

Sister Charmaine's Message to SSND Ministry Boards Fall 2020

Hello and welcome to a brief virtual meet and greet. I am Sister Charmaine Krohe, Provincial Leader of the Atlantic-Midwest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. As you begin the new board year, it is my heartfelt desire to connect with you and express my gratitude on behalf of the entire Provincial Council to those continuing to serve on the board, and to warmly welcome any new board members beginning their service. Thank you for your willingness to share your many gifts and valuable time in one of our ministries or schools. For all of us, we hope it will be mutually beneficial, enriching and filled with an outpouring of God's grace.

Since I last addressed you, so much has changed. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in totally unexpected ways; ever escalating racial unrest surfaces disquieting questions for us as people of faith: **'Who' and 'Whose' are we really?** How are we called to act as a result? In addition, we realize how all is interconnected in the context of a changing climate. As a congregation whose mission of unity is lived out through the ministry of education, we never anticipated learning so much in so many different ways through our ever-unfolding circumstances. Most of you also know that the transition of new leadership for the Province was postponed, and the current Council is serving one additional year.

Myself, the entire Council and the Department of Ministry Services have been in touch with you throughout the pandemic and have learned about your efforts to keep our ministries and schools going, while at the same time keeping everyone involved - safe. We marveled at your creativity, perseverance, faithfulness and hope. The timeliness of my last Lenten message to you is astounding: In that message I referred to the last item of the viability and sustainability framework for our sponsored and co-sponsored ministries, namely to **"Be ready to adapt and change."** Little did we know we would be doing just that.

Looking to our own SSND history, we see that our Blessed Mother Theresa and Mother Caroline and the SSNDs that followed faced epidemics and unprecedented wars of large proportions during their time: Our foundress, as a little girl, witnessed the Napoleonic war and with her parents needed to adapt to live through that time; most notably, this impacted Carolina's own schooling, as the convent school she attended was closed.

We also have records from the 1918 Influenza pandemic where the Public Board of Health raised a ban on attending churches and schools, only to restrict attendance again two weeks later as the instances of illness increased. The Chronicles speak of what a 'hard blow' it was for the teachers and how they made diligent use of their 'house arrest' for their own educational advancement, for which the Motherhouse offered guidance and help. Does this sound familiar to you?

In addition, through the letters of Blessed Theresa and Mother Caroline we have record of three major Cholera epidemics in 1832, 1849 and 1866. It became clear back then that the disease moved with greater ease as the population increased and the modes of transportation became more available. All three epidemics caused great suffering and death. These stories help us connect with SSND history as we live it now in our times.

However, as people of faith, we know deep in our hearts that suffering and death do not have the last word. Today we understand that we live in an evolving universe and so we trust that

‘God is doing something new’ (Is 43:19). This experience of suffering creates in us an energy that propels us toward life. Your work on the board is a prime example of that. Undaunted by lockdowns you met virtually to pray, work through a heavy agenda and discern in light of the ‘signs of the time’ the best direction forward. You used this energy in creative ways to serve your ministries’ mission, and to support and empower one another.

This is a sign of hope. You envision a future beyond the current dangers and hardships. The current SSND directional statement *Love Gives Everything*, calls us ‘to embrace Gospel Poverty, probe its deeper meaning and risk opening ourselves to be transformed’. This Gospel Poverty, according to our Constitution *You Are Sent*, is lived out as hoping against hope (YAS 16). As we live in a time of uncertainty, we are called to ‘hope against hope’. We are called to a “wild hope” for new life, individually as well as organizationally.

This is a real challenge. As a board of a sponsored or co-sponsored ministry, **you are called to give your life to hope without compromise.** Your individual and collective hope needs to call, inspire and empower one another, the mission, the people your ministry or school serves and the community in which it is located. Hope lies in empowering others. This empowerment is a sign of loving one another, of growing people – and the ministry - into the fulness of their potential. Let’s pause here for a moment.

Process for reflection and sharing.

I invite you once again to take a few prayerful moments to consider these questions and jot down your thoughts:

- 1) *How has this pandemic, racial unrest and the increasing awareness on the interconnectedness with climate change created energy in yourself and on your board?*
- 2) *What is this newly created energy urging you to do? How as a board do you feel impelled to act?*
- 3) *Moving forward, in what way do you wish the ministry be a sign of hope? What does achieving this require of the board?*

Then I would ask your board chair to lead you in a bit of sharing, with your neighbor at the table, or with your whole board—and record the ideas that may inspire future meetings and planning!

Please pause the video, and when you’ve completed your sharing, turn it back on. Thank you.

Resume video/ Closing

I hope the time for reflection and sharing was fruitful for you. May the personal and communal insights shared be leaven for your board’s work in the coming year. Please contact our Department of Ministry Services for board resources, board orientation and board development needs. Yvonne

DeBruin, the department's director, and associate director Patrick Laorden are happy to assist and support.

In the meantime, I assure you of the Council's prayers that you be sustained in hope, love and faith, for you and your families' well-being and that your work on behalf of your ministry will bear abundant fruit and continue to grow as a sign of God's all-inclusive love and grace. Thank you for all you do and may God bless you.