

Wisconsin Religious Collaborative

Board of Directors Meeting with Members of WRC Institute Leadership Teams

May 17, 2021 – via Zoom

Minutes

Attending

Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes

Rhea Emmer, CSA
Cyndi Nienhaus, CSA
Susan Seeby, CSA
Jean Steffes, CSA*

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

Sue Ernster, FSPA*
Karen Kappel, FSPA
Dawn Kutt, FSPA
Eileen McKenzie, FSPA
Lucy Slinger, FSPA

Servants of Mary

Sean Fox, OSM
Theresa Sandok, OSM*
Barbara Thomalla, OSM

Sinsinawa Dominicans

Toni Harris, OP*
Pam Mitchell, OP
Betsy Pawlicki, OP
Colleen Settles, OP

Also Attending

Brittany Koteles – Tech Support
Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA - Facilitator

Call to Order

President Pat Cormack, SCSC, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM and welcomed the participants.

Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross

Rose Jochmann, OSF*
Nancy Langlois, OSF
Ann Rehrauer, OSF

Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi

Ellen Carr, OSF
Diana De Bruin, OSF*
KD Strandell, OSF

Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross

Pat Cormack, SCSC*
Carol Crosby, SCSC
Linda Songy, SCSC
Kathy Wiesneski, SCSC

Sisters of the Divine Savior

Beverly Heitke, SDS*
Nelda Hernandez, SDS
Ellen Sinclair, SDS

Sisters of the Living Word

Sharon Glumb, SLW*
Carrie Miller, SLW
Kris Vorenkamp, SLW

* WRC Board Member

Introductions

Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA, invited one person from each institute to introduce her other team members and indicate how the team responded to this question posed prior to the meeting: “How do you see your needs reflected in the survey results in relation to other WRC member institutes?” Responses included the following:

- Diana De Bruin, OSF, for the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi – The areas that connected with them were archives, mental health, and health care.
- Rose Jochmann, OSF, for the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross – Their top priorities mirrored the needs assessment: archives, social justice, and mental health.
- Eileen McKenzie, FSPA, for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration – They are grateful that additional attention will be paid to leadership and governance. Other areas that reflect their needs are archives (particularly digitization), pastoral care, and mental health.
- Kris Vorenkamp, SLW, for the Sisters of the Living Word – Their greatest need is for governance. Other needs include social justice, mental health, ongoing formation, fleet resources, and pastoral care.
- Sean Fox, OSM, for the Servants of Mary – Their top priority is archives. They are thinking of partnering with HARC.
- Kathy Wiesneski, SCSC, for the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross – Items that rank high on their priority list were archives and governance.
- Colleen Settles, OP, for the Sinsinawa Dominicans – Mental health is a priority. Some needs, such as formation and school sponsorship, are being addressed within the Dominican charism group.
- Jean Steffes, CSA, for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes – Priorities include archives, social justice, IT, and health care.
- Beverly Heitke, SDS, for the Sisters of the Divine Savior – Archives are a priority, but this would have to be coordinated with the generalate in Rome. Social justice is also a top priority.

Prayer

Rose Jochmann led the group in a prayer on the theme of the Ascension.

Purposes of the Meeting

Pat Cormack, SCSC, reviewed the purposes of the meeting, which were as follows:

- *Solidarity.* Provide an opportunity for increasing solidarity and belonging in the WRC
- *Benefits of membership.* Increase awareness of the benefits of membership for all members, specifically the benefits of collaboration on the journey and empathy in sharing.
- *Accountability.* Present an update on the activities of the WRC.
- *Engagement.* Invite the involvement of the larger collective group in moving forward.

WRC Update

Pat Cormack, SCSC, updated the group on the activities of the WRC, focusing on the following areas: WRC's mission and vision, organizational structure, timeline from the first meeting of the Tier One Founders in February 2018 to the confirmation of priorities by the board in November 2020, the 2020 needs assessment, and the current action plan.

During the question and answer period that followed Pat's presentation, the following topics arose:

- *Future direction of WRC.* In view of the resignation of the executive director, who influenced the creation of the present structure of the WRC, do you see another executive director coming in with different approaches, or will the board be asking whoever is hired to continue in the same direction? Pat said she anticipated that things would look different with a new director, who would give different emphases and bring different skills. Board member Diana De Bruin, OSF, added that we want to build on the foundations we have begun and use the expertise that we have in place in our various advisory committees.
- *Preferred vendors.* Is there a mechanism for knowing whether the preferred vendors identified by the WRC are actually being used? Pat responded that there is no procedure at the present time, and that this is something the WRC needs to address. Board member Sharon Glumb, SLW, mentioned that finding vendors was just beginning under the former executive director's leadership and that the new director would have to pursue this effort further.
- *Governance.* What progress has the WRC made on the governance issue? Pat said that the WRC is hoping to get the Governance Advisory Committee together to start exploring governance models. Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA, mentioned that she was on the committee. She added that, given her experience around the country and internationally, there are groups like the WRC that are preparing for governance by looking at various PJPs. When congregations no longer have leaders, a group like the WRC, if it were a PJP, might be able to serve in a commissary role.

- *“Gaining traction.”* Board member Beverly Heitke, SDS, said that the former executive director found that in working with the WRC one of her struggles was “gaining traction.” In this regard, Beverly observed that we have expressed our needs, our hopes, our dreams, and now is the time to take the next step, to get some traction, to grab hold of something to go forward.

Marlene observed that Beverly’s point provided a segue to next portion of the meeting. The participants were divided into seven groups of five, with a board member in each group serving as facilitator, and given 30 minutes to discuss the question: “How is the WRC helping each and all of us move with optimum effectiveness into the future? How can communities that don’t have immediate needs for shared services still find value in participating in the WRC?”

Report from Breakout Rooms

The following topics were raised in the reports:

1. The priority areas mean different things to different congregations. Congregations need to be very specific about what the need is.
2. It would be helpful if the WRC had a list of resources to assist congregations with the health care needs of their members. One such resource used by a couple WRC congregations is LifeStyle Options.
3. It’s time for the WRC to start looking at the possibility of becoming a PJP. Perhaps a task force is needed to look into this. The PJP might serve as a commissary for congregations that no longer have members for canonical governance. Perhaps the WRC could ask LCWR and RCRI to pressure Rome a bit in terms of approving such arrangements.
4. Some congregations could use assistance with mental health. For example, there is little after care support for hoarding. Perhaps the WRC could host a virtual support group for hoarding.
5. There is a need for vendors, and it’s important to know who good vendors are.
6. On the topic of archives, there’s a spectrum of understanding what we need. What needs to go into the archives? What do we do when we are no longer able to maintain our own archives? What resources are available to assist with processing archives?
7. More communication would be appreciated by the member institutes. How can the WRC communicate effectively the work that is happening and invite some feedback?
8. Hiring a new executive director is important, as is determining how we are going to function until we have one. Perhaps an interim measure would be to have a board member

serve as a liaison to each advisory committee. Maybe we need to look at a team of directors – sisters and laypeople – instead of just one person.

9. The WRC might like to explore collaboration with the Collaborative Leadership Development Program. RCRI is also a good resource for tools that may be of assistance to WRC institutes.
10. The WRC needs to be very clear about having a goal, getting it more focused and concrete, to do the tasks under it. The board could appoint steering committees to focus on specific tasks and spread some of the labor that is needed to accomplish the tasks.
11. The institutes in the WRC are very diverse: international, national, diocesan. We need to attend to both civil and canonical law in addressing the future of these institutes.
12. As leadership teams of WRC member institutes transition and change, how do we share the value and history of the WRC with the new team members coming on board? Should the WRC develop an orientation process?
13. How does the WRC, which is Wisconsin- and Illinois-based, interface with the national charism groups of some of our members, e.g., the Dominicans and Franciscans?
14. How long do we stay committed to the WRC if there's not a return on the commitment? There are groups that can't collaborate for the sake of collaboration. The need for more concrete, specific benefits came up several times.
15. What an institute brings to the WRC is also a gift, not just what it takes from it.

Following the lunch break, Marlene articulated the following commonalities that emerged from the previous discussion: a commitment to supporting the continuing work of the WRC, a desire to explore the possibility of becoming a PJP, the importance of hiring an executive director to assist the board in its work, the need for improved communication with members, and more action on the issue of archives.

TED Talk

The group viewed the TED Talk “How I Became a Localist” by Deborah Frieze. Following the video, Marlene asked: “Where is the WRC on the arc of evolution presented in the talk? Are we a trailblazer, hospice worker, illuminator, or protector? What are we most of?”

Responses varied. Members saw the WRC engaged in all four roles in different ways. All of the roles are needed to create the conditions for change.

Guidance to the Board

For the final portion of the meeting, Marlene invited participants to offer some guidance to the board. She asked: “What do you want the board to remember as it guides the direction of the organization?” Responses included the following:

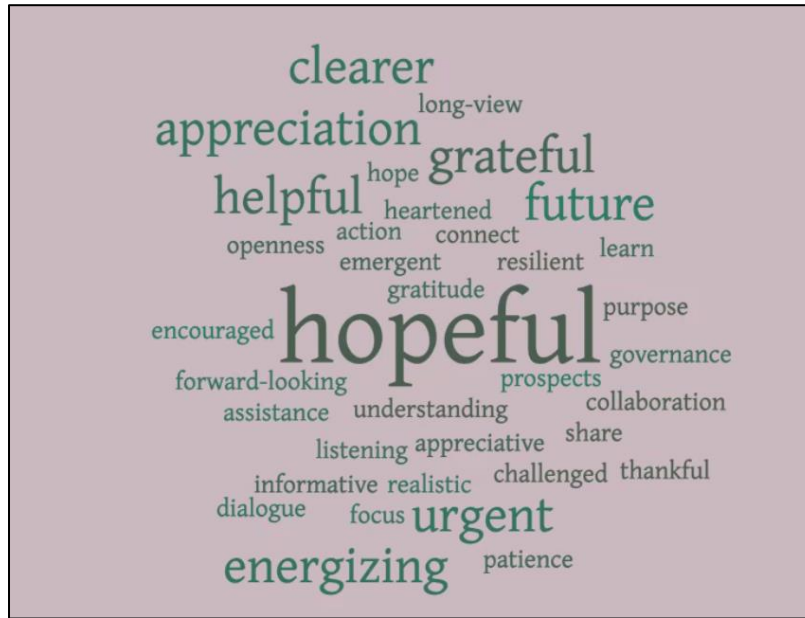
1. Remain open. Think broadly about what we need, and listen with the heart. The WRC is a prototype. We’re trying something out. The process is as important as the outcomes. Risk creativity. Something new is emerging.
2. Keep in mind the differences in our sizes, in our financial abilities, and in our geographical locations.
3. Remember that we are all in very different spaces, but we are together in this space. Board members wear two hats: their own congregation’s and how we can work in this collaborative
4. Collaboration is a good thing. Keep the long view in mind. Stretch us as leaders of our congregations to look at the long view.
5. The WRC moved from idea to structure. Now it needs to move from structure to action, so that the services that we envisioned start happening even as we let other things evolve.
6. Don’t forget to communicate what’s not working and the learnings of what’s not working.
7. Look at the possibility of engaging the board more fully in the work of the WRC, rather than relying so heavily on the Executive Committee. Board members may feel more a part of the organization if kept more fully in the loop.
8. Explore becoming a PJP and do it now. We can learn from what the Canadians and Australians are doing.
9. How can the WRC engage newer members to look at visions and dreams for the future?

Marlene summed up the thoughts participants wanted to leave with the board as follows:

- We see the WRC as playing all four roles described in the TED Talk: we see ourselves as trailblazers, hospice workers, illuminators, and protectors of religious life into the future.
- We see collaboration as a great value. It calls us to a very broad view, to develop the capacities needed for the sake of the common good.
- We embrace the process. We believe that this kind of process has to be, and if that means rattling the chains in Rome, we have to do it. We have to make ourselves seen over there, whatever that requires of us. We need to find out what other organizations have accomplished and experienced with respect to Rome.

Closing

Marlene invited participants to post one or two words that came to mind after the day's experience. Brittany Koteles crafted the words into a word cloud, with the size of each word proportional to the number of times it appeared.



Acknowledgments and Announcements

Pat Cormack, SCSC, thanked Marlene for facilitating the meeting and Brittany for the tech support. She also thanked participants for the gift of time they gave the Collaborative for the meeting.

Pat announced the names of the Executive Director Search Committee, which, in addition to herself, includes Sue Ernster, FSPA; Sharon Glumb, SLW; and Jean Steffes, CSA. She invited participants to send her suggestions of persons for interim director and permanent director, including reasons for their recommendations.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Theresa Sandok, OSM
Secretary, WRC