Dear Sisters,

The Integrating Sisters’ Life and Governance Committee is grateful to all who participated in the October through December 2018 consultation and reflection process. At our recent meeting in Belmont, North Carolina, we studied the collated responses from more than 30 groups throughout the Institute.

Evident immediately from those comments is the belief that relationship continues to be at the heart of our life together—relationship with God and relationship with one another. In the words of “Called to New Consciousness,” our Chapter Recommitment statement: “We hear a call to strengthen our relationships with one another through

• reverence for our international and intercultural community;
• greater availability to one another;
• integration of contemplation and action;
• governance that calls forth the voice and engagement of each member.”

There is among us widespread affirmation for the values we hold in common, particularly in the areas of spiritual integration, pastoral presence, mutual accountability, subsidiarity and both individual and communal interaction.

During our consultation, we asked you to offer input on two questions:

1. What can we put in place (or retain) that will foster personal growth and facilitate our relationships with one another?
2. How can our governance structure call forth the voice, participation and engagement of each member at the local level?
As we reviewed the material, we could see that there was consensus on holding on to some current practices that have been life-enriching, and also recommendations for future implementation.

**Question #1**

What can we put into place (or retain) that will foster personal growth and facilitate our relationships with one another?

**Top Four Elements to Retain**

1. **Gatherings of Sisters**
   Presently, we participate in community-wide gatherings, designed to encourage consultation on community priorities, Institute initiatives and committee updates. In addition, we come together in small groups throughout our geographic communities for faith-sharing, discussion of timely agenda items and offering sister-to-sister support and encouragement. A strong desire exists to continue these gatherings with the option for sisters to choose gatherings of her choice.

2. **Ongoing Spiritual Formation**
   Throughout the Institute, Sisters come together for theological reflection programs focusing on ministry, mission and spirituality. Characterized by contemplative dialogue and communal discernment, these sessions have become essential to our quest for spiritual integration.

3. **Sisters’ Life Ministers**
   Called by a variety of names, the Sisters’ Life Minister position is both pastoral and administrative in nature. It is primarily a ministry of availability and companionship. Exercising authority delegated by the Institute Leadership Team, the Sisters’ Life Minister responds to a sister’s need in whatever way that need presents itself.

4. **Affinity Groups**
   There is inherent value in retaining the existing affinity gatherings, such as: “Sisters Under 50 or 60,” the “Alliance of Women of Color,” the “Mercy 12-Step Network” and the “Mercy Network on Aging.”
Top Four Elements to Implement

1. Institute-Wide Gatherings
   We desire to meet as a single Institute Community for several reasons: to understand and experience more deeply our identity as an international and intercultural community; to strengthen one another for mission and ministry; and to celebrate the bonds of charity and love that enrich our lives. The frequency of these meetings would need to be determined. Many suggested three-year intervals, perhaps between Institute Chapters. Ideally, there would be an organic relationship between the Institute Gatherings and the Institute Chapter.

2. Interdisciplinary Team
   We support a multidisciplinary and wellness approach to facilitating sisters’ life, particularly in the areas of wellness, housing, ministry, transitions and retirement. A typical team would consist of a Health and Wellness Advisor, a Sisters’ Life Minister, and a Retirement Facilitator. The number of teams and the number of sisters served by the teams would be determined by the population density in a particular area of the Institute.

3. Additional Affinity Groups
   Additional groups would be self-organizing and have access to financial resources.

4. Creative Use of Technology
   We affirm the value of technology in bridging the geographic distance between us, depending upon the circumstances. For example, major presentations that require little or no interaction from participants often benefit from the use of technology. Video technology also works well and enables greater participation within small gatherings when interaction is desired. We need to explore the feasibility of expanding the live streaming of significant events in the life of Mercy, such as profession ceremonies, Institute gatherings and Chapter. When live streaming is not possible, we would like events recorded and made accessible to communities via a computer link.

Question # 2
How can our governance structure call forth the voice, participation and engagement of each member at the local level?

1. In response to this question, there is overwhelming support for the continuation of the large and small groups that currently assemble. In addition to fostering and deepening relationships, and encouraging us for mission, the gatherings function as a platform that is hospitable to active participation, consultation and the free expression of individual and communal voice. This is particularly the case when we meet around a common agenda generated by the Institute or a current community.

2. Since this question asked us to focus on the local level, there were many observations about our perception of “local,” and what “local” means to us as we discuss future governance configurations. Comments suggest that we value the influence and scope of our Institute and our international reality, while at the same time we believe that Mercy is truly incarnated at the local level—in specific places, with real people and real ministries. However, we believe that it is possible for these two realities to be not only compatible, but harmonious.

3. Several group responses focused on the structure of future Assemblies, Institute Chapters and the election of delegates to the Institute Chapter in 2023. Clearly, there is energy around reexamining the structure of our Institute Chapters. There were recommendations for holding an “open Chapter,” switching to self-selection rather than election, creating new ways of electing Chapter delegates and ensuring delegate diversity. Additionally, some Sisters are asking for a more comprehensive understanding of “active voice,” “governance processes,” “consultation” and “membership” as it applies to participation and accountability.

Next Steps

At our next consultation, scheduled for March through April 2019, we will be seeking your input in three areas:

1. We will request affirmation of the recommendations for Sisters’ Life and Governance that came from the October through December consultations.
2. We will ask you to identify what decisions related to Sisters’ life and local administrative needs should be made at the local level.
3. We will ask you to address the nomination and election of Chapter delegates.

We will provide, in advance, questions with supporting information that will assist us in discussing topics 2 and 3, immediately above, at the March through April consultation meetings.

The focus of the *October through December 2019* consultations will be on developing more fully the proposed elements of Sisters’ Life and Governance with roles and responsibilities, inclusion of levels of authority and intermediary leadership, and some processes for the nomination and election of Chapter delegates.

We will present the *refinement of all consultation dialogue and work* to the delegates at the Second Session of the 2017 Chapter.

We are aware that this communication is lengthy. However, by providing a thorough overview, we honor the commitment of time and energy you have invested in shaping our shared future.

Gratefully,

Integrating Sisters’ Life and Governance Core Team

Sister Judy Carey, Chair
Sister Ginger Andrews
Sister Carol Ann Gallagher
Sister Mary Ellen Howard
Sister Rose Weidenbenner