

Notes from the Small Group Breakout Discussions – April 13, 2024

#1 Report

Question 1: HOW CAN OPAL NETWORK WITH OTHERS TO SHARE OUR COLLECTIVE CHARISMS AND SERVE THE GLOBAL WORLD?

WE CAN BRING MORE PEOPLE TO CHRIST THROUGH COLLABORATION AND WORKING WITH OTHERS IN SOLIDARITY RESPECTING THE MUTUALITY EXISTING BETWEEN ASSOCIATES AND SISTERS. USING THE MOTHER DRUM TO BRING ALL OF OUR CHARISMS TOGETHER. WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR ASSOCIATE VOCATION AND WE MUST CLAIM THE CHARISM AS OUR OWN.

WHAT TOUCHED US: THE MOVIE CABRINI. FOCUS ON MIGRATION, IMMIGRANTS, FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AND NAME CALLING OF IMMIGRANTS. WE AS ASSOCIATES WANT TO MOVE TOWARD OPEN THE DOORS TO ALL. OUR DIFFERENT CHARISMS ENRICH US ALL. CREATE AND MAINTAIN A PASSIONATE PATIENCE. BETTER COMMUNICATION AS SOME VOWED DO NOT KNOW WHO THE ASSOCIATES ARE OR WHAT WE DO.

PARTICIPATE IN THE MINISTRIES OF OUR SISTERS-EXAMPLES...AIDS MINISTRY, HOUSING, BEATTITUDE HOUSE FOR ABUSED WOMEN. ASUME LEADERSHIP ROLES IF OFFERED BY THE CONGREGATION. EMBRACE SYNODALITY AS WE ARE ALL EQUAL, WALKING TOGETHER. THE MORE WE SHARE/TALK, THE MORE WE REALIZE WE ARE THE SAME.

QUESTION 2: IDEAS FOR SHARING OUR CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

CREATE A COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR TO SEND OUT WEEKLY UPDATES, MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, NOTICES OF BRUNCHES, BREAKFASTS, A WEEKLY PRAYER,

SHARE OUR OWN COLLECTIVE WISDOM=FACEBOOK, OPAL ZOOMS, MEETINGS IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM, MEET AT THE MOTHERHOUSE, PARTICIPATE WITH THE LEADERSHIP COLLABORATIVE, LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR OTHER ASSOCIATE COMMUNITIES + FOCUS ON THE FORMATION OF OUR ASSOCIATES, AND SHARE THIS WITH ONE ANOTHER. WE MUST ANSWER THIS CALL TO ACTION. WE NEED NOT FOCUS ON THE DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF SISTERS, LOOK AT THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ASSOCIATES. GOD IS DOING SOMETHING NEW WITH THIS INCREASE.

WE KNOW/LEARN TO KNOW HOW OUR CHARISM AFFECTS US DEEP IN OUR HEARTS

#2 Group

I was enlivened, gave me hope; it was powerful, especially made me think, what am I waiting for
We no longer have the luxury of doing things the way we have always done them – must change
We need better communication – reaching out to each other.
Service to each other
More outreach.
COVID changed the world – relationships changed; we made decisions based on fear
We must build community; build small family units based on relationships, collecting wisdom; be in person as much as possible
Take advantage of technology – in a good way
We must be confident in what we believe in – it has value, not make excuses; share unashamedly with others.
We can communicate through our parishes, but not limit our connections to just those.
Most effective outreach is through example; show others how we live out our charism; that's what will attract them; be involved in ministries; see ourselves as role models
Do more networking; support each other's groups/charisms
Dealing with resistance from others, especially church institutions; example of Mother Cabrini; find a way to make it happen
Charism: Neighbor to neighbor – Neighbor to God
Relationships – reaching out, recognizing with respect and dignity each other
Synodal – we are in this together, share success, share the blame
Recognize that we are all at different spiritual levels; spiritual maturity is not just an age thing

#3 Group

1. We are what we have been waiting for
Our time – like minded people
Not as dependent on Sisters' ministries – God is calling us
Be patient with those Associates not as ready to move forward
God is calling us differently – no canonical restrictions
2. Support and learn from each other – God is opening the door to better live our charism.
(Collective Charism)
Open to new ideas for OPAL and our own communities
Average age of each communities' Associates
Looking at things much bigger than our own community
Attending the July 13th Zoom
Attending the 2 day conference weekend in October at the Villa

The World is too small for what I intend to do!

#4 Group

We all agreed that Anita Davidson was inspiring and enlightening. Her use of pictures to create the vision of:

Open the doors-wider and wider
Passionate Patience
Mother Drum for Associates
Beat of Charisms
All the instruments

And then, ending with the beautiful song, "If not now....tell me when."

Discussion questions:

1. What resonated or challenged you?
 - How can we think more outside the box.
 - How can we get more associates in each of our communities more involved.
 - We do not have to do the same programs/activities that our sisters currently do.
 - We all have that drum... how can we share our own vitality of that drum.
2. How can OPAL congregations better network with each other?
Within our own associate group--maybe a weekly or monthly email sent to everyone..

To all associate groups-

- Trying to network maybe on a quarterly basis
- An email that each community that is a member of OPAL sends a report when needed
- Massive internet outreach
- Patience in our outreach
- Constant information going out

Our group totally enjoyed the experience!

#5 Group

Question 1:

We found the presentation rejuvenating, empowering and passionate. We have to stop relying on the vowed members who are declining. We have to accept responsibility for the charism and carry on. We have to verbalize who we are. It is difficult to get this across to our own group. One problem with some larger communities is that the associates have never conversed with each other. This is tragic. Leadership needs to take responsibility and make this happen.

Nothing new was in the presentation but the passion and images used invigorated us and helped us realize in a deeper way that we cannot wait. We need to get over the lack of vowed members and move on with our own vision. We need to associate with other associates and with other organizations within the Church.

The image of the drum as charism, the instruments as us, and the rhythm as ministry was very helpful. The Mother Cabrini movie inspires us to keep our focus on charism. The image of and

words of the star trek movie were also helpful. We need to stir up this type of vision within our communities.

The presentation encourages us to grow up in our vocation as associates by finding what is ours to do. It challenges us to help associates see their true vocation as separate from the sisters. If not now, when?

Question 2:

OPAL was founded to help associate leaders, so leadership should remain a focus. We should continue to offer assistance to those in leadership and keep up inspiring presentations for leaders and members.

Leadership is an issue. We were disappointed when NACAR folded and are grateful to the Leadership Collaborative for their work with Charism Carriers. OPAL needs to help develop leadership skills. We are not sure how to bring all of this to our communities. Maybe we rely more on Zoom. Mother Cabrini is a wonderful example of how we can stay true to charism while being thwarted by leaders in the Church.

NACAR is what attracted some to the lay associate movement. OPAL has taken up some of the same tasks and responsibilities as NACAR. OPAL needs to establish an Associate Leadership School in order to teach the leaders of the future.

OPAL has always put on conferences for leaders and needs to continue helping leaders to network with each other. The congregations that have joined need to get to know each other better. One way to get us to network is by doing an activity/action together.

#6 Group

Our group discussion focused mainly on: "what does it mean to live out our charism?" Contributing statements were:

"We don't have the charism, the charism has us."

It means doing and living and giving in our own way.

We all have different gifts--but when all combined, we use them for the betterment of God's people, contributing in whatever way we must to reach out to others.

As was stated in the reading from Romans, chapter 5, read by Anita: "we must keep alert for whatever God will do next." (vs 4) We must forge ahead using whatever it is that is our "charism" to respond to the needs of others in this day and era.

As far as the second question: Our group felt that OPAL is doing a great job in offering this ZOOM format to keep groups connected and in conversation with one

another! Having these meetings quarterly or every other month will be advantageous. Emails with other networking information would be most helpful, also.

#7 Group

What touched us?

> The vital need to remember that we will always hear the "drum beat" of our Charisms; apprehension about what our future might hold; Anita's commitment to living the Charism and her conviction and deep faith in Providence,

> We have to move forward as Associates whether formally connected to Religious or not. We must carry our Charisms God has given us into wherever we go and whatever we do.

> We have to grow our Charisms both in ourselves and together; and support one another.

> We have to focus on where we must go as Associates; what we must do; and what we will look like in the future. This is not likely to appear to and be agreed to by all in our Associate groups; and it will require us to get past fear of the unknown among ourselves and those who do want go where we are called whether into the unknown or not.

> We need to seek counsel and guidance from Religious and Associates who have already begun the journey into whatever the future holds.

> We need to find ways to connect with and learn from other groups of Associates who share our needs and concerns, and our same charism.

How and where can we find ways to communicate, network, share and learn from and with other Religious and Associates?

> OPAL has been an excellent resource and will continue to search out, innovate and find ways to help and support.

> We need to find and contact Associate groups that have already begun or completed the journey to growth into the future without direct assistance from their Religious founders and supporters.

> We need to connect and network with other active Associate Groups .

>We need to objectively analyze our status and needs as Associates and share with like minded Associates.

>Zoom meetings and programs are extremely valuable.

Group #8

The themes of our Group's discussion centered around Community and Maintaining the Fire of our Charisms

Community:

There is a mutuality of purpose between the vowed and Associate members. The Associates are often the ones in the world 'doing what the Sisters are not able to do'.

Is our understanding of Community too limited? It seems we are being asked to throw open the doors and embrace a wider/broader understanding of community. This applies to existing Associates and to prospective ones.

o Who is invited to join us? Is it based on personal, spiritual attributes or on the specific religion of the person? Are we more united by Love or Dogma?

Our sense of community needs to foster acceptance and give a sense of being valued to our members

o How do we do this?

o With existing Associates:

Communication: ask individual Associates to write about their vocation/work accompanied by a photo and share amongst each other and on social media or printed publications.

In personal interactions and group meetings, reach out to the Associate you have never met and share your lived vocation with each other. See the light and fire in their eyes when they speak of the charism alive within: this rekindles the fire of community.

Participate more in cross-Congregational meetings and workshops where we learn and share from each other.

Maintaining/Rekindling the Charism:

We all agreed with Anita that some Associates have never seen themselves as being centered in the charism and being called by it to serve. Many still see themselves as drawn to the specific Congregation and supporting its specific ministries.

- How do we light the fire of the charism within the hearts and beings of Associates?
 - o Having Anita's presentation available for sharing in our communities will help light or rekindle the fire of the charism.
 - o It is up to us to tend and/or relight the fire of the charism.
 - o Increased communication so we witness to each other how the charism is alive in us.

We see a dichotomy between the old institutional church's top-down, hierarchical approach vs. this synodality of conversation and equality that is emerging in this time.

- We must function as groups of equals. There is no hierarchy; we are in this together. Intersecting circles imbued with Spirit.

The Spirit is moving and provides the match for our fire.

Group #9

Deep rhythm axis
Awaken every morning
Called by Baptism to holiness
Empower men and women – keep values alive in our world
Ethical issues →
Our time to step up as lay individuals
Empower

How do we keep going? Reclaim our values, etc. How do we reach out?

Spaces for encounter with other Associates

- Partner or collaborate
- Share resources
- Weave together

Importance of community – building community

Vocation as community of missionary disciples

Networking with other Associates – build relationships

We need to find what is ours to do?

Leadership – mentoring, education
Beyond our charism, congregation

Conference in October at the Villa with Jean Connelly

Networking – inter congregational communication

Own identity – ministry

Expand the vision

Depth of the congregation impacts every aspect of our lives

The way we become an Associate – discernment process

Synodality

Website – events, links, Leadership Collaborative

Facebook

Associates: Living in the Church – virtually bi-monthly

Other notes shared:

I found this morning a gift. I jotted down in bullet format, some of what Anita shared with us. The general consensus was incredible. Personally, I was overwhelmed with her very powerful presentation and pertinent statements.

- throw open the doors of our Associate Movement
- taking our collective charisms into the world
- the Associates is a growing movement
- the Spirit throws so generously her presence into our being
- swimming in the graciousness of God's glory
- beat of God does not miss a beat
- adventures of the Associate Movement
- no end to our possibilities and idea of exploration
- boldly go where no person has been
- shout the praises of this Associate Movement
- what will God do with us next
- we are called to something different
- we are not vowed men and women, we are Associates
- our job is to allow God to flame this movement into something new and great
- we stand on the shoulders of Giants (the Sisters)
- its time for us to grow and to grow up into the adults we are meant to be

---if not now.....tell me when
---we are now being asked to open the doors wider and wider
---our charism is the Mother Drum
---together we can make beautiful music
---Associates---we are our own vocation; claim it and live it
---We are what we are; not what the Sisters are---live our own Vocation
Associates missing in action.....these are Associates who are not active but just
there
---how can we network
---open the door to other Associates from other Congregation
---some Associate groups are not sure of their purpose
---isolation solves nothing---causes only divisions
---conversations are paramount
---work together
---Opal is a start for future networking --- the foundation is there but we must
be patient and build it together
---God is doing something different in and for the Associates and it is profound
---Claim what is ours and take up the baton of the charism we share and move
---those Associates who experience health, aging, family issues and are not able
to minister outside their homes are ministering with their prayer
---we are all serving where we are.....do not compare.....

It was a great experience sharing with other Associates in USA and Canada.
A wonderful common thread, the charism we share of peace and love of dear neighbour.
We are so blessed to be having these conversations together.....in spite of the scary stuff
happening in the world around us.