

Gathering 2024
Reflection July
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The.essence.of.affirmation.is.loving.confrontation; I'm beginning to understand what this maxim means...

I'm not positive I yet see clearly the heart of the matter for myself or for us as a congregation, but I can tell you that I have gained courage and been at times rather firmly encouraged to step into the wonderings I have and do it in front of everyone with Beth's facilitation. If you were in New Jersey or Brazil, you experienced with me, what was finally labeled loving confrontation. From these experiences I emerged with a deepened awareness of the gifts and responsibilities an authentic love draws out of and grows in me. Also, as my visits to Brazil continued, I began to wonder about the shadow of US domination that I had heard mentioned and needed to understand to make amends and move into a mutual empowerment among us. I wondered how, I had participated in, and perhaps didn't recognize, the reality of US dominance over Brazil, Jamaica and Bolivia.

When I expressed my wonderings out loud sufficient times, Beth invited me to once again to do a demonstration, a confrontation, this time in Brazil. After my stumbling around trying to put into words what I was asking to explore, Marinez gave me a very clear, concise, concrete and direct response that revealed her experience of exactly what I had asked for.

The truth revealed was from a while back, during a small international Formation meeting held in NJ. As Mainez continued the description of the event, I came to realize that I had been present. The US focus had strong voices, mine included, and were primary. As Marinez's voice, and reality were not acknowledged as important, much less embraced and encouraged to continue moving forward. Marinez gave me clear example that I was part of the shadow, not recognizing my own participation in U.S. dominance. That was a painful awakening, a challenging truth that she carried into the room and into my heart. It was a loving confrontation.

I am convinced, that experiences I've had during my lifetime, which include multiple visits to Brazil and Jamaica and the US regions as visitor and as leader, have gifted me with opportunities to walk our path with new eyes and listen.as.if.for.the.first.time;.I can't do it if I I'm not fully present, if I don't allow myself to listen with ears curious and fully attuned to other's ideas and experiences with my own Franciscan heart.

This is what it means to me to embrace our intercultural and diversity. embracing our interculturality and diversity. It is my conviction that CARE process can enable our movement forward on a path that leads us to openness, a willingness to ask hard questions and listen to hard answers. In our reaching across differences, culturally, we can come to

understand and love the variety of women we are and look to a future that is more inclusive, more welcoming of our diversity of gifts and talents, more accepting of our different personalities, backgrounds, countries and regions.

I have learned so much about myself and my sisters and the lay people with whom I have shared, that I recognized an amazing opportunity for my/our future. Though I come to you with unfinished thoughts and ideas, it no longer fills me with a sense of inadequacy. My unfinished thoughts and ideas keep me searching, curious and open to discovery. Now I take a deep breath, and dig in, confident in my voice as Melissa, confident that you are willing to walk with me this journey of discovery.

I have had the privilege of getting to know You, my sisters in a new way. Through these conversations, I have come to know myself in a new way. The mutual wonderings, wisdom, and challenges help me understand more clearly than ever, who we are **now** as a Congregation with our varying ages, experiences and realities from region to region and country to country.

We have much common ground – We are more alike than we are different. Though we come from different cultures, speak in different languages, and hold our different beliefs, what I have come to know is that we all have the same Franciscan heart.

I want to know going forward, what it means for us, to strengthen our common heart, our Franciscan Heart, in the midst of our diversity.