Sinsinawa Virtual Assembly 2018

More than 400 Sisters and Associates from over 50 sites across the nation and in Trinidad, Bolivia, and Canada gathered Sept. 29 for our first-ever Sinsinawa Dominican Congregational Virtual Assembly using **Zoom software.** Below is the information necessary to host a similar event. Note that all locations are set up differently, so some of this information may or may not apply to other spaces and places. For an in-depth explanation of what might be needed for a virtual assembly beyond what is described below, visit the Zoom Help Center at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us. We also worked with **Lifeline Audio Video Technologies** in upgrading the audio and video equipment at Sinsinawa. Learn more about Lifeline at https://www.lifelineaudiovideo.com/.

What Was Already in Place?

- **Our congregational Zoom account.** We have a Zoom Pro Plan and pay $99.90 per year which allows us to have up to 100 sites/devices connected to a videoconference meeting at the same time. To learn more about Zoom plans, visit https://zoom.us/pricing.
- **The Heritage Level conference room space at Sinsinawa Mound Center.** The meeting was broadcast from the Heritage Level space that can seat up to 300 participants and has two large projector screens (approximately 12 x 6.5 ft. each) with several microphones that feed into an amplified sound system. A stage with speaker podium was also used.
- **A high-speed, broadband Internet connection.** We utilized "Zoom Rooms" for discussion periods where individuals using their personal computer or devices could meet via videoconference while those at larger venues discussed the presentations via roundtables. A listing of system requirements to use Zoom Rooms can be found at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/204003179-System-Requirements-for-Zoom-Rooms. (NOTE: We considered upgrading our Zoom Pro Plan so that it would include Zoom Webinars software package, but we learned that Zoom Rooms are not supported with Zoom Webinars. Therefore, only the Pro Plan was needed for our virtual assembly.)

What Did We Have to Purchase or Provide to Ensure Success?

- **Upgraded audio and video system on Heritage Level.** The audio/sound system in the Heritage Level space had to feed directly into the Zoom meeting through a laptop for optimal sound quality so that all could clearly hear the presenters at Sinsinawa. This included an upgrade installation of a new Tesira Forte Digital Signal Processor (DSP) to replace the existing model for echo cancellation. (Echo cancellation is critical in conferencing systems so that people joining the conference do not hear an echo of what is spoken.) A high-definition QSC camera was also installed on Heritage Level, and a USB connection allowed for the high-definition video to feed directly into the computer used for the assembly. (A USB extender cable was also installed so that the camera in the back of the room could connect directly with the computer in the front

of the room; another USB extender cable was added for the audio.) Finally, a QSC processor and QSC touch screen designed specifically for streaming was installed which allowed for pre-set camera shots, easier volume adjustments, and reliable time alignment with camera and audio.

- **Upgraded broadband Internet connection.**
- **Training sessions.** We held nearly 20 training sessions for Sisters and Associates between May and September in order for participants to feel comfortable with using the Zoom technology.
- **Zoom support.** We contracted Zoom staff for support leading up to and the day of the virtual assembly at a rate of $250 per hour (2-hour minimum). This included help with event planning, rehearsals, pre-event support, live-event support, and training support for the facilitators.
- **Facilitator support.** We contracted with Ted Dunn for facilitation of the virtual assembly. Ted divided the 50 sites into groupings and assigned specific times each grouping could ask questions of the presenters. Ted also screened all questions that were sent via email by these groupings and planned the order of which sites would ask their questions during the assembly.

What Were Challenges Encountered?

- **Training.** Regardless of the amount of training sessions offered, it proved challenging to support people at all different comfort levels with technology with adequate training. The different types of devices and program platforms used to enter Zoom meetings also offered a challenge (e.g., Android tablets and smartphones operating systems had Zoom features accessible in different ways than those with Apple tablets and smartphones which also differed from features found on desktop or laptop computers).
- **Technology at other sites.** Although the congregation was able to make an investment to upgrade the audio/visual equipment at Sinsinawa, remote locations with larger numbers of people in attendance did not have as much control over their meeting space. Therefore, it was necessary for larger groups' questions to be asked near the computer connected to the assembly rather than through a microphone at their location since the audio system at their site wasn't directly connected to the assembly.
- **Time zones.** With the assembly stretching over a full day and with participants spanning five different time zones, it was challenging to find a block of time that worked well for all.