Journey of Oneness update: Energizing design team workshop positions Institute for next phase

This article summarizes the work of the design teams during the March meeting of the Institute Leadership Conference in Madison, Connecticut. Watch design members share some of their learnings here (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyO764CqlrkVgęaN-5cyPyjrttAfrsbbH).

You can view current and next steps of the Journey of Oneness on the timeline here (https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/journey-of-oneness-timeline/).

Meeting Details
Trains, planes and automobiles brought Mercy design team members from across the Institute to Madison, Connecticut, for their second in-person work session. Mercy By the Sea, a retreat center in the Northeast Community, served as the setting for the three-day meeting.

On March 28, work began following words of welcome, prayer and inspiration.

“Design work is a humble task accomplished in service of the organization,” said Sister Mary Pat Garvin, who opened the meeting on behalf of the Institute Leadership Team (ILT). She reminded those gathered that the mission of Mercy does not belong to the Sisters of Mercy alone, “but to ensure that all those who are partners will continue the work of Mercy.”

Sister Maria DiBello, who led the group in prayer each day, drew on the theme of art and nature for her welcome. “As the Divine Artist creates beauty,” she said, “you will be engaged these
days as artists, creating the fresh design that will allow the life and mission of Mercy to be a work of art offered in healing for the devastated soul of our world.”

Next, Institute President Sister Pat McDermott offered her thanks for the “extraordinary” work already accomplished by the team members. “We are indebted to you, to your presence and your hard thinking. … You’ve done stellar work in so many different ways,” she said.

As the design teams prepared to begin their work, Pat reminded the group of the two key questions guiding our Journey of Oneness and thus the design process:

**Who do we, as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, desire to be for one another and for our world? How might we embody the Mercy of God for a suffering world in more meaningful and impactful ways into the future?**

Pat referenced the *Chapter Declaration* affirmed in 2011 and the call for interdependence as a lens to envision the future.

She impressed upon them that their designs should have two important characteristics: flexibility and scalability. By doing so, what is envisioned will serve the Institute now and enable it to adapt to the changes that religious life will see in the future.

The next three days involved intense meetings during which the teams reviewed their initial assumptions and design plans and considered the rich information gathered through the research of other organizations or groups and consultation sessions. Based on this work, the teams revised and refined their initial recommendations for leadership. For some, it was an affirmation of the work they had done. For others, it prompted further discussion and revision. For one group, it meant a paradigm shift.

“During our discussions, we came to realize that we were recreating the structure we already had. We decided that we need to do something different,” said Mike Poulin of the justice design team. “We feel that we need to be in stronger partnerships with others, rather than primarily being a resource. That way we can draw on what those partners already have in place and further extend the work of the justice team.”
The remaining days included time for teams to work in groups, to share ideas with each other and time for leaders to share their impressions of what they were hearing from teams so far.

**Design Team Member Perspectives**

Design team members ended the final day reflecting in small groups on their experiences, hopes and learnings. Team members were invited to share their thoughts with the larger group during an open mic session.

“Our table was in agreement that this was an organic process from the ground up. A decision could have been made, and it could have been from the top down. But we appreciate that it was an organic process,” said Sister Patricia Lapczynski of the information technology design team.

Sister Mary Kelly said her team (stewardship) appreciated the composition of the design teams.

“Among the many things we talked about in our group is the wonderful blend in the room, the mix of people who are here, the special talents that people have, and in all of it, the delicate attentiveness to the individual lives of members who will be impacted by anything that comes out of what we are doing and the sense of the attentiveness to the ministries of the sisters.”

Sister Rose Marie Tresp of the justice design team asked the group to keep in mind how tough transitions are. “The sisters have 20 different ways of being Mercy. When I looked at where we went from 1991 to the Institute and then to doing this, I really think we do have to pay attention to how hard transitions are. … We’re asking people to shift and to change, too. So [we need to do] whatever we can do to be aware of those transitions and that those changes are not always really easy.”

As the session closed, Sister Pat McDermott addressed the group. She shared her perspective that this work likely may see additional changes as it moves forward, as a result of further thinking and engagement.

“The experience that we have enjoyed is really a glimpse of a transformed Institute,” she said, “where the elements have to do with the quality of relationships that we hold, that we stay mission focused, that we have respect for diversity among us as we seek the common good, that our communications reflect deep listening and a sacred curiosity for that which is offered.”

She continued, “Those are the kinds of elements of any living learning community and thus contribute to transformation. So we do have a glimpse of a transformed Institute, which is really the heart of the Journey of Oneness, which is foundationally about mission and relationships. That has been your contribution during all these days.”

Pat ended the final day on a note of thanks. On behalf of the Institute Leadership Conference (ILC), she thanked team members for “your wholehearted, very wise counsel, your generous hearts, your continued good spirit, your engagement of one another, and the ways you have worked and lived with one another relationally.”
She then thanked Ruth Thomas, Institute Chief Operations Officer, who worked to guide and design the meeting days. Finally, she acknowledged the contributions of Marisa Guerin, who not only served as facilitator of the design team workshop, but who also provided treasured guidance and wisdom during her 11 years as facilitator for the ILT and the ILC. Those gathered responded with a standing ovation in gratitude for Marisa’s work.

*Next Steps*
Some design teams submitted a final report by April 19 of their work for review by the ILT in consultation with ILC. The Governance and Sisters’ Life design teams will continue, as their work needs more time and engagement with sisters.

Once design reports are reviewed by the ILT and ILC, next steps will include a development phase that will begin sometime in the fall. The development phase will move the blueprint ideas of the design phase into more specific details in areas such as staff roles and work processes. The development phase will be followed by an implementation phase. View the timeline for the Journey of Oneness here ([https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/journey-of-oneness-timeline/](https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/journey-of-oneness-timeline/)).

*Photos:*
(First) On the last of their three days together, the design teams split into mixed groups to share their perspectives.

(Second) Design team members shared their thoughts with the larger group during an open mic session.

(Third) The CCASA Community Leadership Team met and worked on their agenda during the design team days.