

# **Community Assembly Vision and Purpose Statements**

## **Vision**

The Community Assembly gathers people who share the passion for justice and spirituality of loving God and neighbor without distinction and continue the mission of Jesus in the world today.

## **Purpose**

The Community Assembly promotes new ways of engaging with each other, partners, experts, and those directly impacted by social injustices in order to:

- Develop and strengthen relationships among persons who intentionally live the CSJ mission
- Understand and support the unique ways individuals and groups are living the mission;
- Engage in significant dialogue around the acts of chapter
- Educate ourselves about emerging needs and resources
- Take action for justice and ministry within our local communities and larger world

## **Sisters and Consociates Envision a New Community Assembly by Linda Taylor, CSJ**

On January 10, 2015, approximately 163 persons: 114 Sisters, 46 Consociates and 3 Candidates gathered to inaugurate the first Community Assembly of the St. Paul Province. The day's process began with a ritual of participants walking under a festive archway or "threshold". This symbolized moving from earlier paradigms or models of being the CSJ Community of St. Paul toward a new paradigm of more inclusion and connection with other persons and groups who share the CSJ charism and are committed to the CSJ Mission.

To varying degrees, most of the participants had an understanding that their task was to create something new. Many hoped the new assembly would help participants grow in a deeper understanding and living of the 2013 Acts of Chapter. They anticipated it might develop ways for Sisters and Consociates to work together and partner with others to address issues of justice. Some who came to the assembly were excited about doing something new, having glimmers of what that might be. Others came with hesitations and concerns about what that might be. It was the usual mix of dreamers and thinkers joining together, sharing their visions, trying to understand each other, and working toward a consensus that would guide and energize the group into the future.

To begin the day, Consociate Janet Williams sang the "Prologue" to "Born of Dreams", calling all to remember the CSJ legacy of courage and daring in loving God and neighbors. Later, Justice Commission Members Joan Wittman, Mary Ann Brenden (Consociates), and Susan Jasko, CSJ(A) led a Legislative Advocacy Partners (LAP) presentation on the challenges and injustices of the US immigration system. These issues became real as a resident of Sarah's shared her personal experience of immigration from Africa to America. The presentation ended with information on how LAP works to address injustices and an invitation to join LAP.

As the day continued, participants began developing scenarios for the new Assembly by: 1) talking about what matters to them, and 2) identifying persons and groups who might want to join them in carrying the CSJ mission into the future. Themes that emerged included:

- Widen our circles, welcoming and including a diversity of others who gather around our mission and charism especially marginalized people;
- Build networking and collaboration among those who share our mission and charism;
- Include those who have a deeper connection with the CSJ community, mission and ministry at some of the Assembly meetings, when appropriate.

With this first meeting, the province began to explore possibilities for creating a new Community Assembly. All those who engaged in the process realized it would take a while to complete. The next Community Assembly is on Saturday, May 9th. All sisters and consociates are invited to be a part of the process as it continues to move forward.

### **Second Community Assembly: “Seeding the Future” By Linda Taylor, CSJ**

On May 9, 2015, 99 Sisters, 44 Consociates and 1 Candidate gathered for the second Community Assembly (CA) of the St. Paul Province. The theme for the day was “Seeding the Future”. The morning ritual included inspirational readings from the “World Café” and Clarissa Pinkola Estes, and guided us to reflect on the “Calls to Action” created at the 2013 Congregational Chapter. As each “call” was read, everyone responded with a resounding: “POSSUMUS! WE ARE ABLE! YES WE CAN!”

During the morning session, Table groups looked at five Vision and Purpose statements based on themes that emerged at the first CA in January. Some of the themes were: “developing existing and expanding relationships with a diversity of others who share our charism...” “focus on the mission and values of Jesus”, “inspire action around justice issues”, “engage with others, partners, experts as well as those directly impacted by issues in significant dialogue and in identifying current/emerging needs and resources”. Each group selected the one statement they thought was closest to what they wanted the Vision and Purpose to be and talked about words/ideas they wanted to add to it. Discussion in the room grew spirited and intense as table groups talked, visited other tables to “cross-pollinate” ideas, and added or crossed out words until they were satisfied with the results. Completed statements were hung on the wall, then everyone read them and placed a dot on the one they liked the best. The posted outcomes showed leanings toward two of the original five statements and a large number of statements that combined ideas into a new statement. The CA Planning Committee will take the statements and use input from them to prepare new statements for participants to work with at the next Community Assembly.

In the afternoon, CA participants worked on defining the composition of the CA. This led to a conversation about how the Community Assembly would be different from the Province Assembly. The question was raised about what it would be like for the participants to be “equal”. Florence Steichen suggested: “I think of “equal” in the sense of having equal voice and status. Everyone's voice is of equal importance and carries the same weight”. More discussion followed, and it became clear that we weren't ready to define who the participants will be or to make rules that could inhibit the flexibility of the new entity. Peg Schwendeman said, “I always draw the map for my garden in pencil. I start with where I am going to plant things. If I get a new idea, or something doesn't work,

I erase it and change it. We need to write our plan for the Community Assembly in pencil, too, so we can erase, adjust and change things as we need to...as reality changes." People seemed to be in agreement that the new Community Assembly is a "work in progress" and we need to be patient and let it emerge.

At the end of the day, Individuals said they sat with some people they didn't know and became better acquainted with others. The closing ritual included watching "The Everything Seed", the reading of more "Acts of Chapter", and again the resounding: "POSSUMUS! WE ARE ABLE! YES WE CAN!"

At the close of the ritual, Kathy McLaughlin led everyone in singing, "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" while staff of Carondelet Center and Carondelet Village passed out ice cream treats. We ended the day hopeful for the future and energized by our interactions with each other.