



***Pathways to  
Transforming  
Governance***

*A Collaborative Endeavor by:*

*Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd*

*Sisters of Notre Dame*

*Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*

*CommunityWorks, Inc.*

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## Pathway One: Overview

*Women religious across the globe are undergoing a significant shift in their identity and their place in a world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. They are situated in a world where a new consciousness is surfacing, and people are seeing the critical need for all peoples to bring their best selves, competency, and wisdom to the table if our universe, our very planet, is to survive.*

In facing this shifting reality of humanity and Earth, women religious across the globe are called to:

- Embrace the very essence of religious life with its profound belief in God, its oneness with all creation, and its profound commitment to those on the margin.
- Explore new ways to reimage religious life to fit into the ever-changing socio-political reality of our times.
- Commit to being more inter-connected with others and increasing their moral voice and collective agency within the world.
- Reassess their beliefs, assumptions, and ways of doing things; to let go of visible and invisible structures that hold them back.
- Engage in new relationships and partnerships as they cross charisms for the common good of humanity and Earth.

All of this speaks to the transformative work facing religious women, the courageous honesty to look at their ministries in response to the times and re-assess their governing structures to support their life and mission.

### Invisible and Visible Governing Structures

***There is an inclination to look for quick or concrete solutions to complex problems.***

There tends to be a significant propensity in human nature to categorize things. The assumption is that categorizing issues makes it easier to cope with complexity and uncertainty rather than seeing how things interrelate. It limits our capacity to see how our beliefs or assumptions impact decisions and the

need to change. There is an inclination to look for quick or concrete solutions to complex problems which leads to changing styles of leadership or the government structure.

Before changing the government structure, a congregation needs to take time to explore its invisible structures. Invisible structures, such as values, beliefs, assumptions, and unwritten expectations, hold significant power over the congregation and inform its behavior and decisions. These structures impact how the members live together, their level of satisfaction, and their sense of belonging. When basic needs are unmet, the congregation often looks to change its visible structures, including leadership, policies, finances, human resources, and decision-making. Rarely is changing the visible structures the answer to these types of issues.

The desire to be more active in ministry by freeing Sisters from administrative positions also necessitates changing the visible structures. It results in hiring more laypeople at the administrative level. This change is also due to a decline in the number of sisters or sisters not having the required expertise to fill administrative positions.

The more pressing the need for change at this evolutionary time of religious life, the more congregations recognize the critical need to create adaptable, flexible, and innovative governance models.

## Mission, Vision, and Communal Transformation

There are multiple ways of creating an evolving model of governance. Each congregation's culture, invisible structure, and way of functioning significantly determine how they may wish to approach the task.

***What is critical is to determine the best approach that suits a specific congregation.***

Professional research conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and informal research conducted by grant participants helped to uncover how diverse congregations were restructuring their governance. Both formal and informal findings validated the effectiveness of various approaches for changing the government structure. What is critical is to determine the best approach that suits a specific congregation.

Research also uncovered key principles used in each approach. Keeping the mission at the forefront is the primary principle. The capacity to be on mission is the motivator for undergoing structural change.

Critical components of the process include:

- reaching out to other congregations to ascertain how they created a new governance model
- engaging sisters, associates, and lay ministry partners in the process
- consistent communication.

At the very beginning stage of creating an adaptable and innovative government structure, it is helpful to remember that the assigned governance planning committees need a larger vision beyond the mechanics of changing the government structure. Creating a new model of governance, as well as strategizing how to implement it, is far more than changing the structure. It is transformative work that needs careful attention and intention. Creating and implementing a new model of governance generates an array of emotions. For some, it means relief and excitement. For others, it sparks a sense of loss, loss of identity, pain, and grief. Collective transformative work is pivotal if the change in the government structure has heart and a chance to succeed.

## **Organizational Principles for Transforming Governance**

In creating an adaptable and flexible government structure, it is essential to envision the congregation's future reality and attend to its collective soul. Besides these essential components, a congregation needs solid organizational principles to guide its new model. The grantees uncovered the following as they designed their new models.

1. **MACRO FOCUS (big picture) VERSUS MICRO FOCUS (details):**  
In the initial stages of research and planning, it is critical to keep the planning committee focused on the big picture, so they see possibilities. It is key that the committee wonders, imagines and asks open-ended questions versus getting trapped too early into the practicalities which will weigh the overall process down.
2. **MINDSET OF COLLABORATION:**  
To build a solid commitment of collaboration and partnership that transcends time, the overall design needs to be a collaborative effort from the beginning which includes non-members of the congregation in the process.

### 3. PARADIGM SHIFT REGARDING PARTNERING:

For many congregations, there is a need for a change in thinking regarding the inclusion of lay colleagues and mission partners in shaping the future. In the past, religious life across the globe was a very self-contained system. However, it has been consistently moving towards being a more open system.

Collaboration and/or partnering takes trust and openness on the part of both sisters and lay people.

### 4. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE:

Diverse cultures and languages are key issues when developing a global form of governance. The conveyed design needs to be culturally sensitive, and the language issues considered. Where there are emerging ideas and/or concepts, it is important to create a glossary of terms that is language sensitive. Effective and competent interpreters, translators, adequate staff to support communication and connection throughout the congregation are paramount.

***Changing a congregation's government structure means attending to the whole congregation...***

## Concluding Remarks

Changing a congregation's governance and government structure means attending to the whole congregation, the entire system, that is, its life, purpose, and way of functioning. The structural change or the change process can surface a collective emotional reaction, such as the sense of loss, letting go or grief depending on the reasons for the change.

If there is a desire not only for a new structure but also for transformation within the congregation, then deep interior collective work must accompany the change process. Touching into the congregation's mission, shared purpose and shared values enable members to focus on the collective good.

## Moving Forward

Building on these thoughts, our second pathway focuses on the meaning of governance. Some form of a governing body touches everyone. While we can experience or be impacted by being governed, do we really know what governance is? To change one's government structure, it is critical that the planning committee clarifies what governance is and shares their mutual understanding with the congregation.



## Pathway Two: Governance

*In Pathway One, Overview, it was noted that we are living in a time of significant transition as a society and within religious life. Our socio-political and ecclesial systems are in a state of collapse. Cultural norms are radically changing, and issues are becoming increasingly complex. This reality is calling for poignant curiosity, imagination, and the creation of new narratives around what we value, believe, and how we function. It is prime time to examine how a congregation governs, resources itself, and provides a meaningful structure around it as it lives out its mission. This pathway invites us to explore the very meaning of governance and its importance.*

### Governance

#### Everyone thinks they know what governance is, but what is it?

Often when members of a congregation hear the words governance or government, there is a groan! Often, memories of oppression or frustration about the lack of subsidiarity surface. The sentiments become mixed with other concerns, such as an approach to initial formation or the answer to how lay people are managing ministries. The idea that governance could enhance one's communal life or support a new endeavor is rarely given as an initial response.

What is governance? Initial discussions on governance generated interesting insights regarding governance and government. Participants began to see that these two concepts are not synonymous.

With mission as its primary purpose, *governance* is seen as the guiding principles, values, and elements that underpin how a governmental structure operates. For instance:

- making the Gospel come alive today
- our shared responsibility for the mission
- our accountability to each other



*Government* reflects the structures that describe how the congregation organizes its leadership, membership, and decision-making processes to carry out the values of governance.

***Governance energizes membership for mission.***

In collaboration with the creation of new models of governance, *The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)*, surveyed eight international congregations about their new models of government. One question focused on the purpose of governance. The participating eight congregations identified three primary purposes:

1. to support the Congregation's charism and mission
2. to exercise authority properly and ensure participation
3. to care for the Congregation, Provinces, communities, and members.

Governance energizes membership for mission. It is a means that enables the congregation to:

- Sustain and nurture religious life that aligns charism, mission, spirituality, and community.
- Provide for accompaniment and animation that challenges sisters and lay partners to live the mission in a way that provides "best practices" for ministerial service with all the people they encounter and for all of God's creation.
- Foster relationships among sisters, Associates, lay partners and collaborative networks so that as friends and co-learners we become more effective and energized for mission.
- Provide a forum for innovative ideas to emerge and to be shared with the congregation to move processes forward with a clearer understanding. For example, one group used focus groups.

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*A focus group through deliberate thinking moved formation out of the realm of government into a separate, more appropriate area to be addressed. Formation then had a focus group that could pay more attention to the diverse needs which surfaced that did not pertain to government structure..*

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- Call forth accountability and interdependence in both members and lay partners regarding each one's specific decision-making areas and complementarity. It highlights subsidiarity and personal responsibility.

Governance expresses the values out of which a Congregation organizes itself. It can promote unity and cohesion at all levels through a shared vision. Governance has the potential of building global awareness, cultural sensitivity, and it holds the capacity to be transformative.

### **Why is governance important?**

Governance is essential because it ensures that the congregation's authority protects the integrity or rights of each member and maintains effective stewardship of the resources needed for mission.

Governance impacts all levels of leadership and is designed so leaders operate with appropriate autonomy. Specifically, governance guarantees that members and lay partners have viable opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and to share responsibility for the direction of the mission. Everyone connected with the congregational mission has a role pertinent to their gifts/expertise for the common good of the congregation.

Congregational structures (government) need to be designed for flexibility to meet the needs of the members and ministries. Effective leadership is required to meet the vowed members' canonical rights and responsibilities.

### **What are assumptions around governance and the need for change?**

Assumptions are the stories we tell ourselves about a situation or a person. True or not, they can become our beliefs as well as influence our behaviors. While working on creating new government structures, sisters have offered a few assumptions about governance. Governance is an/a:

- Evolving series of relationships.
- Underpinning for the congregation, integral to all aspects of congregational life.
- Support to the life and ministry of the congregation.
- Formal means for members and lay partners to know their rights and responsibilities.





## Pathway Three: Call for a Change in Government Structure

*In considering changing one's government structure, it is important to probe what is prompting the change. There are many diverse reasons given the changes transpiring within religious congregations across the world. Pathway Three outlines some of the changes expressed by the eight international congregations that felt a call to change their government structure.*

### Call for Change in Government Structure

Changing one's government structure so that it is flexible, adaptable and addresses a congregation's needs takes thought and planning. The effectiveness of the change process depends on the support and engagement of leadership, members, and the congregation's lay employees. To establish a strong commitment to the change process, the intent and vision for the change need clear articulation and sharing with all involved.

If the intent for changing the government structure is unclear, a congregation can change the structure, expending time and money for the wrong reason. For example, suppose members are unhappy about the operative leadership style, or feel excluded from congregation-wide decision-making. In that case, they could recommend changing the government structure only to find it was the wrong solution to their dilemma.

Being attentive to why one would change their government structure is critical for making sure that the need is for structural change pertinent to the congregation's life and mission, not for addressing another issue.

### Why change government structure?

What prompts a religious congregation to explore a change in their government structure? The answers are as varied as the institutes and their situations. Learnings gleaned through conversations with other diverse congregations pointed to the following observations.

## Trends and Developments within Congregations

- Decrease in membership which changes a congregation's structural needs.
- A shift in the proportion of members of advanced age, leaving fewer sisters for mission and ministry.
- Younger cohorts of sisters lack adequate representation in leadership positions.
- Shrinking congregational presence and ministries in some geographic areas, while in other areas there is a growth in both presence and ministries.
- Desire to free sisters for mission instead of administration.
- Decline in the number of potential sisters with leadership experience to assume a leadership role in the congregation or who wish to embrace the call to congregational leadership.

## Government Structure Not Adequately Reflecting the Congregation's Values or Desires

In speaking of the need to change their government structure, sisters expressed the following desires for a change in structure that reflects:

- Their charism
- Gospel values and their evolving understanding of theology.
- Servant leadership
- A form of government that incorporates lay persons and others outside the Congregation
- Lifegiving energy
- Today's needs

## Administrative Challenges Necessitating a Change in Government Structure

- Lack of clarity and/or consensus about authority for decision-making
- Unnecessary replication of positions and salaries performing similar functions in different areas of the congregation.
- Unnecessary travel costs and travel time for leaders
- Resources are not always being expended where they are needed

## A Feeling of Imbalance and Disconnection within the Congregation

- Not having enough connections among members in different provinces and/or countries
- Members' decreasing sense of belonging to the congregation
- Inadequate communication among different provinces
- Needing to find a better balance between decentralization of authority for more flexibility to respond to changing needs and circumstances, and centralization of authority for more cohesion and stability at all levels

*...knowing the intent  
and reason for the  
change is critical.*

As stated, there are many diverse reasons and situations that create momentum for considering a change in one's government structure. Again, knowing the intent and reason for the change is critical so that the congregation does not engage in a momentous change process for the wrong reason.

To effectively change a congregation's government structure, besides intent, one also needs to ask about readiness. Is the congregation's leadership team on board? If there are multiple teams due to provinces and/or regions, it is critical that all leaders are on-board and willing to engage in the change process. There also needs to be a collective agreement that there will be a change in the government structure, and there is latitude for different provinces to engage at various stages of the change based on their circumstances.

At any one time, not everyone will agree about the need for or the how-to of the change process. What is helpful is **the 25% Rule**, uncovered by researcher D. Centola (2018) which states that if 25% of the members are on board, change can happen. This core group has the capacity to keep the change process alive while the implementation committee continues to strive for a consensus in supporting the final change.

### Moving Forward

Having clarified the intent for changing one's government structure and having garnered the support of both leaders and members, it is important to determine whom to engage in this change process leading to a new way of operating. Pathway Four outlines diverse ways of engaging others.



## Pathway Four: Engaging Others in Finding a New Way

*To effectively change one's government structure, it is critical to hold in balance both mission and structure. It is also imperative to have leadership and membership's commitment to the change process, knowing the emotional impact change can have on those involved. At this time of complexity and evolution within religious life, we need to broaden the spectrum of engagement beyond one's members and engage both internal and external collaborators. Pathway Four outlines diverse approaches of engagement.*

### Collaborative Movements: Engagement to Support New Governance Models

Religious life is in a paradigm-shifting time. Thus, the search for any significant breakthroughs entails collaboration, partnerships, and cooperation to support internal capacity and innovation. These relationships will enhance the life and mission while sustainable and interdependent structures are being formed

Adopting collaborative practices requires altering one's internal culture or worldview so that the congregation can shift from a closed to an open system. Simultaneously, balancing the creative tension of being more porous while honoring the unique congregational charism and call in the church and world is critical.

One premise for managing evolving governance requires increased intentionality and broader collaborative engagement. An ongoing communal commitment is necessary to move to an open system that creates the potential for a congregation to increase its capacity for mission. There are many facets to engaging others in developing new governance models. It may be helpful to recognize the continuum of possibilities for engaging with others.

	Networking	Collaboration	Partnership	Integral Planning and Action
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal sharing</li> <li>• Informal communication</li> <li>• Exchange of information and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common purpose or commitment to a project</li> <li>• Share resources and/or fiscal sponsorship to enhance capacity</li> <li>• Selected shared service arrangements</li> <li>• Alignment of some activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared means to a goal</li> <li>• The joint plan of action and responsibility</li> <li>• Joint mission</li> <li>• Shared back-office functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open system orientation</li> <li>• New forms of leadership structure</li> <li>• Shared leadership with formal agreements</li> <li>• Joint ventures</li> <li>• Pooled funding</li> <li>• Joint sustainable practices</li> </ul>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional meeting or call with another Congregation or organization</li> <li>• Share experiences</li> <li>• Exchange resources &amp; networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) collaborations</li> <li>• Eldercare</li> <li>• Resource organizations, e.g., RCRI (Resource Center for Religious Institutes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-sector commitments or agreements (Nonprofit, religious, private, government)</li> <li>• Shared leadership</li> <li>• Expanded roles for mission colleagues/partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A continuum of strategies for structural collaboration among different entities</li> <li>• New roles for lay mission partners</li> <li>• Promotion of interculturality vis a vis a global sisterhood</li> </ul>

Informal—short term

Low intensity-low complexity

### Continuum

Formal—long term

High intensity—high complexity

At each stage of planning a new government structure, from its inception to implementation, there are opportunities to seek wisdom from people involved within and outside the congregational system. Among the Hilton Project collaborators (Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Notre Dame, and Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary), the following situations provided valuable insights for creating governance models:

- Focus groups: Convening a diversity of people: sisters and associates, those from other congregations; nonprofit executives; people from culturally diverse backgrounds; managers and administrators from within and outside the congregation to tap universal wisdom. Various cohorts shared creative and adaptive government structures, values orientations, and promotion of an esprit de corps in their organizations and congregations.



- Think-tanks are one-time opportunities for creative thinking to address a common issue or vision among participants. Participants might include those from leadership and membership of different congregations, associates etc.
- Theological reflection: Processes of prayer, reflection, dialogue, and discernment involving members, associates, mission collaborators, and partners from a diversity of congregational relationships.
- Affinity groups: They are groups of people focused on similar functions that exist in the congregation. They are convened across a congregation to consider new possibilities such as finance, formation, justice peace, and integrity of creation.
- Retreats: Regional or congregation-wide exploration of personal and communal transformation that coincides with structural change.
- Webinars, virtual meetings, and creative use of technology: Opportunities for education and inclusion of everyone involved in the governance processes.
- Wisdom and faith-sharing circles: Smaller engagement units among members and associates including collaborators and mission partners.
- Charrette: From the French word meaning cart, it is a gathering of stakeholders in a participatory planning process to envision and create potential designs for a desired future.

Deeper engagement with mission colleagues within the congregation and partners outside of the congregation, who support shared

***...congregations might envision expanded congregational leadership teams to accompany the canonical teams.***

values and mission, opens the possibility for innovative leadership scenarios within governance models. This commitment sets the stage for re-imagining the structure and functions for canonical and non-canonical roles that establish a more collaborative governance model. For example, congregations might envision expanded congregational leadership teams to accompany the canonical teams.

These scenarios require new delineations of tasks and roles at the congregational, regional, and local leadership levels.

To support a movement of communal transformation to be on the forefront of collaboration and partnership necessitates openness and a commitment to being a learning community. The wisdom gleaned from collaboration yields a rich perspective on evolving governance. It opens the congregation to greater wisdom through

discernment, dialogue, and reflection which increases feedback loops and continual re-envisioning among members, and a wide spectrum of the congregation's ecosystem of relationships.

## Practices to Support Collaboration for Evolving Governance Structure

*...we are at a Kairos moment that calls women religious to be co-creators with the Spirit in the emergence of new pathways for religious life.*

- Encourage collaborative curiosity.
- Educate to change the culture and practice of collaborating and partnering to support the mission and expanded community.
- Engage proactively for "possibility" scenarios, rather than react to unresolved challenges.
- Support the formation of leadership, membership, associates, and partners-in-mission for viability and sustainability.
- Address the emotional field of fear, letting go and trust to support a collective soul in search of communal transformation.
- Practice subsidiarity and shared leadership among members and non-members.
- Create an openness to vulnerability for the equitable sharing of power and resources.
- Exercise foresight to make collaboration integral to the process for the congregation's good and the common good of the religious life.

In conclusion, we are at a Kairos moment that calls women religious to be co-creators with the Spirit in the emergence of new pathways for religious life. As we embrace a contemplative, prophetic stance, living a global sisterhood is on the horizon for us. Let us listen with the ears of our hearts and see beyond our current borders and boundaries.

## Moving Forward

Having explored the meaning of governance, why change the government structure, and who to engage in the process, Pathway Five explores at a deeper level the reality facing congregations as a means of seeing what is possible.



## Pathway Five: Data and Meaning Making

*Throughout these Pathway reflections, it has been stated that to change the government structure effectively, the new design must be rooted in the mission. The planning committee needs a deep understanding of the congregation's culture and values as well as clarity about the change's intent. Regardless of the number of sisters, the congregation must go beyond itself to invite others into the conversation to allow for fresh ideas and possibility thinking.*

*Another critical dimension to restructuring one's governmental structure is making meaning of a congregation's trends. Trends enable the planning committee to design with foresight based in reality.*

### Data and Meaning Making

It is crucial to tell the truth about one's reality. Information and data are critical for truth telling. And yet, there can be a tendency towards 'Fact Avoidance'. In considering facts, a congregation can experience fear in lieu of possibility; embrace denial in lieu of seeing data as building blocks to a new reality. Leaders and/or planning committees can withhold information or share only part of the facts for fear of upsetting the membership. This dynamic causes anxiety given that people sense and observe growth or decline within their congregations.

What can be extremely helpful in designing a new model of governance is to focus on trends. Trends are not just numbers. They are patterns, and they speak to a congregation's reality over time. Trends illuminate possibilities and deficits. They highlight a congregation's internal capacity and where it will need to increase its resources or shift its ways of functioning.

Trends show the congregation's reality over time enabling a planning committee to design a government structure that is flexible as well as realistic. For example, one of our participating congregations brought four independent Provinces together to form one new Province. Trends showed that for the first five years the new Province

would expand to its largest point; however, during the following five years, there would be a sharp decline in the number of sisters. The implication for the planning committee was to create a flexible government structure that could manage the expansion while putting in place the needed structure for a smaller Province.

Trends speak to the resource capacity of the members over time as they highlight the congregation's age configuration, and its resource capacity for system-wide leadership. Looking out five, ten and fifteen years, a planning committee can use trends to address the following types of questions pivotal for designing a government structure.

- 1 Focusing on five-year increments, what type of education, ministry and healthcare will the members need?
- 2 How do you image elected leadership and community service shifting over the next fifteen years and what are the implications for the new government structure?
- 3 In what ways will your financial resources meet the member's needs across the age spectrum; what role does the government structure have in safeguarding the congregation's financial resources?
- 4 How will culture impact the new governance structure? How will the new government structure impact the congregation's culture?
- 5 Given the changes in the congregation's demographics over time, how will relationships shift; how will participation in the congregation shift; how will ministry shift?
- 6 What is the appropriate size of Congregational Chapters and Leadership Teams for a much smaller Congregation of active Sisters?
- 7 How will the congregation's government structures sustainably engage the sponsored and co-sponsored institutional ministries?
- 8 How will the congregation's government structure care for the large number of elderly and infirm members and sustain the smaller number of members in full-time ministry?

Trends, noted by CARA-World Data Over Time, show a consistent decline in the number of women religious. In 2000, there were 801,185 religious in the world and in 2020 there were 630,099 religious, a decline of 171,086 religious worldwide. This reality has implications for changing government structures. Surface changes, such as the following, will only serve as a band-aid to the dilemma religious are facing and those served by religious.

1. Reducing the number of members in the leadership team
2. Reducing the number of provinces or unifying a current province with provinces in other countries
3. Establishing shared governance with other religious institutes
4. Changing bylaws or constitutions

***Belief in a global sisterhood and in religious life requires a larger system vision...***

Our world is going through a significant transition. World powers are shifting. World poverty is changing and there is a rise in the middle class in Asia and Latin America.

Professional opportunities for women continue to open throughout the world impacting the choice for religious life. All this calls us to imagine religious life differently and to think differently about changes in the government structures that support the life and mission.

Belief in a global sisterhood and in religious life requires a larger system vision for restructuring how congregations govern. Trends call congregations to think differently about vocations, formation, and leadership. They challenge congregations to collaborate more extensively with each other and with their lay counterparts. The implication of this challenge is the call to move from being a closed/self-contained system to a more open system that is porous and open to others. Strengthening the whole system with ongoing learning opportunities and mentoring across entities will be more effective and efficient.

This is a time of great possibility, new thought, and connection. It necessitates congregations creating flexible and adaptable government structures for the sake of the life and mission of women religious worldwide.

## **Moving Forward**

Having explored indicators for changing one's governance as well as congregational trends necessitating a change in the government structure, Pathway Six identifies guiding principles that are consistent across congregations choosing to change how they govern as well as their government structure.



## Pathway Six: Guiding Principles for Restructuring Governance

*When committing to help a congregation reimagine how it governs and how it structures itself, a planning committee takes on a significant task. Effectively attending to the task calls for a discerning mind and heart as to how to proceed, function and make decisions. This special work also calls the planning committee to be reflective practitioners, constantly learning in order to see new possibilities.*

*Pathway Six identifies consistent principles congregations who restructured held as critical to their work. These principles become benchmarks for evaluating the unfolding of the restructuring.*

### Reflective Practitioners and Guiding Principles

Community Works Inc. staff and representatives of each congregation served on the Hilton-supported Core Team. Regular meetings among the Core Team created a learning community and a forum for identifying universal guiding principles emanating from the work of the congregations' governance planning committees. Amidst the diversity and different approaches to governance, the principles were the same or similar.

The Core Team found that the following principles coalesced around three central themes. These themes provided clarity and focus for supporting the work of the governance committees and aided the Core Team in documenting what is central for any congregation that is exploring restructuring.

#### 1. Faithfulness to the intent of the change process

The cross-fertilization and dialogue among the group confirmed that it was essential to stay vigilant about the following principles as crucial for each congregation's planning committee.

- Enable an enriched focus on mission.
- Engage participants, systems and lay partners in lieu of simply consulting with them.

- Support the life and vitality of each member and stage of religious life.
- Build structures for a sustainable future.
- Respond to global issues.

These governing principles served as a crucial reminder of the planning committee's overall intent to strengthen the congregation's life and mission. They called forth and fostered engaging in wider and deeper relationship building internally and expanding the process externally to involve all the congregation's networks.

The evolving structures must be able to cope with anticipated and unanticipated challenges facing the Congregation. Attention to the present needs and reality of the Congregation is vital while simultaneously attending to future hopes.

Awareness of world issues underpinned the principles as the Core Team committed to promoting integral practices as they recognized the interdependence of all things. All design configurations require congregations to place themselves in a world context.

## 2. Governance includes transformation and structural change

Fundamentally, changing one's governance is primarily a social process. It affects how sisters, associates and lay partners relate to one another and the world. Consistent, continuous and transparent communication must be infused with meaning-making throughout the process. Everyone needs to have the opportunity to be part of the endeavor and give feedback.

***Fundamentally, changing one's governance is primarily a social process.***

As mentioned in previous reflections, a change of this magnitude touches the emotions of both the individual members and the collective body. The change is influenced by both the invisible and visible culture of the congregation along with long-held traditions. To let go of old ways of thinking and acting takes courage, humility, and a capacity for change. This takes prayer and deep faith sharing on the part of all whose lives are impacted.

Support for the ongoing congregational transformation entails:

- Maximizing relationship building.
- Processes for personal, communal and structural transformation
- Consistent communication and transparency.
- Prayer and faith sharing.
- Continuous feedback loops.
- On-going education and formation.

### 3. Creation of a holistic and global-minded change process

Expansion of the aspirational vision and values is requisite to the change process if women religious are to live out of the interdependence they seek and proclaim. The Core Team identified the following values as important for committees' holistic, global-minded governance planning:

- Nurture an open mind and heart to global trends and influences external to the congregation.
- Foster cultural awareness that provides new ways of understanding, new views and approaches to life's dilemmas.
- Embrace global networks that expand and strengthen global sisterhood.
- Employ new resources in the field of technology to foster connectivity and interdependence.
- Attend to the congregation's charism and call to ministry and mission with foresight and a sense of purpose.

The Core Team observed that, while each congregation has a unique charism and culture, there are essential similarities to keep in mind for those concerned with transformation

*... networking with others engaged in similar processes and researching new resources can greatly enrich congregational transformation in governance and its structure.*

in congregational governance. First, it is important to focus on the change process's intent to avoid the many difficulties and distractions that will arise. Secondly, it is critical to understand that the development of new government structure in a congregation is primarily a social process, based on rich communication, common prayer and relationship building. Finally, it may seem that change in governance is a purely internal matter, best kept within the confines of the congregation. The Core Team learning was that the opposite is true: networking with others engaged in similar processes and researching new resources can greatly enrich congregational transformation in governance and its structure.

### Moving Forward

Knowing what you are called to do, understanding the intent and reasons for change, bringing diverse people together for wisdom and insight, studying the congregation's reality and establishing guiding principles all lay a solid foundation for building a flexible and adaptable model of governance. Pathway Seven explores several models of governance and government structures that were created from this endeavor.





## Pathway Seven: Steps to Creating Flexible, Adaptable Models of Governance

*In Pathway Seven, the intent is to outline key steps needed to create a flexible, adaptable government structure supported by the congregation. Undoubtedly, there is no one way to do this work. It truly depends on the congregation's needs, culture, and leadership. However, there are basic steps that are classic and pertinent for creating a new model of governance that also necessitates changing the government structure..*

### **Building Ownership for Changing the Government Structure**

Changing one's government structure can result from a visioning process that requires a different structure to succeed. It can result from demographic changes within a congregation or changes in a geographic area's social, economic, or environmental reality.

Regardless of the "Why," changing one's government structure impacts all the congregational members. Change of this magnitude touches people's identities and beliefs. It can call forth the best in people and it can call forth behavior that seeks to sabotage the endeavor. Some examples are letting go of being a province, letting go of a sponsored ministry, reducing the number on a leadership team, or reconfiguring regional gatherings.

Aware of these human dynamics, leadership teams seeing the need to realign or change the congregation's government structure must engage members in dialogue about the congregation's reality and its future. They need to provide information about possibilities, allow time to hear the sisters' concerns, and make a recommendation to the General Chapter for developing a new government structure. A well framed recommendation that members can explore, discuss, and modify can lead to a Chapter Directive or Act.

This deep engagement, both prior to and at Chapter leads to ownership of the decision. It also provides solid ground for action when people begin to question why or resist the change.

## Creating a Committee for Designing the New Government Structure

Determining the committee for designing the new government structure is a significant task. Its configuration should reflect the emerging congregation such as cultural diversity, intergenerational, lay collaborators. This type of committee is best appointed based on expertise and experience.

It is helpful to have a member of the current leadership team on the committee to expedite access to support systems, members and to make decisions. They also bring a knowledge of the congregation, its culture and how it operates.

### Sample Configurations:

**Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd's** committee had seven members from seven different countries, a liaison from the Congregational Leadership Team and a professional facilitator. One member was a lay woman from a sponsored ministry, and one member was a former Congregational leader.

**Sisters of Notre Dame's** committee was composed of their four Provincials, two members and two professional consultants. Originally, the committee consisted of the four Provincial Teams, totaling twenty-two people. This was too large for doing work effectively and efficiently.

**Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary's** committee included three members, one Councilor and the Congregational leader. They had a professional consultant.

A couple of consistent elements among these three congregations is that each had a member or link to Congregational Leadership Team and all three used a professional consultant/facilitator to work with their groups.

## Research, Data Collection, Storytelling

The three planning committees were highly interested in learning from other congregations how they went about developing a new governance model and what were the presenting issues or questions.

This data was gathered through three means.

1. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) conducted a formal survey with eight international congregations around their demographics, what governance means to them, what prompted the needed change in structure and their learnings.
2. Besides the formal CARA survey, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary conducted focus groups with congregational leaders in Canada, Lesotho, and the USA. They also did one-on-one interviews with administrators and finance people working within their congregation.
3. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd conducted a congregation-wide theological process to uncover critical elements for a new model of governance and change within the government structure.

The learning from these quantitative and qualitative studies was shared with the chairperson and consultant/facilitator for each planning committee.

Given that the three congregations are international and deal with diverse cultures, significant committee time was spent storytelling so that the committee members could get a sense of the diverse cultures within the congregation.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd minister in over seventy countries. This level of diversity provided a large continuum of insight and questions. Many questions surfaced around canonical issues. This planning committee consistently accessed a canon lawyer throughout their work providing invaluable information for the other two congregations.

## Creating Draft Models of Governance

Given the diversity within congregations and the transitional times in which we are living, there is no one way to change a government structure, nor is there only one model. The model depends on the congregation inclusive of its culture, needs, and leadership.

The three congregations used different approaches for developing their new model of governance inclusive of changing their government structure.

The **Notre Dame Sisters** focused on becoming one based on their desire for a shared future. As the planning committee matured, its main strategies were:

- Maintaining quality of life and mission as the primary focus

- Engaging sisters in the change process around issues that most impact their lives.
- Linking to the overall endeavor, anything that was being developed and similar across the four Provinces. ex. The National Education Office.
- Setting up the government structure to free leadership to focus on the life and mission.

The Sisters of Notre Dame took eight years to officially become one in terms of corporate and canonical documents. However, within eight years they became one at a heart/soul level. At the end of the eight years, they named their new Province, elected a leadership team, clustered themselves for a greater sisterhood, and created a 'back office' or centralized office for administrating the whole Province.

The **Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd** request for a special governance committee came from the Congregational Leadership Team and was affirmed by pre-Chapter feedback on issues of concern. The planning committee used a theological reflection process to garner congregation-wide input on elements the members wanted in the new government structure. Initially, the planning committee created three different models that the International Assemblies reviewed. Based on feedback, the planning committee developed a fourth model that garnered unanimous support during the General Chapter.

The new model entails:

- Moving from Provinces to Regions
- Creating extended leadership teams at the local, regional, and congregational level with the local level being optional.
- Including lay people on the extended leadership teams which are non-canonical.
- Increasing the presence and work of the Congregational Offices throughout the entire congregation.
- Encouraging Provinces to engage in dialogue with one another about reconfiguring into regions allowing for language differences and geographic proximity.

**Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary's** decision to form a new government structure came from a Chapter Directive. From the beginning, the planning

committee involved their members, lay colleagues and sisters from other congregations in their exploration of a new structure. The planning committee:

- Decided to design one structural model from which to work with their congregation.
- Conducted focus groups and interviews to get a sense of what other congregations were doing especially in South Africa given their youngest Province is in Lesotho.
- Focused on broad questions and decisions versus details such as roles and structures with the intent to foster flexibility and adaptability.
- Created diverse feedback loops to build ownership.
- Accessed different configurations of people to assess the model from different perspectives. Examples: Creative Think Tank, Provincial Leadership Teams, Critical Reflectors, Members at Large and Associates.
- Their model is a phase-in model that covers 15 years or three chapters. Key features include:
  - Moving Provinces to one unit as a Congregation.
  - Moving from four province leadership teams to one Congregational Leadership Team with Councilors living in the new regions.
  - Creating administrative centers in countries of previous provinces.
  - Establishing consultors from each Province to encourage cultural sensitivity.

While each governance model inclusive of a companion government structural change is distinct and each congregation approached their task differently, there were six consistent characteristics among them. Each new governance model is:

1. Mission centered.
2. Future oriented.
3. Open to collaborating and engaging lay partners
4. Culturally sensitive.
5. Committed to the sustainability of the congregation/Province.
6. Committed to a global sisterhood.

## Implementation

A crucial part of the governance grant is to provide insight into implementation. While the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary were designing their new governance model, the Notre Dame Sisters began their first year of implementation. They intentionally took time to address issues pertinent to the quality of their life, their ministerial direction, and their commitment to vocations. Their first year of implementation, which COVID seriously impacted, focused on:

- Establishing the new Provincial Council and the team's relationship with the new regions.
- Creating Community Coordinators that oversee different clustering of sisters allowing the team to focus on the overall vision and life of the province.
- Strengthening the Province's technology capacity for nation-wide connection.
- Developing a centralized back-office for greater efficiency and cost reduction.

The Sisters of Notre Dame's implementation plan underwent a 12-month review and will have a follow-up review during year two to crystalize insights for implementing a new government structure.

Due to Congregational Chapters and change in congregational leadership; the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (RGS) and the Sisters of Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) are in their initial steps for beginning implementing their new governance models.

To sustain energy and momentum between Chapter and starting the implementation process, the RGS chairperson and facilitator conducted interim workshops in the provinces to review the new governance plan, implications and to begin dialogue. A committee devoted specifically to implementation was named.

The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary hosted a charrette of twenty-four sisters, affiliates, lay co-workers, and partners to explore what is the creative how for implementing the model. From this group of twenty-four, six people were selected, plus one additional person from Lesotho, to serve as the implementation committee.

## Conclusion Or Beginning

In the opening reflection, we said, 'Changing a congregation's government structure means attending to the entire system, that is, its life, purpose, and way of functioning.' Such a change calls for a vision that means looking forward, acting with foresight so we create today what tomorrow requires. This takes courage, time, and intention. Envisioning and planning are challenging and often exciting endeavors, but the perseverance of implementation is where the change lies

It is in the implementation that we do our most intense collective interior work especially now when our world is in major transition, and uncertainty and ambiguity reign. Could it be that a message that Pope Francis gave at World Youth Day in July 2016 could also be a message that we all need to take to heart for our time?

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*"God expects something from you...  
Have you understood this?  
God expects something from you...  
God wants something from you...  
God hopes in you...  
God comes to break down all our fences...  
God comes to open the doors of our lives...  
Our dreams...  
Our ways of seeing things...  
God comes to break open everything that keeps you close in...  
God is encouraging you to dream...  
God wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be  
different...  
For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the  
world will never be different...  
This is the challenge."*

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***Are we just changing our way of functioning or are we changing our hearts,  
our relationships, our way of being for the greater common good?***

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## Congregations Surveyed Regarding New Models of Governance

- Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (RGS)
- Sisters of Notre Dame – USA (SND)
- Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM)
- Franciscan Sisters of the Poor (FSP)
- Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (MSOLA)
- Religious of Jesus and Mary (RJM)
- Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ)
- Missionary Sisters (SMC)