Many communities throughout the nation, like us, are striving to grow. As we have addressed in our regionals and elsewhere, growth implies knowing our reality, “letting go” and “letting come.” Many communities working with LCWR have discovered that there are basically seven essential aspects for the viability of a religious community. We have made efforts to address these essential aspects through our circle process work. In brief, they are:

- To Be Focused on mission
- To Have a critical mass of members to maintain mission/or decide how to network for making a mission impact
- To Have a Pool of future leaders
- To Have the Financial resources for maintenance, mission and enrichment
- To be courageous and willing to take risks,
- To value Healthy relationships within and beyond the institute
- And lastly, to engage in effective long-range planning.


These seven essentials for viability imply:

- this work continues across membership, leadership terms, and includes partnerships within and beyond the community...
- a well-grounded transformation requires a span of 10-15 years. This length of time has been affirmed by communities that have long been in a major transition process.
- it takes time to focus the dream and live into it. As Rainer Maria Rilke says: “The future enters into us, in order to transform us, long before it happens.”

Today, we share with you some new stewardship and sustainability information which wasn’t yet available for our reporting this past July.

The call of the previous Chapter resulted in a Stewardship and Sustainability Circle to “explore and re-imagine, promote study and steward sustainable use of all of our facilities and land in light of mission, ministry and the common good.” While the exploration of stewardship and sustainability through the circle process resulted in a variety of learnings, the BIG question remains: “What structure will support our mission and charism into the future?”
At regional gatherings and Community Days each of these last four years, we reviewed and re-reviewed projected demographics according to TRENDS. (demographic slide) In light of those demographics we continue to resource consultation… (consultant slide). Consultants cited in yellow are those we have been most closely working with since Community Days 2017.

Since the summer, we offer you, as promised, the initial results of the boorings soil density testing on the field conducted by IIW Engineers and Terracon. (Slide of boorings) Boorings 2, 3, 6 were dug to a depth of 15 feet; boorings 1, 4, 5 to a depth of 20 feet.

Each “booring” - a 4-5” hole in diameter - was created by pounding a hollow tube into ground. The force of the compressions and the depth helped to measure the various levels and types of soil: top soil, lean and fat clay, silty clay, sand, and shale. As you can see, the ground surface elevations range from 844-878 ½ feet – a difference of 34 ½ feet in elevation. Land slopes north toward Kaufmann Avenue and east toward Chaney. Subsurface water levels were also measured. The final report will be coming.

Initial results indicate: We dwell in possibility! It IS possible to build on the 3.3 acre field. The shale/bedrock is at least 16’ below or deeper. These acres could hold a 2-3 story building. They could host a solar array with four-foot footings or pole ballasts. Community gardens are also an option, in which case we may choose to neutralize and nutrient the topsoil via composting. The acres of the field are equally as valuable as any buildable acre on the property.

Another option to steward the land? The possibility of a Dubuque-area intercommunity effort to gift city of Dubuque with a non-contiguous land conservancy. Several methods exist to establish “permanent land protection.” We and the Dubuque Franciscans are hosting initial conversations with Anita O’Gara and Erin Van Waus from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Anita suggests one option, perhaps the best for us into the future, is a “Conservation Easement”- a permanent agreement with a partner which allows us as current owner or any future owner to hold the land as an asset. A written permanent agreement would be attached to the Title of the land, citing specific uses for the land or specific restrictions for which the land would NOT be used, whether or not it would be open to the public or restricted for privacy, etc.

The potential partner, e.g. the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Four Mounds Foundation, the Dubuque County Conservation Board, or another stable, experienced, dedicated agency, would annually assess the utilization of the land in light of the written agreement attached to the Title. With a Conservation Easement, sound stewardship is
sustained. Though the value of the acres _may_ decrease, it’s not a forgone conclusion. Regardless of potential future owners, the permanent agreement would remain attached to the Title indefinitely! The partner agency is bound to annual assessment.

Anita encouraged next steps:
- continue internal community discussions regarding our values;
- host Anita and Erin for a site visit and conversation;
- seek a local mortgage loan officer whose expertise is realty, to offer two ballpark appraisals:
  - If we sold as is, no restrictions, and, if we split the acres with Easement Agreement.
  - Later, closer to the time of a decision, seek a full appraisal at an estimated cost of $2,000-$5,000.

Over these past four-and-one-half years, those we have consulted with – regarding healthcare, land, facility, energy conservation, etc. – echo from one consultant to the next: “Anything is possible!”

In addition to the professional consultants, we have surveyed other PBVM congregations regarding their experiences of hiring a consulting firm to assist in futuring. Presentations in New Windsor, New York and Aberdeen, South Dakota have enlisted _Plante Moran Cresa and Associates_, located in Chicago and Michigan. A strong staff member, Sister Carol Zinn SSJ, has worked in grassroots-based international movements as consultant and facilitator. She was a part of the United Religions Initiative and the Earth Charter and has worked with multi-sector and multi-issue groups to help people deepen an understanding of global realities, local efforts.

_Plante Moran Cresa_ is cited by these PBVM communities for its flexibility in working with various religious communities based on each specific profile and desire. Though expensive, the time, conversations, and financial investment continue to pay off in community satisfaction. The impact of mission is held at the center of every conversation. Specific consideration is given to the: Future of Mission; Member Well-Being and Community Life; Ministries; Facilities and Land.

The Sinsinawa Dominicans and the Dubuque Franciscans are pleased to be working closely with Appleton, Wisconsin-based _Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction_ for their Strategic Facility Plans. Renown for its care for Earth, innovative design and responsible solutions, _Hoffmann_ also offers an Integrated Total Project Management firm. Both communities offer sound recommendations. Other consulting firms are yet to be researched and other communities surveyed.
We heard the call for a “feasibility study.” According to the consultants we resourced, we have been engaging in the initial stages of a “feasibility study” regarding re-commissioning this facility and these acres into the future. Our many preliminary conversations (regionals, Community Days, Emerging Circles, and self-selected groups,…) will serve us well and guide continued planning as we enter into a formal agreement with a consulting firm.

So the key question for us now is (slide): “Which expressions of mission could utilize this land and facility to their fullest capacity as we live fully in the present and continue to create a new future? What is God calling us to? What is our work to do now?”

For Chapter, we have specifically pulled out the major community feedback from the Dream Book, and from the 2016 Fall Caritas Feedback which can help guide our work with Stewardship and Sustainability. We share that with you now to assist in our recall and focus. (See “Stewardship & Sustainability References cited in Carias Fall Meeting 2016 Feedback and the Dream Book”)

In the working summary, you will note, that first, we sifted out foundational statements which express what we value. We also collected the aspects of community life which we hold dear. Further, we gathered the community suggestions given for the use of our land and buildings, and for engaging partnerships. From the listings we also noted some essential first steps. We share these summary handouts just to help us recall what has been suggested.

As Meg Wheatley has said, “Emergence means to be fully engaged…” We can be so inspired by the great circle work in which all have been engaged these past years. The results provide wisdom for the present and hope for the future.