

# MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE: KEYS TO THE FUTURE FINAL REPORT

A project of the National Religious Vocation Conference

Made possible by the Generosity of the GHR Foundation

December 2013



5401 SOUTH CORNELL AVENUE, SUITE 207 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60615
773-363-5454
NRVC@NRVC.NET | NRVC.NET

ON THE COVER: Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters on the day they used <i>Keys to the Future</i> program.
NRVC is committed to continuing the in-depth discussions, practical steps, and sense of hope and energy that have come forth so far in communities that have used the <i>Keys to the Future</i> process.
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Prepared by Carol Schuck Scheiber. Material compiled from presentations and discussions



#### **KEYS TO THE FUTURE PROCESS**

In 2012, through the generous support of the GHR Foundation, a committee of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) developed the *Moving Forward in Hope: Keys to the Future* process. The process is an adaptable, interactive, and participatory workshop for religious communities. It is designed to help an individual community:

- 1) Understand crucial points of information that emerged in the 2009 NRVC/CARA Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life.
- 2) Examine the community's realities in light of the study.
- 3) Identify and prepare to take positive, concrete steps to encourage new membership with support and participation from the entire community.

#### WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE KEYS PROCESS?

The committee consciously designed the process to help communities address what might be hard realities in some religious institutes. After the 2009 NRVC/CARA Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life was released, it was clear that differences exist in the vision of religious life between a Vatican II generation and those newer entrants. These differences extend to young adults' experience of church, worship, their ways of communication, and their ethnic diversity to name a few.

Because of the delicacy of the issues emerging from the 2009 study, the committee designed a process to enable participants to focus on the issues and to maintain a hopeful, positive, and practical perspective. The committee chose the metaphor of an automobile because it is not gender specific, it conveys movement, and it would elicit discussion of significant issues without being threatening. The main elements of the *Keys* process included.

- 1) Getting in touch with one's own vocation story: looking through the rearview mirror. In individual reflection and small-group sharing, participants recall their emotions, hopes, and dreams from their own call and response.
- 2) Naming the community's reality honestly: describing one's car and journey through written reflection and small and large group sharing
- 3) *Understanding newer members: Who are they? What are they looking for and what do they need?* This step including examining the main findings of the 2009 NRVC/CARA Study through a Power Point presentation; watching a DVD of finally professed members under the age of 40 to gain insight into what newer members are seeking; and small and large group sharing.
- 4) Taking our foot off the brake: exploring concrete, creative, and courageous

#### **KEYS COMMITTEE**

NRVC staff gathered a committee representative of U.S. religious life to create the Keys process. The committee members were: Brother Ionathan Beebe. C.S.C., Sisters Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M.: Charlene Diorka, S.SJ.; Maria Therese Healy, O. Carm.; Virginia Herbers, A.S.C.J.; Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J.; Ms. Jeanne Dennison; and Father Mark Soehner, OFM, In addition to serving on the committee, Sister Lynn M. Levo, C.S.J., Ph.D. was hired by NRVC as facilitator.

# MAIN ELEMENTS OF KEYS PROCESS

- 1) Getting in touch with one's own vocation story: looking through the rearview mirror.
- Naming the community's reality honestly: describing one's car and journey.
- 3) Understanding newer members: Who are they? What are they looking for and needing?
- 4) Taking our foot off the brake: concrete, creative, and courageous next steps.

*next steps* including asking the questions: How can the community respond creatively and boldly to four important areas (identified by the NRVC/CARA study and by younger religious in the DVD): communal living, Eucharist, communal prayer, and visibility? What should members start doing? Stop doing? This portion of the process involved small and large group sharing.

#### COMMUNITY LEADERS LEARN TO USE KEYS PROCESS

In June 2012 NRVC held a two-day training event in San Antonio, TX to prepare 75 sisters, brothers, and priests to use the process with their own religious congregations. As part of the training, participants took part in a trial run (even though it was created as an intra-community process, rather than inter-community). In addition to the 75 selected participants, guest attendees included five representatives from the major U.S. religious-life organizations (CMSWR, CMSM, LCWR, RFC, and USCCB); seven of the eight members of the *Keys* planning committee; the executive director of NRVC, Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C.; and the publications editor of NRVC, Carol Schuck Scheiber, for a total of 89 participants.

In feedback about the San Antonio training, participants were overwhelmingly positive and eager to bring the process back to their communities.

Some felt apprehensive about the issues and emotions that an honest vocational appraisal might evoke, but the overriding sentiment above and beyond any fear was that the *Keys* workshop would help communities deal in a constructive way with the concerns raised by

the 2009 Vocation Study.

Here are some representative comments from the San Antonio training workshop:

- It could not have been more hands-on and practical. I am so looking forward to using the tools with my community. The witness of the newer members was particularly engaging.
  - —Brother Robert Croteau, Brothers of the Sacred Heart, New England Province
- I gained so much insight from all the tools that were used in this workshop. I'm very hopeful, as well as excited, to go home and share. Excellent ideas!

—Sister Mary Stephen Beauford, Oblate Sisters of Providence

• It gave me a clearer understanding of the [2009 vocation] study and increased my energy to "doing something" about vocations! It was non-threatening and truly engaging, in an honest manner.

—Sister Yolanda Cruz, Sisters of St. Mary of Namur

• It will help us to get real/concrete. Thank you!

—Brother John Celichowski, Capuchin Province of St. Joseph



Representatives of a crosssection of U.S. religious life gathered in San Antonio, TX in June 2012 to be trained in using the Keys process with their own religious communities. Here the sisters, brothers, and priests being trained are taking part in a trial run of the process.

#### **KEYS CD DISTRIBUTED WIDELY**

Every workshop participant, professional NRVC member, and religious superior in the United States received a CD that contained all of the program materials for the *Keys* process. This CD included a facilitator's manual with accompanying handouts; the newer member Wordle; two Power Point explorations of the 2009 NRVC/CARA Vocation Study; and a 30-minute video and script of eight recently perpetually professed members under the age of 40. (This comprehensive CD package is now available as a resource for \$25 for NRVC members and \$37.50 for non-members, and can be ordered through NRVC.net.)

#### CONTINUING COMMUNICATION ABOUT KEYS

As NRVC developed and rolled out the *Keys* process, it gave its members regular updates, primarily through its monthly online newsletter, "Focus on Vocation Ministry," as well as its website, social networking sites, its quarterly HORIZON journal, and member e-mails.

Photos and the process logo were included in these reports whenever possible. A table discussion was reserved for the topic of the *Keys* process during the 2012 NRVC national convocation, and NRVC regional coordinators promoted the program at its meetings. NRVC continues to advocate for this workshop as a useful tool for community renewal.

Despite its multifaceted efforts in communication of the program's value, some institutes occasionally report being unaware of the process.

This lack of knowledge is attributed to some vocation directors confusing the *Keys* process with other initiatives that began at the same time, and others being distracted by demands of their ministry or a transition in vocation personnel.

Now that communities who have implemented the *Keys* are beginning to see the fruits of using the process, awareness of the program will increase as results are being shared with a wider audience. As of December 2013 more than 60 communities have used the *Keys* process and the good words about the program will continue to spread.

## ENCOURAGING REPORTS FROM FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF FIRST KEYS USERS

Those who attended the *Keys* training workshop in San Antonio were asked to use the process within one year and to report on their experience via a 14-question online survey. The reports are encouraging. The great majority of *Keys* users were pleased with the progress they witnessed in their communities. The vast majority of users reported that *Keys* generated a communal sense of hope, energy, and commitment to support and promote vocations for their community. Many communities agreed to stop being negative and to start taking concrete, positive steps toward vocation promotion and awareness. Even the language used to describe the *Keys* process was inspiring: "This process has

#### INITIAL REPORTS

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been a real grace to our community," wrote the leader of a cloistered Carmelite community. Another vocation minister wrote, "We have been so blessed by that San Antonio workshop over and over again."

Only two users of the 64 who submitted follow-up reports were decidedly unhappy with the overall experience, and after further investigation, it seems that the internal resistance of the members may have been the cause of their discontent.

# BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS

From among the 176 applicants to the San Antonio workshop, NRVC selected 75 who were representative of religious life in this country in terms of their gender, age, community charism, ethnic background, etc. Every NRVC region had at least one representative with the exception of Region 13, which had no applicants. There was one participant selected from Canada. The final roster of participants included 25 percent (19) male religious and 75 percent (56) female religious.

Of the 64 participants who responded to the survey, 77 percent were women, and 23 percent were men.

## BREAKING DOWN THE FEEDBACK: WHO PARTICIPATED AND WHO REPORTED

Applications were received from 24 states and Canada, representing all three Leadership Conferences of women and men religious. From among the 176 applicants to the San Antonio workshop, NRVC selected 75 who were representative of religious life in North America in terms of gender, age, community charism, and ethnic background. Every NRVC region had at least one representative with the exception of Region 13, which had no applicants. There was one participant selected from Canada. The final roster of participants included 25 percent (19) male religious and 75 percent (56) female religious. Of the women religious 10 percent of the participants were from the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR), and 65 percent were from religious institutes that belong to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Fifty-nine percent of the participants were vocation ministers; 23 percent were in congregational leadership; and 18 percent were in formation or another ministry. The youngest participant was 30 years old, and the oldest participant was 84 years old.

Of the 64 participants who responded to the follow-up survey, 77 percent were women, and 23 percent were men.

#### SETTINGS AND OCCASIONS FOR USING THE KEYS PROCESS

Every participating group used the *Keys* differently, and astuteness and sensitivity to member needs and the culture of the community seem to have been critical. The right place, the right time, the right introduction to why and how the process would work, the right facilitator . . . these choices needed to be made wisely. Although success stories were not dependent on these factors, if there were any difficulties, they frequently were tied to internal issues, many of them connected to these judgment calls.

One successful method of proceeding was to facilitate a "mini-Keys-process" with leaders in the community. Once these individuals had tried Keys and were on board and enthusiastic, they then worked together on how to implement the process with the larger community. With this support of leadership, other details, such as planning and scheduling, quickly fell into place.

The occasion for *Keys* and the type of location for it varied from one community to another. One community used *Keys* during what they called a "Wisdom Gathering," an assembly specifically established so that members would increase their understanding of vocation and religious life issues.

Overall, settings and occasions used to introduce the *Keys* process to a particular community included:

Settings Occasions

Retreat house Province-wide gathering
Convent Regional Day of Reflection
Motherhouse Annual district gathering

School hall Province assembly conducted in six sites

University buildings Full chapter/ Local chapter

#### **ADAPTATIONS**

Most people (73 percent) adapted the process for their communities. Some adaptations reported, included:

- Shortening the process (especially if the community had already spent time digesting the 2009 survey results).
- Breaking the process into multiple days.
- Adding reflections based on the charism/words of the founder, etc.
- Having members do some of the reading/reflection on the survey data ahead of time.
- Skipping the Wordle [computer generated graphic using words of participants].
- Inviting single laity to join the discussion of what young people are seeking.

#### MOST IMPORTANT THING TO OCCUR DURING THE PROCESS

When asked to respond to the *most important thing(s) to occur during this process*, survey respondents identified two similar

themes: the quality of discussions and the energy and optimism generated by the process:

"The animated engagement with practical suggestions about where to go in the future."

"Dialogue was rich and interest was deep."

"The sisters honestly naming the reality of the province and looking at bold, courageous steps . . ."

#### HOW TO APPROACH THE KEYS PROCESS

Every group approached the use of differently, and astuteness and sensitivity to member needs and the culture of the community seem to have been critical. The right place, the right time, the right introduction to why and how the process would work, the right facilitator . . . these choices needed to be made wisely.



The high quality of the discussions along with the optimism and energy the process generated were the most important things to occur during the Keys process. Here the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters take part in table talk.

#### **ADAPTATIONS**

Most people (73 percent) innovatively adapted the process for their communities.

#### **CHANGES IN PROCESS:**

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- Breaking the process into multiple days.
- Adding reflections based on the charism/ words of the founder, etc.
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- "The process led to animated discussions . . . and opened up conversations about what we need to do . . ."
- "Having open discussions."
- "Great conversations . . . allowed us to speak in areas that had never been covered before by the community at large."
- "A real and deep sharing . . ."
- "There was great animation . . ."
- "Affirmed the belief in religious life"
- "Enthusiasm of the group . . . eagerness for follow-up"
- "This [process] was an antidote against the dangers of pessimism and desperation."
- "Gave our sisters/associates hope for our future and the future of religious life"
- "Reigniting the energy and passion of our original call"

Several respondents also said that actually getting to concrete plans and commitments was one of the most important outcomes of the day. But clearly, what leaders and vocation ministers most valued was the deep participation and honest conversation, in addition to energy and optimism. Plans developed without a deep level of open conversation don't often target the right things, and action plans developed without a sense of hope and energy to carry them through usually die on the vine.

#### WHAT AROUSED THE MOST INTEREST AND DISCUSSION?

The follow-up survey posed the question: *What aroused the most interest and discussion?* Almost all the answers focused on two intertwined concerns:

- What newer members are seeking in religious life;
- The community reality in light of what newer members are looking for.

Some respondents identified particular areas of communal life that may need revisiting in light of what newer members are seeking: larger communal living arrangements, communal prayer, and Eucharist. A few respondents said their most animated discussions revolved around the consistency between their constitution/charism and what newer members seek.

Four of the 61 responses to this question named discussions that essentially boiled down divisions within religious life and the church ("liberal versus conservative" as one respondent labeled it). Three of the four groups that reported intense discussion of these divisions were very positive about the overall effect of the *Keys* process. The single neutral respondent reported concrete positive steps that the community had already taken as a result of the process.

#### PRACTICAL STEPS: WHAT TO START DOING

The survey asked those who led their communities through the process to complete the

following statement: The practical steps that our community agreed to take were as follows. We agreed to start doing . . .

Many responses focused on *opening up* and *inviting in*. Communities decided to open up their prayer times and liturgies, open up new living arrangements, open up discernment houses, open up their facilities to youth groups, and so on. Responses also emphasized inviting young people to activities and events of the community, with many responses using language such as "intentional inviting" and "taking responsibility to invite . . ."

The following is a sampling of the initiatives communities agreed to:

- Hold monthly "affiliate" evenings in three of our districts (evenings when young people come for dinner).
- Celebrate our jubilee year with events to strengthen ties within the community and for reaching out to youth.
- Open our motherhouse for young-adult worship.
- Live in a neighborhood with young people and families.
- Be more open to other cultures and more accepting of each other.
- Improve our visibility in our ministries.
- Invite women to the community for prayer, meals.
- Open our Sunday Vespers service to the public for Lent.
- Begin work on the use of social media.
- Offer Eucharistic Adoration followed by Compline.
- Introduce ourselves as Sisters of . . . and wear our [community] cross.
- Host singing, writing, and poetry contests to generate interest in the community from young people.
- Open an intentional community of discernment.
- Engage a full-time vocation promoter.
- Have an evening vocation session three or four times a year and invite women to attend.
- Be intentional about speaking about our life and vows.
- Allow the vocation minister more time to do vocation ministry.

#### PRACTICAL STEPS: WHAT TO STOP DOING

In addition to encouraging positive actions, the *Keys* process encourages participants to identify negative actions that the community should discontinue doing for the sake of new membership. In response to the statement *We agreed to stop doing*... communities described behaviors that are destructive to any kind of shared life, including criticizing one another, being negative, complaining, holding old hurts, being fearful, being pessi-

### DISCUSSION OF NEWER MEMBERS

The survey posed the question: What aroused the most interest and discussion? Almost all the answers focused on two intertwined concerns:

- what newer members are seeking in religious life, and,
- the community reality in light of what newer members are looking for.

mistic, being individualistic, judging, gossiping, being discouraged, whining, and grumbling.

More specific to the issues of new membership, communities agreed to:

- Stop looking to the New Membership Office to do the work of inviting (this received multiple mentions).
- Stop using diocesan models of ministerial living, which favor single living or living in pairs.
- Stop living out of a nostalgic past.
- Stop dwelling on age and diminishment.
- Stop waiting for the "right time" to be welcoming, hospitable, and inviting (multiple mentions).

#### MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Longterm effectiveness must be measured in another year or two after communities have had time to carry out the start and stop actions they identified.

#### FOLLOW THROUGH ESSENTIAL

Essential to any commitment is the follow through. As one *Keys* survey respondent said: "We can get a pretty good picture of how the friars want things to go; now it's just a matter of actually doing it!" Both to gather information and to reinforce the concept of accountability, immediately following the questions about what they were starting and stopping, NRVC asked participants to name *the person(s) overseeing follow through on these steps*.

The majority of respondents listed two or three names or titles, usually the vocation director and the regional superior or leadership team. Eleven respondents (or 18 percent) named a single individual charged with follow through, and again it was usually a vocation director or a superior.

When it comes to reconvening those involved in the process to see how the community is doing in living out its commitments, of the 61 respondents, nine (14 percent) will bring the whole community or province together in an assembly or chapter to re-examine the issues raised in *Keys*. An equal number, again nine communities, either will not gather to re-evaluate or are uncertain if they will. The remainder of communities, 72 percent of them, have some type of sub-group that will be meeting to monitor progress. These groupings range from local communities, to regional groups, to members of the leadership team, to vocation committees, and even special task forces set up as a result of K*eys*.

#### **WEAKNESSES IN THE PROCESS**

The survey asked those who led the *Keys* process: *Were any aspects of your community's engagement with the process disappointing? If so, please elaborate.* Forty percent of the respondents said they did not have any disappointments with the process.

Of those who listed a disappointment, only two are actually critiques of the process itself. The most important critique was summed up in this response: "It was a very long day, and as much as the sisters were engaged fully in the process, they were absolutely drained

by the end of it, and when it came time to talk about 'bold' and creative initiatives, they were ready to bottom out." Others, too, reported that the day was overly long, especially for elderly members. In addition, many observed that the process did not allow adequate time for coming up with steps to take and making sure that some kind of accountability for the steps was put into place. And many noted that even if there had been time, participants were too drained to do a fair job with the critical "next steps" portion of the process.

This same critique was reported in September 2012, three months after was rolled out at the San Antonio training session. As a result, NRVC sent an e-mail to all the San Antonio participants encouraging communities to consider adapting the process to leave plenty of time and energy for discussion of "concrete, creative, and courageous next steps."

Apart from this observation, other critiques seemed mostly related to internal issues: problems with scheduling, inadequate support from leadership, resistance to the messages contained in the 2009 NRVC study, resistance to change, and a focus on past hurts or current ecclesial divisions. On the whole, however, most who listed drawbacks were actually pleased at the overall way the process worked with their communities.

Long-term effectiveness must be measured in another year or two after communities have had time to carry out the start and stop actions they identified .

## THREE MOST HELPFUL ASPECTS

In answer to the question, What aspects of the process were most helpful?, respondents had three main replies:

- The DVD of perpetually professed newer members under the age of 40
- The questions on the handouts
- The way the process started from personal experience

#### MOST HELPFUL ASPECTS OF THE PROCESS

Answers to the question *What aspects of the process were most helpful?* included many comments about the depth and quality of discussions evoked by the process and the positive energy the process aroused. In general the answers here named three aspects of the process itself that were helpful:

- 1) The DVD of perpetually professed newer members under the age of 40.
- 2) The questions on the handouts.
- 3) The way the process started from personal experience.



The Keys process helped many older religious come to understand what today's newer members in religious life. While old and young ultimately share the values of religious life, newer members tend to emphasize different elements of the life than their elders.

Here is a flavor of the responses concerning helpful elements of the *Keys* process:

- The questions in the "concrete and courageous next steps" section were well-focused, and we had a very good dialogue.
- Many of the sisters commented that the DVD was most helpful in understanding young religious and also fostering a sense of hope in the future of religious life.
- Beginning with their personal experience was very helpful.
- The video of the recently professed women and men was the biggest hit with the

# AN ONGOING EFFORT

NRVC will continue to promote the use of the process in the following ways:

- Continue to make this report known to members.
- Encourage regional coordinators to host regional-level discussions about the process (sharing their experiences and best practices).
- Tell collaborating organizations about the process.
- Publicize the process on the website and offer it for sale online.
- Provide information about at the convocation in November 2014.
- Provide venues for discussing the implementation of at the convocation.
- Report, again, on in HORIZON.

group, coupled with the CARA report. People felt they were eye-openers and should continue to be used

#### ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

The last question in the survey asked participants to share any other feedback that would be helpful for NRVC. Five people explained here (or in other communications) why their community has not yet fully used the *Keys* (for example, reconfiguration, reassignment of vocation director, scheduling problems). Some of the five said they would still make use of the process.

A few respondents brought up the weakness mentioned earlier, that more time and energy should be dedicated to the next-steps discussions. A few respondents also mentioned that they wish they had used an outside facilitator as they think members would have been more engaged.

The most repeated theme was that of gratitude. Many of those who expressed appreciation wrote a bit about the significance of the process, such as these remarks:

- It was a wonderful "shot in the arm" for the sisters, and it has recharged our province battery at a very critical time in our history and reality. Thank you to all who worked so diligently to prepare *Keys to the Future* and to train us as facilitators. It was an extremely profitable experience for all.
  - —Sister Michele Vincent Fisher, CSFN Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth
- I am deeply grateful for having had the opportunity to participate in the MFIH process. To have received the latest information on young adults who are seeking and now living religious life is a great asset for congregations as we move into the future. This resource dispels misinformation regarding the desires of young adults and newer members, invites all of the membership to be involved in vocation ministry, and [delivers] accurate facts which can assist us in the choices we make for our congregational formation and daily living. THANK YOU!

—Sister Kathy Claflin, S.S.J.

• The process was awesome. Sisters felt that their confidentiality was protected, especially in the naming of the community's reality. Sisters felt safe being honest. Many Sisters expressed appreciation for the process and felt that the questions were well formulated. Because, in my instance, the workshop was not done on a province level but in individual units facilitated by the vocation director, the outcome was not as definitive as I would have liked. But all agree that there is significant work to be done as we continue to build on what was accomplished. We will be coming back to what happened in each workshop to be sure we implement the steps that were identified.

—Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother

• I would just say that those who obviously labored long hours to put this together did a VERY FINE JOB and made my job as recruiter a lot easier.

—Jim Osendorf, C.M. Congregation of the Mission

#### **NEXT STEPS FOR THE KEYS PROCESS**

In its inaugural year, at least 63 religious communities used the Keys process, and almost

all of them found it well worth the investment of time and effort. However, given that approximately 800 religious communities exist in the United States, a great many more could be benefiting from *Keys* no matter where they are on the vocations continuum. NRVC will continue to encourage communities to adapt the process to ensure that adequate time and energy are put into the "bold, courageous steps" portion. In addition, NRVC can promote the use of the process in several ways, including the following.

- 1) Continue to promote awareness of the program, feedback from participating members, and this final report of the initial gathering and assessment.
- 2) Encourage regional coordinators to host regional-level discussions about the process (sharing their experiences and best practices).
- 3) Tell collaborating organizations about the *Keys* process.
- 4) Continue to publicize the process on the NRVC website and social networks, and market the comprehensive *Keys* CD online.
- 5) Provide information about *Keys* at the convocation in November 2014.
- 6) Provide venues for discussing the implementation of *Keys* at the convocation.
- 7) Report, again, on Keys in HORIZON.
- 8) Follow up with participants and continue to request feedback.
- 9) Continue to communicate to those who will be using the process that they should leave plenty of time for the all-important "bold, courageous steps" portion of the program.

Clearly, as with the car in the *Keys* logo, NRVC will want to keep pressing on the communications gas pedal about what this process has done for communities and what it can do. It surely falls within the mission of the NRVC to encourage *any* practice that—like *Moving Forward in Hope: Keys to the Future*—opens up deep and honest conversations about religious life and instills energy, optimism, and responsibility for building its future.

#### **POSITIVE FEEDBACK**

"It was a wonderful shot in the arm for the sisters, and it has recharged our province battery at a very critical time in our history and reality. Thank you to all who worked so diligently to prepare to the Future and to train us as facilitators. It was an extremely profitable experience for all."

- Sister Michele Vincent Fisher, CSFN Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth



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