Implementation teams making steady progress

To listen in on a conversation between the Coordinating Committee members (Institute Leadership Team and Institute COO) and the implementation coordinators for the Institute’s 11 key functions is to hear the Journey of Oneness becoming real. Consider these highlights from the group’s mid-December 2019 call:

- Development Team recommendations are coming to life, so that it’s no longer a matter of what’s going to happen but what is happening.
- Teams of sisters, associates and staff members from across the Institute are working diligently, juggling their commitments both to implementation of Journey of Oneness initiatives and to the usual day-to-day work of their current positions.
- Greater cross-function conversation and collaboration are creating an appetite for integrated Institute planning, not only function-by-function planning. Implementation teams are assisting and learning from each other.
- Recognizing that transition doesn’t always feel great or flow smoothly, groups are adopting change processes found to be effective and avoiding those found to be problematic, learning from the “pioneers”—those functions that are further along with implementation.
- Next steps outlined by the various implementation teams are a tribute to their investment in the future. Several groups will open the new year with January meetings.

Here’s the big picture

Which are the so-called “pioneer” functions mentioned above? They are primarily the six functions identified in early 2019 as well-positioned to move forward without much delay on the recommendations framed by their predecessor development teams: Archives, Justice, New Membership, Association, Information Technology and Stewardship (Finance).
The implementation of three other key functions—Communications, Human Resources and Mission Advancement (Fundraising)—was put on pause while searches were conducted for Institute leaders. Cathleen Farrell and Colleen Maher have since been named to the communications and mission advancement functions, respectively. A new search for a human resources leader will open in early 2020, following the resignation of the person hired last year.

Two functions—Health and Wellness, and Ministry—needed transitional attention from Institute and area leaders. Further groundwork has positioned those functions for implementation in 2020.

The Communications Transition Team authored and *Mercy Now* published 29 articles in 2019 about the activities of the implementation teams in an effort to keep sisters, associates and companions in the loop regarding the Journey of Oneness. These articles (and future ones) can be accessed on the Institute website [here](https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/journey-of-oneness-a-path-forward/journey-of-oneness/).

**More specifics**

At the December 2019 Coordinating Committee–Implementation Coordinators meeting, each coordinator shared her team’s significant achievements since the group’s last meeting, in October. Speakers noted instances of collaboration or coordination with other functions and, in some cases, commented on immediate next steps.

Snapshots of those notable achievements and next steps—organized in alphabetical order with function names in bold to help readers find the areas that most interest them—can be found below. Future articles in *Mercy Now* will explore in more detail the implementation work around these key administrative functions.

**Archives:** Mercy archivists are working to become familiar with all the collections gathered from across the Institute so that they can respond to research requests more efficiently. Digitizing the Archives’ holdings is also progressing well.

**Next:** Having created a library-catalogued collection of books by Sisters of Mercy and about the Institute (and its forebears), Archives will make this resource available to the general public early in 2020.

**Association:** Feedback on a first draft of a common Institute guidebook for Association resulted in a more comprehensive second draft now ready for further review.
Next: Association will work with Archive to streamline data gathering about Association at the Institute level, and with Communications and Information Technology to help make Association better known externally and more connected internally. Mapping geographical areas for Association also continues.

Communications: New Institute Communications Officer Cathleen Farrell has begun her orientation, a process that is taking her to each area to meet with leaders and communicators and to visit with sisters or ministries, where possible.

Next: Communicators from both the Institute and the area offices will hold their semi-annual meeting in January with development directors from across the Institute.

Health and Wellness: Position descriptions for an Institute Health and Wellness leader and for area Health and Wellness directors, as well as a proposal for a standard wellness profile for use by the Institute, are ready for review. Conversations with the Sisters’ Life and Governance Task Force are exploring and clarifying areas of possible overlap in the work of these two groups.

Next: Coordinating Committee representatives will meet in January to begin review of draft documents.

Human Resources: Area HR personnel are researching and drafting materials related to employment topics ranging from payroll management to general employment practices. Institute-wide action on these topics will be completed in phases, with 2021 as the target date for the start of any transitions in employment practices. A request for proposals has been issued to payroll vendors.

Next: The new position of payroll manager at the Institute level, recommended by the HR Development Team, will be posted early in 2020. Additionally, a request for proposals will be issued to benefits brokers, allowing for assessments in the latter half of 2020.

Information Technology: A search is underway for a vendor to handle the migration of all email to a single Sisters of Mercy platform. This will involve all sisters and staff having sistersofmercy.org email addresses in order to access and receive Institute communications.

Justice: An in-person meeting of the new U.S.-based Justice Team members focused on the group’s new situation as a united and centrally coordinated group. The team discussed its internal working style and processes, as well as project updates. Members are learning new computer skills to enhance efficiency and agreed that management of activity on different justice concerns need not always be centered in the Silver Spring office.
Next: One priority is the hiring of two new staff members to serve as justice coordinators in the Buffalo, New York, and Rhode Island areas. Conversations with other function groups and Institute ministries continue about how to integrate justice into all areas of Mercy activity.

Ministry: Recent clarity about the Institute’s civil and canonical structures will help the Ministry Office move forward on relationships with Mercy ministries. These ministries’ complexity of purpose, location and structure (incorporated or not) pose significant challenges. **Next:** Ministry directors from across the Institute will meet in January to help advance the work of this key function.

**Mission Advancement (Fundraising):** The first-ever Institute Mission Advancement Officer, Colleen Maher, will take up her new role in February. **Next:** Advancement personnel from across the Institute will gather in January for a meeting with the communications staff. Professional fundraising consultant Angela White reviewed and updated her 2016 assessment of Mercy’s fundraising practices and potential with the new development officer, members of the Institute Leadership Team and the Institute’s chief operating officer. The group considered this earlier analysis in the light of current realities and began to formulate Institute plans, priorities and strategies.

**New Membership:** Two areas command the current attention of this group: how to animate sisters across the Institute to connect with and engage young women, and developing a more cohesive plan for existing welcoming houses as well as identifying new welcoming houses. Adding to the challenge is research showing that the population of Catholic young women—primarily Hispanic and Asian—tends to be in the Southwest, where the Institute has few sisters. **Next:** A presentation, probably in some electronic format, about the New Membership Team’s work will be on the agenda of already-scheduled spring meetings throughout the Institute.

**Stewardship (Finance):** After much preparation, an Institute-wide accounts payable process went live December 10, 2019. It was a smooth transition, to the delight and relief of all involved.