JOURNEY OF ONENESS UPDATES

Journey of Oneness work continues in midst of pandemic

Recent updates from Institute key function implementation teams, shared during the April 16 Coordinating Committee/Project Coordinators virtual meeting, show Mercy’s responsiveness to the coronavirus pandemic. While ordinary Journey of Oneness work continues even as most leaders and staff members work from home, what’s most encouraging and impressive is how some of the key functions are being Mercy in response to the COVID-19 “new normal.”

Advancement: The focus right now, says implementation team coordinator Colleen Maher, is care for donors. That means weekly prayers sent to donors and personal telephone calls to check on individual donor’s welfare. “They are as concerned about the sisters,” reported Colleen, “as we are about them.”

Communication: The need for everyone to “shelter in place” spurred a new venture for sister-with-sister communication. Creation of the A Comfortable Cup of Tea Facebook group just for sisters has attracted more than 200* participants, noted implementation team coordinator Cathleen Farrell. The reach is broad, with some postings in Spanish and others from as far away as the Philippines. Sisters are posting and responding to one another’s comments, prayers, photos, humor and hopes; it’s a real conversation. *As of May 14, there are 260 participants.

Information Technology: “Very busy” and “working long hours” hardly describe the reality for IT staff, reported implementation team coordinator Lori Pinkerton. With everyone across the Institute working remotely, reliance on technology has skyrocketed, creating a host of requests for service and troubleshooting assistance. Retirement centers, especially, have needed help with efforts to keep sisters, staff and families connected and informed.

Health and Wellness: Responding to the coronavirus became the urgent priority for this team as Community-based health and wellness coordinators worked with Leadership Teams to assess and respond to the needs of sisters in retirement facilities, their staff members and other residents, as well as to sisters living independently elsewhere. Jumping into action in the face of an unprecedented threat “has shown the strength and the skills” of this team’s members, commented implementation team co-coordinator Sister Margaret Mary Hinz.
Human Resources: Keeping up-to-date with Leadership Teams and administrators at various Mercy-related sites/facilities about the constantly shifting mandates from federal and state authorities regarding personnel has commanded the attention of this function. Given the spread of staff across so many states, keeping up with general and health regulations has been quite challenging, reported Renee Higgins, HR director for NyPaW. Similarly, forwarding information about government, retirement plan and other benefit programs’ coronavirus initiatives that might benefit individual employees financially has been an ongoing and complex task.

Justice: “We’re looking at the pandemic through the lens of our Critical Concerns,” said implementation team coordinator Maggie Conley. The systemic racism and economic injustice in the United States are clear when one looks at who is being most gravely impacted by COVID-19. Consider, for example, the disproportionate coronavirus death rate among African Americans. The Justice Team thinking has shifted to ask: How can this be an opportunity to offer a new vision and prompt advocacy and action on racial equity? How can we help society move forward, rather than return to previous policies and realities? The team is working with Reverend Ada Renée Williams, director of the Institute Office of Anti-Racism & Racial Equity, on possible educative and transformative strategies.

Ministry: “Our ministries are intensely focused right now on how to provide services to their clients—usually very fragile populations—while following health agency and governmental guidelines and restrictions,” said ministry implementation team co-coordinator Sister Christine McCann. The stress of continuing service, often compounded by a loss of revenue that threatens a ministry’s future, finds this function attending to supportive relationships while hitting the pause button on infrastructure and legal matters.

New Membership: As team members keep in touch with women who have expressed an interest in Mercy, they are also praying that reception and profession ceremonies planned for the next few months will proceed. “They’re not something to be done online,” noted implementation team coordinator Sister Eileen Campbell. The pandemic also stirs questions about life after COVID-19. Will there be a greater willingness to form welcoming communities as living sites for candidates and novices? Will there be an openness to different models of community living in a post-pandemic world?

Some noted in their reports that Journey of Oneness efforts to date had facilitated their function’s ability to respond to the current crisis.

At meeting’s end, Institute President Sister Pat McDermott reflected on that observation. “We are blessed to have learned to work with each other, to have developed trust and deeper relationships,” she said. Speaking for the ILT, she added, “We are grateful and in awe of your creativity and steadfastness. They are so important now and as we go forward.”