

LUCY CARDET

## DISCERNMENT REFLECTION

A. I, Lucy Cardet, am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this process with other sisters who have been invited to discern the call to serve in congregational leadership.

Our prayer, sharing, and small group work at our Tampa discernment retreat affirmed for me the value of hearing *different* insights and working *together*. Knowing that others were praying for us was in itself a support.

B. Having prayerfully reflected on my personal abilities, experience and challenges, I've had a "fit of common sense". My current "leaning" is to withdraw from further consideration for congregational leadership. My primary reason is that, at this time in my life, I no longer have the necessary energy, memory retention, and ability for multi-tasking that is required. I can (and will) serve the congregation but not in this capacity.

C. God can do the impossible. However, I don't think that this role is what God is asking of me now. I will continue to discern what that might be. God is not done with me yet.

D. Thank you to all those who have invited, affirmed and supported me. I took your comments seriously. It is time to let others lead the congregation. I will continue to pray for them and you.

Good morning everyone!

First of all I want to thank you for your invitations to participate in this discernment process and for your prayers, words of support and affirmation. Actually, I was not expecting to receive any invitations and I had prayed that I wouldn't!!! That being said, here I am. I came to the discernment with a lot of anxiety but with an open heart and mind with great dependence on the spirit as is evidenced in my symbol on the table. In truth, it was your recognition and affirmation of gifts you saw in me were the driving forces that brought me to this place. I know I have gifts, however, most often I either don't recognize them or I take them for granted. So, I am grateful to you for your sharing with me.

Although this discernment process was (is) a bit of a stretch for me, I must admit as we worked together as a group during those few days two weeks ago I was beginning to recognize some inner freedom surfacing that enabled me stay open to the process. For me there was and has been chaos and confusion during this process and truth be told, I don't function well amidst chaos. There have been moments of second guessing myself and wondering why I even said "yes" to entering into this discernment. With that said though two weeks ago I did decide to continue in the process of discerning for a leadership role but not for elected leadership.

Regarding my role in leadership and what I would bring to the table is basically my continued involvement in one way or another in the affairs

of the Congregation. What would I bring to the table today? Today with the uncertainty of what will be? Today, with possible changes in governance structure? I can tell you what I wouldn't be bringing, and that is, I'm not a visionary thinker and find it difficult to think out of the box but I would continue to bring my gifts of organizational skills and inclusivity – whereas, all would **not only** be welcomed at the table but also their voices would be heard as well. I pay attention to detail, am objective, practical and realistic and find it relatively easy to “fill in the missing links” in a plan. And most always I have plan B in my back pocket.

Thinking of what I need from you, my sisters. In addition to your being honest with me, I need you to have faith in me that given this experience of discerning for a leadership role we can **together** be open to the spirit to guide and direct us to what is best for our Congregation and for me at this time in our history.

Thank you!

Dolores

**Gwen Melhado**

**What did you discover that influenced your discernment regarding the call to serve in leadership ( e.g. areas of challenge, affirmation, discovery) and what was your experience of the process (e.g. important learnings, working toward interior freedom and clarity, being with other sisters on the same journey)?**

- Sisters, many of you affirmed and invited me to participate in the process. Thank you for making me one of your three choices.
- For me, it is further affirmed that each of us has a role to play in leadership, regardless of our capabilities, so when we voice our perspectives, we influence others, and we are influenced by others.
- I experienced sisters' expressions of sincere love for our Congregation that helped to strengthen my own love and commitment.

**Share your current “leaning” toward remaining or withdrawing from the process and your primary reason(s) why.**

My current “Leaning” is to remain open and stay in the discernment process for elected leadership because I am available and willing to explore and express what I can possibly bring to the table while living into the call. I am moved and encouraged by the sisters who invited me to the process because they expressed that they believe I have gifts that could serve the congregation in this new paradigm. Also, I am experiencing REVITALIZING energy around the leadership approaches that we are framing, they offer opportunities for inclusion, experimentation, and ownership by the sisters.

**In what kind of role, and what kind of competences, do you see yourself bringing to the table as a leader?**

Serving as Councilor now, I believe my gifts could have been better matched to tasks and utilized more effectively. Going forward, while I am open to leadership generally, I think I could still serve as Councilor in mutual relationships with sisters in leadership, empowering each other by exploring, recognizing, appreciating and drawing upon others' gifts in service. Among the competencies I would bring are:

- Interpersonal skills- ability to work with different personalities
- Presence and listening abilities
- Attention to details, my goal-oriented approach to what needs to be done
- Perseverance and commitment in good and not so good situations

- Organizational skills, using trends of the time to plan and influence change and to guide the process.
- Background experiences in leadership positions:  
as Councilor in this current leadership and  
as President/principal at the college in Jamaica

**What do you need from your sisters at this Regional Gathering that will aid you in furthering your discernment (e.g. to become more free, informed and clear, more connected with your sisters)?**

In closing, I am highlighting two points which I think are similar to all of us in this process.

- That we are in this process together as one congregation having conversations that matter.
- That we are supportive of each other despite our differences to facilitate exploring possibilities for our life in the future.

If you feel moved to speak with me, I can be available, so let me know.

Thank you!

**Gwen Melhado**

## **Discernment Reflection**

## **March Regional Gathering 2025**

Bom dia, Buanos Dias, Good morning!

I want to thank you for your invitations to consider Leadership in our Congregation. I am humbled by the many invitations received from you, my sisters.

Most of my invitations to discern Congregational Leadership came from the Motherhouse sisters who suggested that my leadership skills demonstrated as Local Minister of the Motherhouse would be an asset to Congregational Leadership: my “capacity and willingness to receive and listen to the Sisters with words of comfort, hope and optimism;” as well as “my self-awareness and desire for team building,” and “being able to stay calm in the face of adversity.”

My current leaning is to keep my name in the discernment process to honor the invitation of my sisters. They have faith in my management and administration capabilities as their Local Minister and the difference my leadership has made at the Motherhouse. The Sisters encouragement of my leadership skills reassures me of this leaning.

I see myself in the role of elected leadership or in leadership in other forms as presented in the various Governance paradigms. The competences that I see myself bringing to this role are:

1. I have a desire to work as a team member. Actually, I’m not competitive.
2. I speak the truth even though it is difficult at times.
3. I am willing to dive into what needs to be done; I have good organizational skills and can receive input from others without becoming defensive. In fact, I value others’ contributions which often emerge into something new and exciting. This has been the focus in much of my ministerial experience.

What I need from the sisters at this Regional Gathering is prayer: that I can truly discern the Spirit’s will for the Congregation and my place in

this new moment for FSA. While I am leaning toward keeping my name in for Congregational Leadership, I am torn, as I experience great fulfillment in ministering to my sisters at the Motherhouse and believe that there is more to do to make the Motherhouse a warm-hearted place of belonging and love (from our MH Mission statement). Thank you

Judith Terrameo

Dear Sisters,

Peace and All Good!

I would like to thank you immensely for the trust and care in calling me to discernment for leadership.

I think of the call as a call from God, and I am open to that call.

It was a great experience to be with the Sisters, to discern and try to develop a new model of Leadership for all our Congregation. To be part of the decisions that will define our present and future, and to contribute to the process is a blessing.

I am willing to continue in the process to better understand and contribute to the possible new model of Leadership that we as a Congregation are dreaming of. Whether in the elected Leadership or as a contributing member, I am open to participating. Even though I have clear in my mind and heart my responsibilities as a member of the Regional Leadership of Brazil and to my Sisters.

It is difficult to be clear about a competence without being clear about the form of Leadership. But I am sure of God's care. I bring to the table my creativity, emotional intelligence and empathy, collaboration and teamwork, and a lot of willingness.

I count on God's love and the support, prayers, and understanding of my Sisters.

Ir. Liliane Araújo



## Reflection Response – Discernment Retreat

Thank you for this opportunity.

For the discernment weekend, I brought a seashell that holds a lot meaning. I found it on the beach at Pt. Lookout in the 70's. While at Holy Cross, Bronx the community would go to the Point for weekends of prayer. This small conch shell is rather ordinary, but tucked into the spiral is a tiny seashell, reminding me of God's love and presence holding me. All these years the small shell has remained in place reminding me that I dwell within the heart and love of God.

Over the years, in parish ministry and leadership, I've learned that leadership is not about power, control or authority over others. Rather it's about collaboration, listening, and cooperating through dialogue and working together.

**The discernment weekend** was a good experience for me. I was comfortable and experienced myself as being open to the process and to everyone gathered. I enjoyed working in our small group designing a new way of governance. It reaffirmed for me how much I enjoy engaging with others in open, creative and often playful encounters exploring new ideas.

I'm willing to remain engaged in discernment, to be influenced and open to the Spirit. I'm willing to be of service to the congregation. Over the years, and especially in these past 3 years, **I have learned** a lot about myself.

- To be more transparent with others in what might be affecting me personally,
- To take time and sit with another, to be attentive and explore what they might be experiencing,
- To be more inquisitive to **seek and ask for greater clarity** rather than rush to judgement or decision.

I believe **I bring**:

- A balance of administrative and personal/pastoral skills
- Creativity and imagination to projects and tasks with others in teamwork
- Self-discipline and follow through on what needs to be done, while also learning to balance work and time-off to relax and rest.
- Personal integrity and professionalism in representing and speaking for our Congregation with other organizations and within the wider church
- Technological and communication skills (speaking and writing)
- Good health, energy and interest to continue to serve.

**What I need and appreciate** is hearing your thoughts, feedback and insights, not only on community matters, but especially on how I might be coming across to you. I'm willing to look at myself and continue to grow and to serve.

Margaret Magee

The invitations to participate in discernment for Leadership provided me with a great deal to consider and in many cases, supported my personal reflections . The input confirmed my growing desire to be of service in a new way. I was affirmed by those that zeroed in on their perception of my personal growth. I attribute this to repetitive CARE training, which provided opportunities to more deeply appreciate my sisters and discover anew my inner self .

The loving and direct challenges of some Invitations confirmed my own thoughts about the wear of nearly four years of travel and the intensity of the work that has been part of this leadership. Through all, I came to recognize that **there** are some “what ifs” in my life that might slow me down or limit my ability to be an effective member of any kind of Leadership.

Such feedback, reflection and prayer caused me to question, would my recommitment truly be a

call to my soul? And during the discernment retreat I was presented with 21 sisters who joined in this discernment for leadership and they filled my heart and soul with hope and freedom.

My leaning right now is to stay in the process to focus on my belief that, with open minds and hearts I and we will hear the in insights of every member and absorb the drops of wisdom, flights of imagination and flashes of insight from the women through whom God speaks to inspire us.

I firmly accept that we are being invited to evolve, take what is best in us, to experiment, accept trial, error and adapt, to join with others to become the difference needed today and beyond. At this point I am leaning toward and anticipating a developing definition of leadership in which I may in some form, FULLY participate.

Melissa.

## Discernment Reflection

I discovered that the way for us to do something new in terms of leadership was something to which I could offer some ideas based on my past experience as a member of CL and way back as a Regional Councilor. I was encouraged to do that by a couple of sisters who know me well. I was also challenged to examine if I had the patience to work with others who did not think as I did or as quickly as I do.

When those challenges arose in our retreat I decided that I should consider withdrawing from the process, exercising leadership as a Participative member and as the Congregational Treasurer if the Congregation so desires. Since then, I have given considerable thought to this and feel I still can offer some clarity of thought to our discussions on leadership models.

I believe I am a clear thinker and able to express well what is being discussed. It is what I offered in past leadership even though it may not have been evident outside of our leadership team. I am creative in many concrete ways but can also be creative in a group of committed women.

I do not feel called to elected leadership. I also find it very difficult to make any decision without knowing what leadership will look like post Chapter. I am willing to stay in the process to contribute to the further clarification of our form of leadership.

As the General Treasurer I feel I bring some unique knowledge to leadership and would envision that role being included in any leadership model.

From this Regional Gathering I would like to have a better concept of what we all want for leadership and how we envision it being carried out. I also am concerned about our seeming inability to face our future concretely, knowing that by Chapter 2029 we may have a much smaller leadership pool. Thank you for listening. Let us rejoice together in God's abundant blessings.

Pat Klemm, OSF

First, I would like to say “Thank you” to those of you who invited me to this process I was very touched. Each of you had only three invitations, and the fact that you used one of them to invite me touched and humbled me. You are women that I have admired because of the wholehearted way in which each of you have responded to God’s call in your own lives. I believe in “call”. That is why each of us are members of this community as Sisters to each other. We are gifted women and follow in a line of other gifted women. Our Congregation has touched the lives of so many in simple and amazing ways. Three women, in the 1800’s answered a call in Allegany and now we serve in five countries. Each venture being an answer to a call by the Church and the needs of others . So often answering with trepidation, but graced with God’s love and the support of each other. Now that our numbers are fewer and we are older, we need each other even more. The “yes” I said when I was seventeen is the same “yes”, I say now. I am not young. I have physical limitations. There are words that evade me, but I still have the concepts. I am slow in walking, but I get there. What gifts I have, I offer them to the community. I can be your “Sister”. I can pray with you – journey with

**you. I can love you and be grateful for you. Like the young man with the loaves and fishes, I offer what I am to you, my Sisters. God's power and grace will multiply and strengthen any gifts I may have to offer – insufficient though they may be. I will stay in the process, but only if you promise to be a Companion on the Journey. Remember that there are among those who follow me in these next few days many younger Sisters with great gifts who are willing to serve. Being with them in this discernment process has been a gift for me.**

**May God's grace give us the wisdom, we need to journey together into the future. We pray for God's grace to bless our lives and our decisions going forward. Thank you.**

**Pat Shirley**

## Bernadette Schuler - Assembly Response

Bernadette Schuler  
Assembly Response

I began my discernment at a retreat the weekend before Christmas. At that time I was feeling anxious and I heard God calling me to "stay in the light of Jesus' presence" and not to be afraid of what may lie ahead.

I received invitations from 5 sisters whom I believe know me on a deeper level. In those, I heard an affirmation of my love for the Congregation, my listening skills, and the ability to let go of my own idea if a better one was offered. My organizational skills were noted, which could carry over from ministry as a DRE and with volunteers in parishes. I was reminded that I have served the Congregation in a variety of large and small ways and always discerned where God and the community were calling me in the process. I acknowledge these gifts as God-given and community-developed over the years—not my own doing except in responding to the grace given to me.

I was challenged to believe in myself and to have courage (stone) as I listen and discern further. I was challenged to practice self-care and asked if I was willing to leave my ministry with the poor to give more time in service to the community.

The process with our other sister discerners was heartening to me as each shared her doubts and fears as well as hopes for our future. I felt energized by the spirit and openness among us.

At this time I am willing to remain in the process at least through the 2nd Discernment Retreat in May. I need more clarity (not total clarity) about what I am saying yes to. I need a sense of what a new leadership design may call forth from me/us. At the same time, I realize this is a continuing organic process that requires trust and faith.

I believe I can bring the skills I already mentioned. My heart tends more toward areas of spirituality, compassion and outreach. I enjoyed working with our partners in mission in CARE and could see myself continuing that relationship.

## Reflection for Leadership

This time of discernment has been challenging. I am also very grateful to each sister who sent me the invitation for discernment and the messages of support and prayer. You are an example for me of strength, determination and love for the charism and the mission and that moved me a lot. I have been challenged by you to be aware that congregational leadership is for the whole congregation. For the sisters and realities of all countries. Just as I was led to reflect on whether the experiences of US domination could influence me. And what I have to say is that I have a great love for the congregation, for our charism and mission, which from an early age I learned to love as a whole, not just as a region. I don't have any regret in my heart, on the contrary, I am grateful for the leaders who allowed me to participate in international teams and experience in the USA, getting to know our history and our sisters even more, as I admire them. I dream and want to help build a united congregation, where Franciscan joy emanates from our hearts reconciled and at peace. I was also asked to take care of myself by giving myself the rest time I need. I have seriously questioned myself and God if I have the skills to contribute to the congregation at this challenging time. I don't have that much experience, I don't speak English fluently, I'm impulsive, disorganized, I don't like bureaucratic work although I can do it, and I'm honest. I am afraid of experiencing the same loneliness that I experienced when I was in the regional leadership. I am also aware that the next few years will be demanding for us and even more so for leadership. As much as we want changes, when they are about to happen, it becomes challenging, it scares us to want to go back, we are like the people in the Exodus, crying for the onions of Egypt and blaming someone. During this time I have prayed the Prayer before the crucifix and contemplated the icon of San Damiano. A few days ago, Christ spoke to me. And he asked me why I have not given myself as an instrument of Him as I have always done, since I entered the religious life. So I'm putting myself into God's hands and letting him do his work in me during this period of discernment. I am open to putting my gifts of communication, group articulation, creativity, passion, psychological knowledge, love of mission, desire to know and understand other cultures, and the energy I have, wherever the congregation needs it, whether in elected leadership or in any other instance. And I would like to know from the sisters what leadership profile we will need in the coming years. What do you believe is fundamental for the people who will be in this leadership?

Lilian Cristina



Kathy Maire

Good afternoon. Like everyone who has spoken before me, I would like to thank you for allowing me to participate in this process, especially since I missed the first retreat. I do appreciate your consideration.

In the hospital, I had a lot of time to consider the call to leadership and I believe I faced the pros and cons of such a personal choice for myself. I have experienced resistance in myself and I have tried to understand why.

I recognize that I have gifts to offer the Congregation, but I do not believe they are limited to elected leadership. I see religious life today in the context of our history as women who have responded to the needs of the times by teaching, nursing, evangelizing, praying with the disillusioned, caring for the poor, daring to speak out for the immigrant, the vulnerable and the rejected. Not only Allegany, not only Franciscans, but all women religious in all countries through the centuries. In particular, I have a passion for mission and a deep belief that the Franciscan message of peace is desperately needed today, in the midst of the violence that we see in daily life. I sincerely believe we have a part to play in that call and to deny that call is to betray our vocation.

I am reluctant to give that up if elected leadership requires me to focus on our internal relationships to the neglect of the large picture of need.

What I need from you now is an understanding that I cannot commit to four years of zoom calls and meetings that will keep me from active involvement in service to the poor. These next four years of my life may well be the last four years of my life. I want the freedom to be faithful to the call I believe is from God, a call to work for justice and encounter up close and personal the suffering body of Christ.

So, I am willing to continue in the process and offer my gifts, with the understanding of what I cannot do.

It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I share with you about the discernment process for congregational leadership. I would like to thank all the sisters who have made space for me by sending invitations and proposals to participate, whether they are Brazilian, Jamaican or North American. The feedback I have received on this journey is fundamental and very much appreciated by me

In these times of reflection, I feel enriched by everything I have experienced. For me, the most valuable thing is not just the possibility of joining or not joining the congregational leadership, but the understanding and joint construction that we are carrying out. I believe that we are living a true kairós as a congregation, a time of grace that invites us to be even more united and in solidarity in view of following Jesus Christ.

It's true that we face many difficulties in integrating fully because of our cultural differences. However, there is a strong commitment on the part of each of us to collaborate in building this unity that we so long for. This search for synergy between the different experiences of our sisters makes me feel expectant and hopeful.

As I reflect on the role we can play, I am convinced that this is a propitious moment for us Brazilians to participate more actively in leadership at the congregational level. I feel that my personal path is more focused on regional leadership at the moment, but even so, I am praying that we can make the collective discernment led by the Holy Spirit, because I believe that each one of us brings something unique to the table.

Together, we are taking new steps on our journey, and this reciprocal exchange strengthens our mission. May we move forward with love and courage, always in search of unity and the strengthening of our collective journey.

Thank you!

Marinez Arantes da Silva

This has been a discernment experience different from others in which I have participated. I am grateful for the communal aspect of it, gathering with others who are discerning and having the opportunity of engaging with our sisters in this assembly.

I have contemplated the invitations that I received and listened to feedback from others. I have been reminded by some that my name has come up before and that I withdrew from the election process each time. The challenge seemed to be that it was time to step up. While I know those decisions in the past were made with interior freedom and confidence that the Spirit was guiding me, I realize this is time to look at the invitation in a new way.

During this process I have continually asked for the grace to know God's will for me and to be open to that being different from what I think it might be.

Initially, I had said that my leaning was away from elected leadership and being in a more supportive role. But I have been challenged by the invitation to think beyond elected leadership as we have known it. The possibility that there might be a group of people (more than a few) who would comprise leadership invites me to reconsider.

I am willing to remain in this discernment process with the other discerners to use the results of this assembly to continue to design a new model of leadership. I am also willing to continue to discern my own role in that design. The competencies that I would bring would be ability to collaborate, the ability to put values and principles before personalities, and the willingness to engage in difficult conversations when necessary. I would ask you, my sisters, to let me know if my own assessment matches yours.

I love the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany and will continue to participate as my talents and capabilities allow—all with the grace of God.

Sister Cathy Cahill, OSF  
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## Discernment Reflection

In the invitations I received and conversations I've had with several of our sisters, it seems to me that we continue to look for leaders who work well with others and who are open to including others on the journey. I'm clear that if I were to serve in a leadership role, I would need to include, and to be in significant partnership, with others. There are many reasons for this. Primarily, collaborating with others is a high value in my ministry and my life in community.

I also know that I don't see myself as an innovative thinker, and I don't ever think that I have all the answers to the challenges we are experiencing at this time in our history. Although I have opinions about most things. I need others with whom I can dialogue, others from whom I can learn and be influenced, and others with whom I can discern and seek a truth that is bigger than any one person's perspective. There are times when I can ask questions and can spot gaps in our planning and interactions; I can commit wholeheartedly to directions that emerge from our communal efforts; I can acknowledge that I make many mistakes and that, at times, we, as a community, make mistakes and may need to modify what we are doing.

It was helpful to be one among others trying to gain insight as to how we might adapt to our reality in 2025. I realize that we are in the beginning stages and ideas need to breathe. We need the whole community to offer insights and wisdom about how we need to move forward together.

My current "leaning" is to continue in the discernment process because I am not yet clear, even though serving in leadership is out of my comfort zone, and I am not inclined toward it. I don't do well with criticism, and I fear that I would not live up to your expectations of a leader. My goal is to be of service in whatever way I can be.

It was helpful for me to learn that sisters see me as being attentive to others, supportive, compassionate, honest, and that people matter to me. Whatever model of governance we choose, I hope there is room for all of us to contribute our gifts without it being excessively burdensome to a few sisters. I love my current ministry, and I want to continue doing this in some way.

What I need from you is: What do you know about me that would make it challenging for you to have me in a leadership role?

Cindy Matthews

## **Journey of Discernment**

### **Colleen Brady**

Good morning and peace!

During the first discernment retreat, we were invited to bring a symbol to represent our own discernment journey. I brought this angel with a heart clasped in her arms. I am a heart person.

I come to you with deep gratitude and a sense of being one with all of you! The letters of affirmation and challenge matched my own sense of self.

When praying and pondering the Spirit's call, I reflected on my experience both as the vocations' minister and as co-director of the Associates Way of Life. Both ministries provided me with the opportunity to utilize my gifts of vision, empathy, hopefulness and love of others and to be able to reach out to different people and communities. My mother said my father never knew a stranger and from the time I was very little wanted to be just like him. I also bring a varied life experience as a mother, grandmother and in the workforce as a general manager, human resources, budget director and other sundry projects. I bring these experiences and have learned to integrate these with community life. Humor is an important and life giving attribute which I often use to reach out to others.

During the past discernment time together I was energized and filled with hope and encouragement by both the small and large group sharing. It was then that I knew I was to stay in the process and be open to the Spirit's call.

I ask for your continued prayers and support as we move together into a leadership model yet to be determined, confident that the Spirit who has always led us, will continue to unite, guide, inform and love us on our journey together

## REFLECTION ON DISCERNMENT

Peace and Goodness!

Initially, I am grateful to the sisters who recognized my abilities and sent me invitations to be part of the Congregational Leadership, but I confess that I was very surprised because reading the summaries that came from our assemblies, two phrases impacted me a lot: "elect new sisters to leadership who will empower the sisters and promote transformation". "New empowered leaders who can guide the sisters through transformation will be installed, putting an end to the turnover of the same leaders." I realized that I fit into these two statements: I'm not that young and I've already participated in Regional and Congregational Leadership. At first, I didn't see any point in taking part in the discernment week because God's will for me was already explicit there. At an assembly, I asked Ted if it was really necessary for the sister who received the invitation to take part in the discernment and he said yes. I received the invitations, I didn't question it anymore and I went, but I only went to fulfill an obligation. When I started the process, I remained closed in on myself, but little by little, during the prayers, sharing, living with the other sisters in discernment, the priest's homilies and some letters of encouragement from sisters I received during the retreat, began to realize that something inside me was telling me: give yourself a chance to continue in the process. It's too early to give up... think of the sisters who sent you invitations, surely if they invited you it's because they trust you and your gifts. It's hard for me to hear from some of you the desire to "end the turnover of the same leaders", but I'm trying hard not to interpret these statements as something personal, but to hear it as a sincere desire for a new kind of leadership. And all of this is something we have all said we want and are trying to create, and I affirm our joint effort. I'm willing to be part of that new creation and I'd love to get your feedback because it would help my judgment to know if you think I still have something to offer in any capacity as a leader or if you think my stepping aside would help all of us in creating something new

I therefore place myself in God's hands to know where and where he will lead me from now on, and for this I would like to count on the support and prayers of each one of you so that his will becomes clearer for me and for all of us. Thank you so much

Goianira Silva

When the Discernment for Leadership Retreat took place earlier this month, I was totally unprepared for its grace-filled outcome. Although I came with a grateful heart for your letters of invitation and affirmation, I was struggling to trust the process or to admit my discomfort about making any future commitment in this time of unknowns.

As I listened to 20 sisters share reflections about their personal prayer, discernment, and their individual “leanings” about a leadership commitment, I rediscovered whole-hearted generosity, honesty and willingness to serve the Congregation in every sister’s response. At the same time, our collaborative work to create mutually inclusive leadership among all sisters sparked a renewed energy within me. I value this kind of communal visioning as a profound gift of the Holy Spirit and a vital step forward in our shared journey toward transformation.

For that reason, I expressed my leaning toward continuing the discernment process to explore further how these proposed partnerships among ourselves and others will evolve. It’s important for me to visualize concretely how I might contribute my gifts of listening, communicating, networking, and supporting the common good. Drawing from my current leadership experience, I’m convinced that every sister has equal voice and is welcome at the leadership table as collaborators with elected leadership, both locally and regionally. Together, and with God’s guidance, it is possible to formulate and expedite the complex Congregational decision-making necessary for our future and our legacy, with assistance from professional laity, as needed.

During these days of discernment and throughout our Chapter preparations, I hope to learn from you how we may strive together as a Congregation in satisfying our hearts’ desires for our Franciscan life and mission in the world today and for generations to come.



Liz Schumacher's leadership discernment response to be given Sat March 29:

Good morning/afternoon.

I wish to echo the sentiments the discerners have mentioned thanking the sisters who took the time and made the effort to write inviting us, inviting me into this discernment process. Although I did not want to be considered for leadership, I found myself accepting and even welcoming the process. The process allowed me to look at what was occurring in my world through a more considered discernment lens. I appreciate this opportunity. I appreciate too the sisters who wrote letters of support just prior to the initial retreat in early March. The support of my sisters is so affirming and humbling as well.

So, many of you know that I have a 20 year background as a civil trial attorney. Trial attorneys look at and work with facts. Every time I need to discern something, I take the time and look at facts. I look for patterns and see where the facts are leading what the facts are suggesting to me.

So, here are the facts. When I returned to Tampa late last summer following the Gathering at the Motherhouse, I began receiving more inquiries from those wishing to receive spiritual direction. My spiritual direction clients began increasing. Additionally, over the fall I wound up taking 3 written exams and 1 oral exam to obtain my Florida clinical social work license enabling me to work as a therapist in Florida. Let me back up. In the fall I studied, studied, studied - - - and took 3 written and 1 oral exam to become licensed. Also, I submitted all the freakin paperwork required by the Florida Dept of Health to support of my application for my Florida counseling license.

Further, during the fall I prepared for and worked with a team of spiritual directors at the Franciscan Center to put on a silent retreat. In addition, I

worked on preparing and presenting a grief workshop during the Christmas Holidays at the Franciscan Center.

Then, in early January of this year – I received an email from the Florida Department of Health announcing that I had been granted a license in clinical social work and could begin work as a therapist. Whew! ... Yay!. Breathe.

I was then invited onto the team who conducts the retreat program at the Franciscan Center designed by Sr. Annie Dougherty called “Operation Restore”. It is for first responders. This is a 4 day retreat to assist police officers, firefighters, EMTs and other first responders deal with the trauma they witness in their lives . It uses a wonderful trauma therapy called EMDR in which I am trained. I became part of the team in February of this year.

Our congregation has been blessed with congregational leaders and sisters in mission and ministry. Both are needed. Mission and ministry without leadership is chaos and congregational leadership alone without mission and ministry serves no real purpose.

Oh, and let me add 2 more facts before I conclude. When you journey with a spiritual director you meet someone who desires a closer walk with God. How amazing is that? How wonderful is that? To witness that is . . . well so rich, so rich. You have touched the heart of our human experience.

When you meet first responders who volunteer to come to the Operation Restore retreat and allow themselves to be vulnerable, seeking help for the burdens of the traumas they’ve experienced . . . and you are able to assist them in lifting those traumas off their shoulders. . . well, what can I say. . . it is a direct God-experience.

Thus, I am sensing the call to withdraw from further discernment for leadership fulfilling my call to ministry. If there is a project leadership needs me to do, and I can do it, I will. What I need from you my sisters is your prayers.

If experience is the best teacher, then I should probably move to the head of the class. It was in August of 1955 ~ during a blinding rain storm, that I approached the old St. Elizabeth Motherhouse to give my life to Christ. Except, in my case, it was going to be just a temporary gift to God, so I could be free of the notion of answering a call, and get back, quickly, to my real life. Now, 70 years have passed, and I can think of no truly real life, better than the one with which I have been gifted as a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany.

I never gave invitations to the discernment process a thought, but I was moved, humbled, challenged and, yes, energized, by those I received and by the notes from others which followed. Thank you, thank you.

I came to the discernment quite sure that God was not calling me to elected leadership, but filled with curiosity about what might be developing in terms of governance and leadership. And, I was not disappointed.

I think that I can speak for all our ‘experienced’ religious. We have lived through challenging times, but we have been enriched by our religious life, by our commitment to it and our participation in that life. And, speaking personally, even at this stage of my religious life, I am open to continue to be used by the Lord, in whatever ways might be appropriate.

The opportunities which have been afforded to me over the years are myriad, and many of the skills I developed are and were transferable. Collaboration has always been of great value and I am always anxious to take an idea and run (or perhaps now move more slowly) with it. One of my favorite sayings is ‘build a better birdcage’ which says let’s expand on an idea and develop it even further.

I am not seeking elected leadership but I would like to use this forum as an opportunity for us, as a congregation, to take a good hard look at each other and who we are. In all stages of life, we are blessing and gift to one another and our work is not over as a congregation or as individuals. Let us all, in whatever ways we are able, continue to serve the people of God and this congregation which we love, until God issues God’s final call: “Come, good and faithful servant, take possession of the kingdom I have prepared for you.”

Marlene

My symbol for the discernment retreat was a rock. First and foremost, rock as the foundation upon which I base my life, my relationship with Christ, my need for prayer and time for quiet.

Rock also as being “caught between a rock and a hard place”, between where I experience being called and how others would like me to respond. I had shared that I was not leaning towards an elected role in leadership, however; I find myself with greater openness to the process as we discover a new paradigm.

My thanks to those who invited me to this process. Your affirmation of my love and commitment to the sisters touched me deeply. I do love you. Your reflections have given me food for thought.

I have never, neither in my religious nor professional life, sensed a call to significant roles in leadership. Forming strong relationships, supporting and caring for others in their need is where I have been drawn the most and where my gifts have been best utilized.

Some commented on my interpersonal skills, my ability to speak my truth or provide a different perspective, to listen deeply, and collaborate with others in addition to the gift of language and cultural sensitivity based upon my years in Brazil and Chile, as well as the many years in health care in the US dealing with people of many cultures. This resonates with my own experience of myself.

I find myself challenged by and yet growing in mutuality. I was asked specifically about dealing with criticism or saying my truth loud enough so it might be heard. I will speak my truth though it is difficult for me to stay in the struggle if I am dismissed, ignored or unjustly criticized. Prayer and forgiveness are what get me through though it may take time. Forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts I have experienced in my life, so I am committed to it.

I was also asked about accepting decisions that I don't really agree with. I can accept most decisions however I will question first. My experience throughout the last 30 years of translating for the many different groups in the congregation is that we as a whole often do not see the implications of some of our decisions. At times I see us as even vulnerable due to our desire to see only the good.

As for the future of the congregation, I have a deep desire for unity among us, and an even greater desire for us individually and collectively to respond to the spiritual hunger that exists in our world. I believe that vocations exist, I would want to foster vocations to any state of life. As for the US, I believe in collaboration, especially with other religious or laity who are meeting many of the spiritual needs that we are ourselves are no longer able to address. I firmly believe that as women religious, we have a unique gift to offer others with our Franciscan spirituality.

Pat Tyre

## **REVISED DISCERNMENT REFLECTION**

**Odette Haddad—March 29, 2025**

### **Challenges:**

Bom dia/Boa tarde! Buenos dias/Buenas tardes! Good morning/afternoon? This discernment process has been both a gift and a challenge. It has required deep listening, trust, and surrender—especially in not letting my own thoughts or hesitations get in the way of the Spirit. At times, it has been demanding, but true discernment stretches us and draws us closer to God's call.

### **Affirmation:**

Despite the challenges, I am deeply grateful and honored to be invited into this process by you, sisters. It has enlarged my heart, deepened my gratitude for our congregation, and heightened my awareness of the Spirit's presence.

### **Current Leaning:**

While I do not yet have full clarity on my specific call, I am at peace with remaining in the process, particularly because I support the direction we are taking toward a more collaborative governance. With good health, energy, and gifts to share, I remain open to where this path may lead. If called to leadership, I would be open to serving the congregation in some way...not elected leadership.

### **Role and Competencies:**

You are important to me, sisters, and I find joy in accompanying and supporting you. I bring listening skills, hospitality, compassion, and respect. I am organized and continue to grow in trust and faith each day.

### **What I Need from My Sisters:**

I ask for your honesty and guidance in discerning whether my gifts are suited for this time. I also need a clearer understanding regarding my assignment in Jamaica. As our strategic plan is just taking shape, I would feel more at peace seeing the plan well on its way before concluding my time there in October 2025.

Thank you for your support and prayers as we continue this journey together.