

LCWR Region 9 Spring Meeting Minutes
In-Person, Jesuit Retreat House, Oshkosh, WI
April 22 - 24, 2024

Monday, April 22, 2024

At approximately 1:10 p.m., Mary Kay Brooks SSND, chairperson of LCWR Region 9, welcomed the 45 attendees to the beautiful space at the retreat house on Lake Winnebago. Fr. Jim Shea SJ, Assistant Director & Director of Hosted Events, also welcomed everyone.

Prayer

The Sisters of St. Agnes were responsible for prayer throughout the days. Peg Spindler, CSA, introduced Morning Prayer with the song, "Room at the Table" (for everyone), by Carrie Newcomer. Following the prayer, the sisters spent about five minutes in table sharing around the question, "What is speaking to us now as we have this time together"?

Mary Kay asked prayers for the following intentions: the death of the father of Sue Ernster FSPA; for successful knee surgery for Julie Tydrich FSPA; and for a 57 year-old sister in Mary Kay's congregation who is a human relations director. She has cancer with only two to seven days left to live.

Legislative Network

An afternoon agenda item was moved to the morning due to the fact that Rose Jochmann, OSF will be sitting in on an update meeting with Carol Zinn SSJ, LCWR Executive Director, and Bridget Bearss RSCJ, Associate Director of Transformative Justice, at 3 p.m.

Rose introduced her report on the LCWR Region 9 Legislative Network by stating that the network is a subgroup of LCWR 9 and is the peace and justice "arm" of the WRC (Wisconsin Religious Collaborative).

Plans are underway for events to occur during the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee (July 15-18) and the Democratic National Convention (August 19-22). As of this date plans by the RNC subcommittee of the LCWR Legislative Network have included:

- 1) A rally for democracy at Canaan Baptist Church in Milwaukee, sponsored by MICAHA (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope). The rally will be held inside the church from 2-6 p.m. on Sunday, July 14, and will include music, prayer, and national speakers. Before the rally, Catholic Sisters and friends will

circle the church block with signs around the message, "Catholic Sisters Pray to Heal the Nation . . . We all Belong," with a 30-minute prayerful presence.

2) A 24/7 Round the Clock Prayer Vigil. Religious congregations across the nation will be invited to participate by signing up for a block of time to organize their members for prayer shifts. Each participating congregation will be invited to purchase and post the "Catholic Sisters Pray to Heal the Nation . . . We all Belong banner."

The LCWR 9 Legislative Network is asking that LCWR 9 members support these actions and communicate the events to their congregations. Time was given for discussion at the tables to see how LCWR 9 can support the effort. By a show of hands, the majority of those present showed their support.

On the Road Again

Mary Kay introduced the "Road Trip" with the song, "On the Road Again," from the album The Essential Willie Nelson. Mary Kay asked that the sisters reflect on two questions: "What is the main conversation your sisters are having at this point in your history? Or "What is the one thing about your community you would like to highlight"?

As a unique way of giving the sisters an opportunity of getting to know one another better, Mary Kay asked that one person from each congregation share their answer to the questions. She presented maps of the 15 congregations represented in the region showing its location on the map, along with some pictures.

Regional Agenda

Consent Agenda: The minutes of the Fall Meeting, October 16-18, 2023 and the finance report as of March 15, 2024 were approved by a show of hands.

Spiritual Legacy

Sharon Pollnow CSA presented a pilot project the CSAs have taken on called "My Spiritual Legacy." Patterned after a project by Katherine (Kate) Piderman BCC, PhD, called "Hear My Voice Research Project," personal stories can foster openness to the experience of illness that helps bolster meaning, dignity, hope, and agency.

Sharon described the process of sisters being interviewed by CSA spiritual directors. The interviews are recorded and then written into a book for each of the sisters interviewed. Even sisters with memory issues were interviewed. Sharon noted that sisters sometimes struggle with their concept of God and their feeling of unworthiness and whether God could love them. This project provides an

opportunity for a sister to reflect on her spiritual journey as a consecrated woman and to share that with a trusted interviewer.

The CSAs reported that 100% of their sisters interviewed said they would recommend it to anyone. Sharon reported that the quality of spirituality and emotional well-being improved following their receiving of their own spiritual legacy book. Sisters can even do a sister-to-sister approach where they write their stories to one another.

Sharon presented a folder of information describing the process used, sets of interview questions, confidentiality form, etc., to each community present. She also mentioned that Kate Piderman is willing to present this model to other communities in person.

Election Review

Georgia Christensen FSPA, Corresponding Secretary, reviewed the process for election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, and Recording Secretary. There are at least two nominees for each of the offices except Recording Secretary. Georgia asked the members to spend some time in prayer/reflection and let her know if they would be willing to place their name in nomination. Two nominees are needed. Election will take place Wednesday morning, April 24.

A break was taken at 3:45 to prepare for the liturgy at 4:15 with Fr. Jim Shea. A social followed the Mass and dinner was served at 6 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

Presenters: Julia Walsh FSPA and Lisa Kane OP

Beginning at 9:10 a.m., our presenters for the morning session, Julia Walsh FSPA and Lisa Kane OP prepared an opening prayer entitled "Religious Life in Flux: Abundant Hope." Pat Cormack SCSC introduced Julia and Lisa. Julia has been in vocation ministry since 2020. She entered in 2006 at age 24 and is now 42. Lisa, a Racine Dominican, entered her community 18 years ago.

The two sisters first asked the attendees to do some sharing at tables on how their congregations came to be and what drew them into their congregation. Julia referred to an NRVC (National Religious Vocation Conference) select findings sheet from an NRVC/CARA 2020 study on recent vocations to religious life. The study enlisted answers to: "Imagine looking 10 years ahead. What are your hopes for the future of religious life? A glimpse of some of their hopes were listed and included in the opening prayer.

Julia also listed the top five influences in the decision to enter their religious institutes from the NRVC/CARA study. She also referred to the five

most important aspects of community life: 98% listed praying with other members; 97% listed living with other members; 97 % listed sharing meals with other members; 96% listed ongoing formation/education; and 96% listed celebrating holidays/feasts together.

Julia presented an ABC news clip from 2022 called, "America is Losing its Nuns." She also noted that she published an article in America magazine entitled, "Changed, Not Ended: A View of Religious Life from a Young Sister." She has a book out now, too, entitled For Love of the Broken Body: A Spiritual Memoir, in which she describes her vocation story. She is co-founder of The Fireplace, an intentional community and house of hospitality on Chicago's south side that offers spiritual support to seekers, artists, and activists.

Lisa is working with a Dominican futuring cohort and introduced the first draft of a working tool entitled, "Measures of Sustainable Formation: How is your congregation doing?" The tool presents opportunities to reflect on questions related to Mission, Community Living, Companions on the Journey, Directors & Mentors, and Considering the Future. The answers to each question are given a point value; and at the end, points are totaled to reflect whether a congregation has a "bright future," "is just getting by," or "is on life support."

Lisa invited the attendees to ask their heart—"what is the heart of religious life?" Sisters were then asked to take a colored rock from their table and write their response. The rocks were then taken forward to make a collective answer to "what is the heart of religious life."

In conclusion, the two sisters said, "We know we can't put religious life in a box. We believe religious life is a movement of the Holy Spirit."

National Agenda

Anne Munley, IHM

At 1 p.m., the sisters heard from Anne Munley, IHM, via ZOOM, about "Discerning Emerging Futures" and the possibilities for shared leadership at the regional level as a deeper form of collaborative leadership. She stated that there are opportunities to expand shared leadership in the LCWR regions at this time. Her report included a PowerPoint entitled "From Autonomy to Greater Interdependence." **NOTE:** Copies of Anne's slides were sent to LCWR 9 members after the Spring Regional meeting.

Anne presented these questions for a 20-minute discussion time:

- 1) Can you see needs of your institute in the areas of need identified in the national findings?
- 2) As a region, how can institutes be of greater assistance to one another at this

time of rapid change?

- 3) Are there resources that could be shared?
- 4) What possibilities are there to expand shared leadership?

Some of the comments were:

- 1) Live streaming and ZOOM to our sisters that could also be offered to other congregations.
- 2) WRC—share resources back and forth with congregations in our goal setting. A lot of questions and discussion are going on right now among subgroups of the WCR in talking about shared leadership.
- 3) Focus on charisms and break them down. There are common elements of all charisms. There is so much that binds us intercongregationally. We are being led to greater unity.
- 4) Find time to collaborate—there is so much urgency that it is hard to find time to collaborate.

Next Steps

Shared Governance. Anne mentioned that there are 550 registrants for the three upcoming hubs.

1. Shared leadership and shared governance are not the same thing.
2. Shared governance is concerned with the canonical and civil responsibilities of religious institutes and will be the focus of the Collaborative Leadership Hubs in May.
3. Some thoughts to ponder in preparation for the hubs. What questions or wonderings do you have about shared governance? Do you see possibilities for shared governance in the region?

Mary Kay mentioned that there are still places open at the two St. Louis hubs, but not at Baltimore.

LGBTQI+ Working Group: Made in God's Image: Human, Relational & Sexual

Kathy Lange, SCSC, Recording Secretary, facilitated this section from LCWR National. Members viewed a short set of slides that reviewed the history and resources available on the LCWR website. A definition was given for the "I" in LGBTQI+ as meaning "intersex." Some renderings also include an "A" meaning asexual.

Sisters were asked to reflect on three questions:

- 1) What are your experiences/relationships with LGBTQI+ persons?

- 2) How do you connect this reality with the ministry of leadership?
- 3) What would be helpful/supportive for your role as a leader in resourcing your work in this area?

Sisters shared their discussion at tables. One person was asked to be a recorder, especially for the answers to the third question. Kathy collected the responses from each table and will send the responses to question #3 to the LGBTQI+ Committee.

Sisters were reminded to look for upcoming registration for a conversation on June 25, 2024 about sexuality and LGBTQI+ persons being part of the human spectrum of personhood. This conversation is meant to assist LCWR members in recognizing the journey of their own sisters.

Outstanding Leadership Award for 2025

Pat Cormack, SCSC, presented slides indicating the purpose of the LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award, the criteria to consider in nominating a person, and the nomination process itself. At the tables, sisters were given 10 minutes to surface names and discuss reasons for those names being nominated. As a region, at least one nominee could be chosen but no more than five. Each table then was asked to share their names. Names that surfaced for nomination were: Nancy Sylvester IHM, Simone Campbell SSS, Marlene Weisenbeck FSPA, Anne Munley IHM, Florence Deacon OSF, Lynn Jarrell OSU, Doris Klein CSA, and Barbara Reid OP.

The decision was made to nominate three—Nancy Sylvester, Simone Campbell, and Marlene Weisenbeck for 2025. Pat asked that reasons/rationale be written for each of these three and given to her so she can submit the names to LCWR National. Because there were no persons of color nominated, it was suggested that we look to nominate Addie Lorraine Walker SSND, Teresa Maya CCVI, and Florence Deacon OSF, for 2026.

Legislative Network

Rose gave an update from the 3 p.m. meeting held yesterday with Carol Zinn, SSJ and Bridget Bearss RSCJ.

1) They heard from MICAHA (Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope). Apparently, they feel that the Catholic Sisters' presence at the Canaan Baptist Church is too Catholic. The MICAHA connection with Rev. William Barber as a speaker raised red flags with/for LCWR. So they may use a different church.

2) Any time LCWR's name is used, it means all of LCWR.

3) Virtual prayer room—Carol said that LCWR is looking at almost the same idea and technology doing a virtual prayer room for the RNC, as well as at the LCWR National Assembly, the DNC, and at the time of the November elections. This would be a round-the-clock prayer during all of these events making it international/global.

4) Carol stressed that we have to be savvy in approaching the political arena. Are signs and banners really effective?

5) Carol and Bridget were at a gathering of Catholics in Las Vegas addressing polarization. They talked about the need for deep listening and contemplative space in all of this polarization in the world.

6) In the coming year of elections, globally there are 40 volatile elections taking place, for which we need to pray the theme, "Catholic Sisters Pray to Heal the Nation . . . We all Belong."

7) Legislative Network response. There are Catholics who don't know what to do—middle people. Catholic Sisters could help those who need help in making wise decisions with this theme.

Rose stated that this is the third adaptation of the plan, so the Legislative Network needs to rethink. She asked for one idea/suggestion from each table to take back to the Legislative Network. The Executive Committee will look at them, put them on the website and ask if there is anything sisters can't live with. The Executive Committee will send the results back to the Legislative Network. The ideas/suggestions are also listed here:

Ideas for the Legislative Network from LCWR 9 Table Groups

1. How will the virtual prayer room be made visible, public? (Public service announcement should be possible) Invite our sisters to participate in LCWR's virtual prayer room. Yard signs?
2. Bring back the billboard idea from Catholic Sisters (no mention of LCWR). Billboard from Catholic Sisters. A billboard in the Milwaukee area (at I94 & Lincoln or East/West freeway near American Family Field) that states "Stand with Catholic Sisters . . . Pray for Inclusivity."
3. Can we find a way to support the other countries that have elections that are at risk this year? Catholic sisters pray for peace throughout the world (banners, posters, etc.)
4. Use our list serve to engage a wider audience than Sisters—virtual prayer room.
5. Template for letters to editor from Catholic sisters in the area—ask others to join.

6. Create something for all our websites—election prayer.
7. Be available for direct service calls for women on the street that will have limited access to the perimeter of the convention. Be in person for monetary assistance—food cards for instance. Work with Sisters South, Benedict Center.
8. Invite others to contemplative, deep dialogue, listening sessions with Sisters. Have different opinions represented.
9. We want to offer our sincere apology to the Legislative Network and thank you for all your work.

Evening Prayer

The CSA sisters led the group in a "Prayer of Unfolding" as they closed the day.

Social and Dinner

The sisters dismissed for a social gathering at 5:15 p.m., followed by dinner at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

Morning Prayer

The day began with a prayer that reflected on the gift of morning. The sun brings itself into the day. There was a time of contemplative silence followed by small group sharing around the question: "What is the **all** that I am willing to pour out this day for religious life and for our world?"

Regional Elections

Georgia facilitated the elections, first for chair—a two-year term. Nominees were: Mary Kay Brooks SSSND—current chair, and Kathleen O'Brien OSF. Results of the election by paper ballot were: Mary Kay 33 votes; Kathleen 9 votes = 42 members present and voting.

For the position of Vice-Chair. Since there were already three nominees, Pat Cormack, SCSC, withdrew her name. Nominees were: Kathleen O'Brien OSF, and Linda Szocik SSF-TOSF. Results of the election by paper ballot were: Kathleen 14 votes; Linda 28 votes = 42 members present and voting.

Nominees for the position of treasurer were: Agnes Johnson OP, and Mary Kabat OSF. Results of the election by paper ballot were: Agnes 8 votes; Mary 32 votes with one spoiled ballot = 41 members present and voting.

There were no nominees for recording secretary, so there was time allowed for discussion before nominations would be taken from the floor.

Ideas

- 1) It is very difficult to take minutes when you are trying to participate in the meeting.
2. Split the responsibilities—someone take the Executive Committee minutes and someone else take the minutes at the Spring and Fall gatherings. Or, have someone do the Fall meeting and someone else do the Spring.
- 3) Think of having a lay person to take the minutes. (The recording secretary must be a member of the Executive Committee).
- 4) Sharon Pollnow, CSA, stated that she would offer the services of the CSAs Administrative Assistant, Dena Rose, to take the minutes at the Spring and Fall gatherings.
- 5) Since that meant that someone from the region would still need to be on the Executive Committee, Sylvia Anne Sheldon OSF, volunteered to serve as recording secretary for the Executive Committee meetings.

Donations

It was mentioned that at the end of our fiscal year, Region 9 donates 5% of the remaining balance, which is \$925. Ideas for the distribution of these funds:

- 1) One of the anti-human trafficking organizations
- 2) Annunciation House, El Paso
- 3) Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom (Network of Muslim and Jewish women—organization that brings together Muslim and Jewish women to foster understanding build relationships, and promote social change)
- 4) Legislative Network expenses (RNC)
- 5) Sisters South, St. Benedict Center
- 6) Casa Alitas

The Executive Committee will look at the ideas/suggestions shared and will make the final decision.

Table Sharing

Mary Kay invited the members to about 30 minutes of table sharing around the following questions: What are your worries and concerns? What keeps you up at night? and What have you just finished that another might just be starting?

Large Group Responses

1. I do not feel qualified to tell the senior members where to move, especially when they fight it.

2. How to keep a vision going and forward thrust when daily things take so much time?
3. Concern about the next cycle of leadership. The younger ones want to be in leadership, but aren't capable, and the older ones might be capable, but don't want leadership. How do we share leadership?
4. Be aware of the sayings, "don't take things lightly" and "don't take things personally"—they don't work.
5. Collaboration—get creative in collaborating. Use who we are—don't want to multiply meetings—do more collaborating so we have energy to do what we have to do.

Meeting with Pope Francis

Sue Ernster FSPA, LCWR President-Elect, shared about her trip to Rome with Maureen Geary OP, Rebecca Ann Gemma OP, and Carol Zinn, SSJ. LCWR makes an annual visit and the four sisters were there from March 16-23, 2024. They gave an annual LCWR update in the five days they were there. Sue highlighted what they talked about in 12 different meetings with different Vatican offices.

Sue noted that every office was prepared to receive them and that the officials had done their homework. The visit with Pope Francis was scheduled for March 21 at 9 a.m. The sisters were told that Pope Francis is usually early and waiting for his audience, and it was true in this case. Pope Francis was ready and waiting by 8:22 a.m. The sisters had 35 minutes with the pope. Pope Francis was interested in asking the sisters, "How are you living religious life?" He has an openness for dialogue and respect for LCWR.

Pope Francis mentioned that he has prayed a specific prayer for 40 years that is attributed to St. Thomas More. Pope Francis had 4 English copies of the prayer for the sisters to use.

Sue related that the pope has a sense of good humor and that he told the sisters they have to be joyful. He asked them to be the maternal face of God for the Church. Sue summarized by saying that the time with Pope Francis was pure gift.

Announcements

Mary Kay made the following announcements:

- 1) Watch the USCCB website for more on the Synodal process.
- 2) LCWR will have a booth at the Eucharistic Congress in July.
- 3) The year 2025 is a Jubilee year for consecrated life—February 2, 2025.

Future Dates

Pat mentioned the dates and topics for the next regional meetings:
Fall Gathering November 11-13, 2024 at Racine Hosts--OP Racine
Prayer—OSF Green Bay; Speaker: Laurie Brink: The Differences Among
Us: Seeking Unity in Diversity

Spring Gathering April 28-30, 2025 at Oshkosh Hosts—Lake OSF
Prayer—SSND; Speaker: Dayna Larson Hurst: Understanding Dementia,
supporting the patient, supporting caregivers, self-care.

Fall Gathering October 27-29, 2025 at Racine Hosts—A New Genesis
Prayer—FSPA Speaker:

Spring Gathering April 20-22 (with alternate the following week) at Oshkosh
Georgia will confirm the dates with Fr. Jim.

Thank You

Mary Kay thanked the Sisters of St. Agnes for the beautiful prayers through the days, the Holy Cross Sisters for hosting with the treats/beverages, and the members of the Executive Committee. She presented gifts to Kathy, Rose, and Pat.

Closing Prayer

The Sisters of St Agnes asked those who were leaving office to stand for a blessing. Those leaving office are: Mary Peters, ANG, Mary Jo Selinsky, ANG, Diane Baumann, ANG, and Kathy Lange, SCSC. The blessing was accompanied by the song, "Blessed be These Hands: the Point of Arrival," by Carrie Newcomber.

Adjourn

The Spring Gathering 2024 adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Lange, SCSC
Recording Secretary

