

Finding new ways to stay connected

By Anne Carey, Co-Coordinator of Associates, Central Pacific Province



◀ Associates and Sisters in Dallas gathered this past October via Zoom to discuss “Why we do what we do” with reflections by Sisters Bridget Waldorf and Georgiann Wildhaber. Pictured left to right are: Top row—Associates Carmen Fernandez, Anne Carey and Theresa Francis; Second row—Sisters Carol George and Juliette Daigle, Associate Anne Vidacovich, Sisters Maria Gomez and Dorez Mehrtens; Third row— Sister Bridget Waldorf, Lisa Cardenas (pre-associate) and Sister Georgiann Wildhaber; Fourth row—Associates Mary Barber and Irene Garza.

A year ago, the terms COVID-19, pandemic and social distancing were not in our regular vocabulary. My, how we have adjusted and stretched our parameters during the last 12 months! As an SSND Associate, I love getting together with other Associates and Sisters, gathering in small groups, sharing, growing and giving warm hugs. The arrival of COVID-19 in February changed so many things. Our gatherings came to an abrupt halt. Covenanting ceremonies, typically scheduled in the spring, were first postponed and finally cancelled. We had to explore new ways of connecting.

In 2019, we had one Associate group in Minnesota and North Dakota who gathered virtually. In 2020, we had more than 14 groups that met regularly on a virtual format. We now use “zoom” as a noun, verb and adjective. Connecting virtually is a new adventure for many, and with each successful connection, Associates build their confidence to connect with other groups, family and friends.

Associates in Missouri and Illinois have been connecting monthly on Zoom since June. It has allowed Associates from Springfield, Missouri, to Springfield, Illinois, to have a meaningful experience without ever leaving their homes. By using the breakout rooms, the group can be separated into small intimate groups for sharing, allowing Associates who may have a hard time traveling to an in-person meeting to get to know and share with other Associates.

The Latino group of Associates in the greater Milwaukee area has been inviting many Sisters who are fluent in Spanish to host their monthly Zoom conversations. They also extended an invitation to other Spanish-speaking Associates throughout the province to join their group. Everyone still misses the mouthwatering food that traditionally had been part of their gatherings, yet they rejoice in finding ways to stay connected during this period.

A large group virtual gathering in October for Minnesota and North Dakota Associates included sign language for three Associates who are deaf. Using features in Zoom, these Associates were able to pin and spotlight Sister Chrisann Mortensen, their American Sign Language interpreter, in order to view her screen continually throughout the meeting, allowing them to participate fully in the gathering.

While virtual gatherings have worked for many, our challenge is to continue to find ways to stay connected with our Associates who are not able to join virtual gatherings, and we are grateful to the Associates who have reached out to others with phone calls and cards.

Later this year, I pray that Associates and Sisters will once again be able to gather in person. However, I do believe connecting virtually will remain an avenue to enhance and build our Associate relationships.