April 24, 2014

Contemplative dialogue shapes discussions, decisions at the Northeast Community Assembly

From April 3-7, 2014, the Northeast Community held their third Assembly in Nashua, New Hampshire. In her keynote address, Sister Pat McDermott, Institute president, employed the symbol of a knot in preparing those gathered for the important choices they faced in the coming days of the Assembly: some knots unite, while others create a barrier between ourselves, our Church and Creation. She encouraged all to become attentive to the stark realities in our world and see how changes could be made.

Using the guiding principles of contemplative dialogue and discernment, the Northeast Community voted on several important matters:

1. An absolute majority voted to adopt the name (local coordinator) and the method of selection (nomination by membership and appointment by CLT) as proposed in the draft Directory regarding the current Northeast Life and Ministry Administrators (LAMA).

2. An absolute majority voted to continue to use a self-selected Assembly model, rather than a delegate Assembly model, as was proposed in the draft Directory.

3. With the two votes noted above to the proposed draft Directory, the Northeast Community Directory was accepted and passed with an absolute majority.

4. A new leadership team was elected: Sisters Jacqueline Marie Kieslich, president; Maureen Mitchell, vice president; Patricia Flynn; Donna Conroy; and Patricia Moriarty. Their four-year term begins July 1, 2014.

The Northeast Community also discussed the connectivity among Mercy Critical Concerns, engaged in a lively exchange about vibrant community life, blessed and celebrated the current
Leadership Team and reflected upon the kaleidoscope of images that formed their days together.

The final night of the Assembly brought inspiring musical entertainment from students at nearby Mount Saint Mary Academy in Manchester, New Hampshire. Before parting, Sister Anne Curtis (Institute Leadership Team member) offered closing remarks on the last day with an inspiring call to action: “As we take leave—we are hopeful and grateful. So let us get up again, 'Mercy-ing' as we go, deeply in love, going home as one ... because our world needs Mercy.”

Photos: *(Top)* Members of the Northeast Community lead the Assembly in song as part of the opening ritual. *(Bottom)* ILT member Sister Anne Curtis (right) participates in a table discussion while Sister Isoline Duclos (Northeast) listens attentively. Anne gave the closing remarks at the Northeast Assembly.

**Nonviolence conference impacts cross-section of Mercy**

Nineteen representatives of the Mercy community including sisters, associates, teachers from Mercy schools, a Mercy Volunteer Corps member and Institute Justice Team members, participated in Ecumenical Advocacy Days, a national conference on the education and advocacy of nonviolence, held in Washington, D.C., March 21-24, 2014. The Sisters of Mercy were a co-sponsor of the conference.

Participants attended workshops on issues including military spending and drones, the violence of poverty and the destructive impact of climate change on impoverished communities in Africa and Asia.

“I really enjoyed the conference and was quite overwhelmed by the amount of information shared,” said Betsy Gagnet, a teacher at Our Lady’s Academy in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. “I really liked the presentation given by Dr. [Maryann] Love [Associate Professor of International Relations in the Politics Department of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.]. What has really stuck with me was her stories of the women being raped in Congo and the child soldiers in Uganda and how the sisters working with them believe there are no ‘throwaway people’ ... I found that to be so powerful and such a lesson for our girls.”

“I believe it is important to remember how lucky we are to have the lives we have and how we too can help in the solution,” Betsy continued. “The weekend was a great reminder that every person can make a difference, you just have to get off the sidelines. On a very practical note, I would like to have my law class compare the different gun statutes and then compare the corresponding crime statistics.”

Attendees also met with staff of their U.S. senators and legislators to urge support for commonsense gun legislation and diversion of some military funding to critical human needs.
“The workshops I attended prepared me for meetings with my Congressional leaders who too are concerned with weapons that are used for hurting our citizens," said Sister Kathleen Smith (Northeast). Three Sisters of Mercy met with U.S Senator Susan Collins on the final day of the meeting to urge the "rebalance of funding priorities away from out-sized military spending to focus more resources on preventing violence and enhancing human security."

**Candidates discuss systemic change at weekend gathering**

Farmington Hills, Michigan, welcomed the nine Mercy candidates from April 11-13, 2014, providing hospitality and a beautiful Palm Sunday liturgy while the candidates met to discuss systemic change with Sister Anne Curtis (Institute Leadership Team).

The group began with prayer on the evening of April 11, followed by a social with the temporary professed. The next morning, the candidates gathered with Sister Anne. She began by identifying the roots of Catherine McAuley’s passion for both direct service and institutional change, and the group discussed how Catherine reacted to the realities of nineteenth-century Ireland. The candidates also learned how service begins with mercy. Those we serve must be treated as individuals with full human dignity, but we must also have the experience of receiving mercy from others and remain open to that experience, or we risk creating another power-imbalanced system.

The group examined the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy: racism, nonviolence, women’s issues, immigration, and care for the earth. Sister Anne emphasized these concerns must be taken seriously, as they are destructive and life-threatening. One candidate used the example of concentric circles to point out how each concern is tied to the others as its effects spread, like ripples in a pond. As an example, she pointed out how often racism and sexism are intertwined.

Speaking about the anger and frustration that often arise when we witness injustice, Sister Anne urged the candidates to use anger as a motivator, but warned the group against too much anger, noting that it can cause us to act unjustly. She presented a quote from Father Peter Henriot, SJ, reminding the candidates that “social justice means loving others so much that I work to change the structures that violate their dignity.”

The weekend ended Sunday morning with a time for reflection and integration, where the candidates noticed which parts of the workshop resonated with them, and began to think how they could work toward more just systems, both personally and as a larger community of Mercy. —Prepared by Colleen, candidate

See the May 8, 2014 issue of Mercy Now for information on the topic discussed by Mercy's temporary professed new members during this weekend gathering.
“Band of Sisters” sells out in Washington, D.C. area

Sisters of Mercy and others from around the Washington, D.C.-metropolitan area contributed to a sell-out crowd of more than 400 for the local screening of “Band of Sisters,” a documentary about the journey of Catholic sisters in the United States. The AFI Silver Theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland, hosted the screening and a question and answer session afterwards with Sister Mary Pat Garvin (Institute Leadership Team) and Sister Marge Clark, BVM.

Producer/director Associate Mary Fishman (West Midwest) enthused over the screening, “Not only did we set a record for the most people at a screening (422) but we had one of our most age-diverse audiences as well.”

The film explores the changed role that women religious played in the Church after the 1960s reform of Vatican II, including a focus on Sisters Joann Persch and Pat Murphy (West Midwest) who are shown making so many visits to a facility deporting undocumented immigrants that they were finally allowed inside its walls to minister to families.

View a film trailer, learn about upcoming screenings and pre-order a DVD of “Band of Sisters” online at: [http://www.bandofsistersmovie.com/](http://www.bandofsistersmovie.com/).

Photo: The question and answer session included (from left to right) Todd Hitchcock, director of programming at AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center; Sister Mary Pat Garvin; Sister Marge Clark, BVM; and Associate Mary Fishman (West Midwest), director and producer of “Band of Sisters.”

Read “Crucible of Courage,” an account of Mercy’s work in Honduras

Jean Stokan of our Institute Justice Team wrote an article on Mercy’s presence in Honduras and the reality of violence engulfing that country, including promoting human rights and an end to impunity as well as encouraging greater solidarity from the international faith community. The article is available at: [http://sojo.net/magazine/2014/04/crucible-courage](http://sojo.net/magazine/2014/04/crucible-courage).


Photo: The Mercy delegation to Honduras in December, 2012, included time spent at a human rights office. The walls pay tribute to persons killed or disappeared. Standing: Sister Eva Lallo (Northeast); Sister Carol Ries, SNJM; Jean Stokan; and Sister Karen Donahue, West Midwest. Sitting: Shirley Tung; Sister Martha Larsen (West Midwest); Sister Rose Marie Tresp (South
Plan your next retreat with Mercy
Several Mercy retreat centers across the United States have recently announced upcoming programs and retreats to help you take a step back from the busyness of life and reflect on and deepen your personal relationship with God.

- Mercy Center in Burlingame, California: [http://www.mercycenter.org/ProgramsMC/SummerRetreats2014.html](http://www.mercycenter.org/ProgramsMC/SummerRetreats2014.html)

View a list of Mercy retreat centers in the United States and Central American countries here ([http://www.sistersofmercy.org/spirituality/retreat-centers/](http://www.sistersofmercy.org/spirituality/retreat-centers/)).