

# Congregational Interculturality Project

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**Final Report submitted by Inês Camiran, Teresinha Dorigon Vieira, Mary Goretty Aboge, Monika Ulrik, Sharon Kanis**

The Core Team prepared for this final report by reflecting on our individual and communal learning throughout the project from our appointment in November 2018 to the present:

- Personal learning through this experience
- Learning from our experience as a Core Team
- Learning through the Extended Lab experience

We also provide a brief summary of the ongoing work in each major area of the Congregation.

Each of us is deeply grateful for the opportunity to be involved in the work of interculturality on behalf of the congregation. Each step of this journey has been full of grace and blessing: from our appointment by the General Council in fall 2018, to participation together in the program sponsored by UISG in January 2019, to our monthly meetings on zoom, to the formation of the Extended Lab, to our planning of this final report.

The journey has not been without its challenges. We thank Sister Inês for her faithfulness and her participation as we met each challenge with hope and with courage.

## 1. The personal learning of each one through this experience (a summary)

- The call opened us for an experience of a new, strange, challenging and yet exciting world of learning.  
Each member of the Team is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Interculturality Seminar hosted by UISG in 2019. We learned a multitude of new concepts regarding culture: transculturality, multiculturalism, interculturalism, the relationship of interculturality to the church and to consecrated religious life, and the implication of intercultural awareness for our times as well as the impact on our own Congregation in the future.
- It is important to give quality time to understand the other, and to make ourselves understood, especially if we touch the areas at the bottom of the iceberg and call out sharings from those depths.
- We developed skills of respectful listening, trust, asking good questions; (having the courage to ask questions); listening with the whole self; and seeing with the heart. This experience has helped us to develop a certain sensitivity and respect for all that has shaped each sister's life.
- We experienced the richness and complexity of working simultaneously on the same theme in different geographies of our religious congregation. We became viscerally aware of the deeper meaning of our congregational identity: **international**, forming actual relationships with love and sharing faith and life. As we worked together, we learned to appreciate the meaning of Augustine's words "We longed for one another... the delight of talking and laughing together and kindly giving way to each other's wishes... sharing jokes and delighting to honor one another. We teach and learn from each other, sadly missing any who are absent and gladly welcoming them when they come home.... These are sparks that kindle a blaze to melt our hearts and fuse them inseparably into one." We have forged a lasting bond.

- We understand the **urgency** of deepening cross-cultural learning and experiencing these concepts with intentionality.
- We recognize the call to Interculturality for mission, not simply for its own sake.

## 2. Learning from our experience as a core team

Our merging as a team was a journey that deepened over time. We shared our excitement as we met by zoom and prepared for the UISG workshop; our enthusiasm increased as we met in person to participate in the workshop in Rome. We learned to know one another as we waited on the train platform and found simple ways to begin to share our stories, our hopes, and our lives. Our SSND connection was immediate and secure. The challenges were immediate as well.

Of course, we have distinct personalities and personal histories that frame our conversations and group dynamics. Although we expected it, we began to understand more fully the challenge of having different primary languages and distinctive cultural origins. Each of us has unique expressions, uses examples that are specific to our home regions, and perceives the project in a way that is particular to us. Tere expresses her experience in this way: “I realized that, in order to understand the thought structure of each person in the group who brings different cultural roots, I needed to listen and reread our reports several times to understand the point each person was trying to say.” As a team, we have learned that it takes a lot of patience and intentionality, to make interculturality a lived reality. Careful planning and flexibility are crucial skills in this context.

What was helpful:

- Committing ourselves to regularly scheduled meetings, usually monthly
- Having the support of Sister Inês, Sister Bernie Fontanez (translator) and the Congregational IT department. Their openness, skill, and flexibility were invaluable to us.
- Dedicating time at each meeting to check in, time to share personal, provincial, and regional updates. This time strengthened our relationships and our care for one another and all of the Sisters in our areas.

## 3. Learning through the Extended Lab experience

Our decision to extend the Team through the Extended Lab led to a deeper commitment on our part. “When we expanded the lab, I was touched by how we all affirmed, in different ways, that interculturality is the only way of being about the Mission of Christ if our congregation is to live its Charism today into tomorrow.” (Goretty)

- Through the Extended Lab, we have gained a more comprehensive picture of the congregation; this led to renewed enthusiasm and new questions. The Extended Lab participants are members of the following countries: Italy, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Kenya, Ghana, Japan, Hungary, United States – and the provinces that encompass these countries. The breadth was amazing and made us long for more time to share.
- Although we were grateful for the opportunity to meet every month, the 2- hour time frame was too short for deeper sharing. This awareness supports our experience that the work of interculturality is a long-range work.

- The broad geographic expanse of the Congregation is a gift and a challenge. Sisters joined the conversations across many time zones, one at 5am and another at 10pm with all of the zones in between included. This challenge required sacrifice on the part of many.
- We received many stories of Sisters who are not healed from cultural traumas borne within the Congregation. This awareness prompts us to encourage the congregation's leadership to continue the work of interculturality.
- We have technological facilities, but sisters in many areas of our Congregation do not have accessibility. Also, we do not have sufficient IT personnel prepared or available to support the efforts of interculturality.
- We need to improve our efforts and our support structure in order to be able to expand the work to other groups of Sisters that have not yet been reached.
- The final sharing of the Extended Lab was a time of grace. Each Sister prepared her response to our questions of evaluation. Everyone expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate. Sisters shared both affirming and challenging aspects of the experience, mirroring the experience of the members of the Core Team. A [brief video-summary](#) of their responses is included with this report.

#### *4. A short description of continuing efforts towards interculturality in each geographical area*

##### Latin America and the Caribbean – Teresinha Dorigon Vieira

- In LAPC, we began in 2019 with a meeting of all the sisters of the province with the theme of interculturality. We had a break because of the pandemic and then, we restarted in 2022 with the application of the Laboratory of Interculturality with a group of 20 sisters. We are also offering a retreat related to the theme of interculturality for every sister who has done the LAB, or any other sister who wants to join that retreat.
- With the aim of reaching out to all the sisters in the province, we have scheduled two face-to-face meetings: one in Argentina in 2024 and one in São Paulo in 2025, together with two corresponding retreats of a shorter duration.
- We have received the support of the Provincial Council from the planning of the process to its development, as well as for our Interculturality Team. This support has made all the difference in getting the sisters enthusiastic and committed to participate in the groups.
- As our province completed 10 years of existence, we have noticed in the dialogues and sharing, both Intercultural and at other times, that we need to continue investing in intercultural education, both for leaders and in initial and ongoing formation. Our province itself is multicultural and international, so this fact already provides a great challenge to continue preparing the sisters to live with more cultural awareness and skills for intercultural living.

## Europe – M. Monika Ulrik

- As I shared in my first reports, I got in touch with the provinces in Europe initiating a dialogue within the provinces. I received the summary from some of the provinces. I planned to have a workshop for the formators from each province and for those who were interested. The plan was ready, the participants were ready, but because of the COVID unfortunately, we had to cancel this meeting.
- As a continuation of the interculturality work, it was good to invite sisters from each province of Europe to the Extended Lab.
- In the process of becoming One Province in Europe, it is crucial to continue to work on interculturality. More than simply exploring cultures, we would benefit from sharing deep stories and narratives. Maria Cimperman's consideration is very helpful:

*Sometimes provinces within the same family come together to create a new province for the sake of mission. [...] The question has come forth in the past twenty years about whether, for the sake of mission, individual provinces and their cultures (deep stories/deep narratives) would be willing to come together. There is both loss and new life in this process. For some there are issues of identity. In the case of provinces joining, the focus of each particular province must be thanked and let go so that a new way, in response to the calls around them and the new common province vision, is to be lived for the sake of the gospel. For new life to emerge a dying must happen. Sometimes it is the newest members whose formation was already with other provinces who help create bridges. [...] In any case, it is certainly an experience of entering other cultures to create the new life that the Spirit is longing to create.*

*(Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, Religious life for our world)*

- Area of Formation
  - We had some initial conversation about moving 'From invitation to radical welcome', (see *Living Mission - Interculturally* by Anthony J. Gittins) considering this call for initial formation and in formative communities. It is very important to go deeper and find wisdom in this area.
  - It is also very important and timely to consider the distinct culture of the new generation.
  - Interculturality in the Novitiate Community is a daily, living/lived experience. To form community takes time and new learning. Interculturality gives a kind of hope to the novices. According to their sharing: "Interculturality opens different ways to approach life". Novitiate is the place for me to share what I learned, experienced, and understood. The most effective method of sharing is by my very being.

## Africa – Mary Goretty Aboge

- Our province committee (PDIC) has continued to assist the sisters to engage in the topic. The committee prepares prayers and processes which are sent out to the whole province. Sisters have consequently engaged in the conversations which deepen understanding of Interculturality. Recently an evaluation was done and it affirmed the sisters' appreciation of PDIC's efforts in sensitizing sisters in area of Interculturality.

- More sisters in the province were invited to take UISG workshop on Interculturality. This has been helpful in the sharing of the information, as it broadens the critical mass needed to accomplish the tasks of interculturality.
- *Call to go Beyond:* In our province, whose membership's average age is nearly below 50, there is need to continue working on inter-generational dialogue in order to build on strong community base and a rootedness in our Charism.
- The role of leadership at province level is crucial for furthering our future and Mission. There is need for the province to re-examine leadership in communities and to find out what better furthers Mission at this time.

To conclude, I believe that there is need to continue deepening the processes already underway in order to fully attain the aim of 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter call.

### North America – Sharon

- Members of the Provincial Council, Provincial Assembly (including all of the sisters of the AMSSND province, Province Staff, and Associates) received workshops on foundational concepts of Interculturality. A similar workshop was provided for the Sisters of CP. In general, the Sisters in the CP Province have been more aware of issues of interculturality and have had previous opportunities for education on this topic.
- We are aware that Sisters living in Canada, USA, Japan and England as well as in various geographical areas of those countries, have challenges that are distinct to their regions. For example, Sisters in Canada are exploring the cultures of indigenous peoples; in the USA, we are beginning to recognize the overlap of culture and race; in Japan, Sisters recognize that they have been insulated and that there is diversity all around and among them. This complex aspect of interculturality work requires sensitive response and education leading to action.
- Sister Lupe Valdez and I have planned an electronic process to ensure that Sisters who are members of the younger generation in both AM and CP have the opportunity to share their experience, learning, and questions on interculturality together across province lines. We intend to move this project forward.

### Recommendations for the future of the work of interculturality:

1. **The call of the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council: “We expand our understanding of interculturality and commit to develop skills for intercultural living in community and society” is more important to us than ever. We hope that the General Council will recommend the continuation of this work to the General Chapter and to the next General Council.**

#### *Rationale:*

- The deep reason is our mission and our charism: to make one for the building up of the Reign of God.

- The work of interculturality supports the theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter: *Living into a Prophetic Witness of Universal Communion*. We can only strengthen universal communion by learning to communicate with one another authentically. This presupposes deeper understanding of one another and each one's culture.
- We have only begun the work of interculturality; we have not yet received the commitment of all of our sisters to this goal. We recognize that this process takes time: personal conversion, then commitment, followed by engagement in daily life.
- Interculturality is more than a program of learning and sharing. We have come to see this work as part of the life-blood of the congregation. It is essential to the deepening of community life.
- We recognize that the learning that is happening in various areas of the congregation challenges us to develop a deeper understanding of interculturality: the experience of our novices in the International Novitiate; the experience of sisters in various stages of formation as they live into final commitment to religious life; and the experience of our sisters in provinces where sisters have integrated or are planning integration from several countries into an integrated province. Intercultural skills are essential for the success of these on-going processes.
- Our future will include dialogue with other congregations. We may join other congregations to preserve the spiritual legacy of religious life and assure the continuation of our ministries. This is an action that will provide continuity of religious life – it will require skills of interculturality. We need to do this work now in the world.

**2. We recommend continuing this work through a congregational structure supported by leadership.**

*Rationale:*

- The work of interculturality began in 2018 with an invitation from the General Council to four sisters to become educated about interculturality and to animate the congregation in this pursuit. A program throughout the congregation evolved from this appointment.
- The General Council held the Core Team accountable for our task and supported our plans, enabling us to extend the program to many parts of the congregation.
- A structure provides grounding and focus for the work of interculturality. It will be most effective if the entire congregation is part of a unified but flexible plan.
- We experienced the importance of having the support of province leadership as we have continued our work in the four major geographical areas of the congregation. In our SSND culture, leadership involvement is important.

\*\* We suggest sharing the resources we have used and developed. The General Council might find them helpful.