

Creative Fidelity

Facilitator Directions

The Facilitator is encouraged to become familiar with the contents of “Creative Fidelity” noting the movement from community centered realities such as habit change, Jubilee programs, etc. with later global issues such as poverty, role of women in the church and society, SHALOM and NGO status at the UN.

The Facilitator welcomes participants and says: Today we’ll look at the role of General Chapters in the governance of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. By taking two topics we’ll look at each from several perspectives: emotional, theological, and political.

After we begin with the change of habit we’ll take a break and then look at the move of the Generalate from Munich to Rome. (Facilitator needs to read Minutes of Move from Rome to Munich found under *Expansion*, “Rome.”

The Facilitator continues: I’d like to consider the change of habit that actually happened in 1963, but conversations on a Generalate level had begun ten years earlier. Pope Pius XII had encouraged sisters throughout the world to simplify their habits out of concern for the sister’s health and hygiene.

If there are sisters in the group The Facilitator asks: “Did anyone present wear the traditional SSND habit? Can you tell us what it felt like to wear it?”

As The Facilitator invites comments, some additional questions might include:

1. Was it difficult to scrub floors or dance or play volleyball in it?
2. Could you give someone a hug?
3. Were you ever uncomfortable wearing it? Summertime heat?
4. How did you experience the change of habit? Where were you stationed in 1963?
5. Did parishioners, family and friends share their thoughts with you regarding your change of habit?

As noted earlier SSNDs were responding to the encouragement of the hierarchical church to modify religious dress.

The Facilitator continues: As we continue to reflect on the religious habit, let’s take a few minutes to recall how this issue had international implications within the SSNDs. What was happening in Europe in 1956, when the first discussion was brought to the General Chapter?

1. Post-war Europe was struggling to rebuild and heal relationships.
2. Sisters in Eastern Europe were silenced under Communism.
3. Many European sisters had been forbidden to wear the habit under threat of imprisonment, fines, ridicule.
4. Those who did wear the habit in public were often jeered or ridiculed.

Imagine yourself as a European sister at the General Chapter discussing the change of habit. Can you name some feelings that may have surfaced?

If you were from another part of the congregation what may have been your feelings?

The Facilitator adds other factors coming into play during the change of habit, beginning in 1963 and moving to more secular clothing in the 1970's; first into a simple suit and veil and then into regular dress.

1. As the discussion continues comments may question whether the loss of a habit had any relation to women leaving religious life. In the 1976 *Survey on Women Who have Left Religious Communities*, authorized by the National Sisters Vocation Conference, there is no mention of change of habit as a reason for leaving. The most common reasons given by the 1400 respondents were: tensions in community life, personal needs not met, personal problems related to not having a "call," health, family pressures, personal immaturity, loss of faith, and uncertainty about the future of religious life.
2. Other factors that may have influenced someone's decision to leave religious life might include: the women's movement, move from formal education into parish work and other ministries, clerical abuse scandal, sisters desiring a family, marriage, career, etc.

The Facilitator concludes by suggesting that the decision in 1972 to move toward simple dress was prompted, in part, by the encouragement of Vatican II to be part of the world, rather than separate from 'It.' In international discussions one sister asked, "Why should we move from one form of medieval dress to another?" With this in mind the SSNDs, like many other congregations moved to "secular" dress. In an attempt at some form of corporate identification the SSND international symbol was introduced.

Move from Munich to Rome

The Facilitator invites participants to take a break before beginning a discussion on the move of the Generalate from Munich to Rome. It will important for her to be familiar with the General Chapter Minutes from 1956, found in *Sturdy Roots II*, "Expansion," *Rome*.

The Facilitator begins by saying: It's important to make a mental shift as we try to recall the emotional feelings surrounding the General Chapter discussion of moving the main headquarters of the congregation from the motherhouse in Munich, where Mother Theresa established it, to Rome. The Vatican had encouraged religious communities to have a central house in Rome where they could more easily transfer congregational business with the Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes. Many religious communities had their central administration in Rome in 1956.

The Facilitator asks: Has anyone visited the Munich Motherhouse? If so, what impressed you about it? (Vital ministry of formal education, many young people on the property, Motherhouse chapel is also St. James Church, so there is an active congregation that meets there, it is the site of the tomb of Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger and she is revered by the public and sisters alike. There is a large community of School Sisters of Notre Dame living there, with a variety of ministries happening along with formation of newer members.)

The Facilitator recalls: In 1956 when this decision to move from Munich was being discussed, post-war Bavaria was trying to rebuild and heal. In reading the Minutes of the 1956 Chapter one German Cardinal (Wendel) had warned the delegates about leaving their established motherhouse. The Facilitator asks the participants: "What do you think those warnings included?" (Loss of congregational unity, loss of vocations, loss of a bond with the German roots of SSND, less influence of German SSNDs in governance, etc.)

The Facilitator adds: "Can you see any advantages to such a move? 1) Deepened sense of internationality by being in Rome, 2) access to church offices, 3) since no SSND motherhouse was in Rome it would be more neutral ground from which to exercise international governance, 4) leadership might become more representative of an international membership, etc.

Imagine that you were a Bavarian sister listening to this discussion. What feelings might surface? 1) loss, 2) sadness, 3) grief, 4) fear, 5) anxiety, 6) deep desire for trust, 7) anger, 8) can sisters who were not of German origin be trusted with the leadership of the congregation, 9) would fidelity to Mother Theresa be lost in such a move? ETC.

The Facilitator continues: In reading the Minutes from 1956 it is apparent that Mother Almeda Schrickler, SSND, the German General Superior who had led the congregation through the difficult years, 1928 – 1955, had foreseen the importance of having an SSND house in Rome. She had purchased a house in Rome in 1954, two years before the General Chapter made the decision to move to Rome. Do you think this was significant?

(Perhaps she saw the wisdom of having a house in Rome simply for occasional visits and business there. However, it seems she saw the wisdom of moving toward that internationality that Mother Theresa treasured so deeply. Mother Almeda was a Bavarian, recognizing the blessing of having the Generalate in Munich as well as seeing the advantages to moving to Rome.

The Facilitator may want to quote from the Minutes regarding the courage and leadership of Mother Ambrosia Roechlein, who succeeded Mother Almeda as General Superior. She responds to the negative comments of the Cardinal present at the Chapter. She also negotiates a difficult political exchange.

At the time, 1956, North America was under the leadership of a Commisariat whose headquarters were in Milwaukee. It was decided that if the Generalate would move to Rome, the Commisariate would be dissolved, thus leaving an opening for new governance in both Europe and America. The final "motion" recorded this decision in the Minutes. S. Mary Basil Roesner, who was a member of the Commisariat made the motion.

What do you think were the feelings and political ramifications of this latter decision? Does anyone remember the Commisariat? Did Milwaukee have any advantages over other provinces because of this? What did this decision allow to happen in the future?

(Greater internationality in leadership, community living, understanding of various points of view, etc.)

As The Facilitator concludes she says: There is a Zen saying: "No seed ever sees the flower." Those SSNDs who planted the seed of greater internationality never saw the flowering of Jubilee programs held in Rome at the generalate, the deep friendships fostered through greater international living and governance, etc. What other aspects of SSND life have changed because of the move from Munich to Rome? Invite comments from participants.

I'd like to conclude with one of Mother Theresa's quotes that tell us something of her vision for the congregation. "The Catholic faith is applicable for all continents. Why should our holy rule not be equally applicable since it was dictated by the Holy Spirit through the Church?" (#4262 Mother Theresa to Mother Caroline, May 3, 1868.)