**November 1 – 7 is National Vocation Awareness Week**

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We celebrate, with all of the United States, National Vocation Awareness Week. It is poignant that in this time of dire news concerning the pandemic, climate change, protests of racial injustice, social unrest, and national elections, we are called to reflect and pray for those who are discerning a vocation to religious life, who are indeed filled with hope for the future. Pope Francis offers the following prayer:

**LORD OF THE HARVEST, BLESS** young people with the gift of courage to respond to your call. Open their hearts to great ideals, to great things. INSPIRE all of your disciples to mutual love and giving—for vocations blossom in the good soil of faithful people. INSTILL those in religious life, parish ministries, and families with the confidence and grace to invite others to embrace the bold and noble path of a life consecrated to you. UNITE us to Jesus through prayer and sacrament, so that we may cooperate with you in building your reign of mercy and truth, of justice and peace. Amen. — Pope Francis

****Let us be open to those who may reach out, question, challenge and who seek wise counselors and companions on their discernment journey. Don’t be afraid to ask the question: Have you thought about religious life? You may be surprised by the response you receive!

**NRVC 2020 Convocation**

As we move into the National Vocation Week, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to share with you about the recent National Religious Vocation Conference Convocation held virtually this year. The theme was “Focus on Hope” and I don’t think there could have been a better theme for vocation ministry (and everyone) amidst all the turmoil we find in our current reality.

Four Hundred and thirty members and guests participated in the conference, from the United States, Canada, Ghana, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Spain, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom. A record turnout thanks to virtual reality! The prayers were simple but deeply meaningful and inclusive. The speakers were engaging, challenging, prophetic and filled with hope. I congratulate the NRVC National Board and Staff on the wonderful success of this year’s Convocation!

**Reconciliation, A Ministry of Hope:** Father David Kelly, a Precious Blood priest who has served in Chicago as the chaplain at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center for more than a decade. He is a leading proponent of a concept called “restorative justice.” It’s an approach that includes bringing perpetrators and victims together, and involving their families and community in a joint effort to repair the harm done by a crime. One of the key factors is the justice circle. As Fr. Kelly describes, “it is a circle of peace which begins by using ritual and symbols and invites the participants into the safe space of the circle where each one can listen and be heard where building relationships are the primary focus; then closes with another ritual to lead people from the safe space of the circle back into their reality.” As in many ancient traditions, a talking symbol is passed to the person who wishes to speak and who holds it while speaking. Fr. Kelly stressed the importance of telling one’s story, not just once, but over and over again. Once the stories have been told, look at the group’s values. This allows a group to be vulnerable to each other. Fr. Kelly challenged us to look at our congregations current ministries and to be open to something new. His suggestions are:

* To begin this something new, an invitation needs to come from leadership.
* Then we need to let go in order to embrace the new.
* We need to respond to today’s reality.
* We are called to stand in the middle and give witness to love and the healing power of God.
* Live in the proximity of those who need healing. We proceed from individual healing to communal healing.
* Take the time to get to know the community you are ministering with and let the people get to know you. Wait for the people to invite you into the ministry.

Father Kelly spoke of the two disciples who walked un-knowlingly with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Upon the breaking of the bread they recognized him. He left them and they ran back to Jerusalem to share their story of hope which went out to the whole world.

**Encountering Christ in Harmony: Inviting our Asian & Pacific Island Sisters & Brothers to Religious Life**  
**with Fr. Linh Ngoc Hoang, O.F.M., Ph.D.:** Father Hoang spoke of the wide range of peoples and cultures who make up the Asian and Pacific Island (API) group. This is a complex group. Not only because of the different countries that they come from, but also different generations, country of birth and where they grew up. He noted that in the API view, hierarchy is not an important factor and does not reflect their values. Laity is an important factor. He suggests that we go out to meet peoples of other cultures; to dialog and express our own faith - to step out of one’s self and be a missionary disciple. Father Hoang spoke of the importance of including the family and their broader community when working with a person who is discerning their vocation. The API discerner reaches a decision through their family and community.

**Communicating Key Messages of Hope workshop with Sr. Maxine Kollasch, I.H.M.**

Sister Maxine (of Nun’s Life Ministry) gave a wonderful step by step overview of a good marketing plan. She used her experience of working with “Cycling with Sisters” program to give examples of each marketing step. She spoke of the need to provide information, invitation and affirmation to potential discerners. She asked that we recognize hope, that we be the hope and that we do not let go of the hope. Hope is all around us.

***La esperanza nos rodea* Communal prayer with composer/musician Mr. Jaime Cortez**

Hope helps us to see the possible. Hope is keeping us alive today. Hope keeps us going. Hope in God. Accept the challenge of never letting go of hope. Allow loving hearts to give us hope in difficult times. He sang six of his beautiful songs that encompass hope.

**Reason for Hope: Testimony to Life, Death, and Resurrection with Sr. Addie Lorraine Walker, S.S.N.D., Ph.D.**

Sister Addie began by adding the word “our” to the title, Reason for Our Hope. Hope is not a solitary gift. It is a gift given to a community of believers. It is given for the good of the whole and not just for me. She challenged us to recognize Jesus who is the vision at the heart of religious life. Seeing Jesus is our hope. We are renewed by seeing and encountering God. We are called to stir into flame the gifts God has given us. What has taught us – what has kept us? Clarify the vision – write it down, make it plain, protect it, treasure it.

Hope is rooted in our Covenant with God. God’s promises will be fulfilled. God will act in our time. We find hope in the Incarnation. We find hope in nature – a rainbow, a flower growing out of a crack in the concrete. Hope is in the fulfillment of love in our time. And we are being used by God to fulfill the vision. We are called to tell our story, what brought us here. Read the Biblical story. Study your congregation’s charism story. Recounting the stories helps us to remember who brought us here. We are provided accompaniment on our way. Hope comes from the power of God. Embrace and live in the present with passion filled with hope. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church, to the world, to me. Pray – ask the Lord that I may see what you want me to see and hear what you want me to hear. Where is the cry of the poor so strong that I must respond? I must do something now. Use the Gospel, my congregational documents to live radically – NOW. Live abundant lives in our time. Am I living faithful to the calling of our foundress? How can my congregation’s charism be applied in our own time? We are living in the time of Coronavirus – how do we respond? How do we protect one another? Are we responsible citizens? Are we paying attention? We are called to keep hope alive. We carry God’s vision into the future. Hope is based on God’s vision. We gather around the table and we remember. The Spirit is doing infinitely more that we can ask or imagine. We hold hope together.

Filled with hope and knowing anew that we are not alone on this journey, I rejoice in the goodness of these past days and embrace the messages of hope; hope in God, hope in each other, hope in our future.

