

Voices of Change Facilitator Directions

Materials needed:

The Facilitator prints copies of one personal story from “Voices of Change” that may interest your group: distribute them later in the program.*

The Facilitator welcomes the group and says: A willingness to change usually means a new idea has prompted another way of looking at reality. When School Sisters of Notre Dame are at their best, a rich conversation can happen in a dialogic fashion. As we focus on those SSNDs who may have been a “voice of change” in our lives, let’s listen without judgment to ways that others may have been a catalyst for change.

The Facilitator may want to pause for a few minutes of quiet before beginning the process. Another option would be to listen to music that may stimulate memories for the participants such as: *Weave Me the Sunshine*, or *500 Miles* by Peter, Paul and Mary, *We Shall Overcome*, *Gregorian Chant*, *The Sound of Music*, etc.

The Facilitator continues: There have been “voices of change” in our lives; some have led to life commitments, such as the “voice” of a spouse inviting us to share a life together, or the voice of a teacher who encouraged us to believe in ourselves. As we sit quietly for a few minutes, try to think of a School Sister of Notre Dame who made an impression on you, encouraged you to grow or think differently. (Pause)

As you think of Sister SSND, try to remember how old you were when you first met her. What were your initial impressions of her? Were her words upsetting to you? Did they challenge you? Is there anything that she said to you that still resonates in your heart?

Turn to 1 or 2 others and share a story. (Listen in on conversations and walk around.)

After enough time, The Facilitator invites comments by saying: Was there any personality trait that you remember about your SSND mentor? (i.e. a sense of humor, a no-nonsense attitude toward education, strict discipline, rare praise, hard work, etc.)

The Facilitator asks the group: how did the SSND in your life change you? How was she a “voice of change” for you?

After sharing, The Facilitator mentions one or two School Sisters of Notre Dame named in “Voices of Change.” that she would like to share. *She distributes the essay of one of those named and invites participants to read it together. Discussion questions arise out of the respective perspectives presented. (i.e. Margaret Ellen Traxler’s lifelong dedication to poor women is the context for her signing the New York Times ad. As the connections between a point of view and the SSND’s life ministry, one may see this as an example of “theology from below,” rather than “theology from above.” The tension between “what the church teaches” and one’s experience with the church of the people may be questioned. This liberation theology is sometimes in conflict with some

members of the hierarchy, such as Margaret Ellen discovered with her early involvement in the Civil Rights movement. (One example is found in memos of bishops regarding religious being involved at Selma. This is found in the first paragraph of Margaret Ellen's introduction.)

The Facilitator says: I invite any comments; let's put them in a dialogic, non-judgmental manner. How do you see Margaret Ellen, Dorothy, etc. a "voice of change?" (NB. There are additional Facilitator Directions for discussing the New York Times ad.)

As we live and have to make difficult decisions they may demand that we follow an informed conscience. Some examples from a pre-Vatican II church might illustrate this tension. Do you remember parents whose son or daughter married a "non-Catholic" and were forbidden by church law from attending the service in a Protestant church? Or the many questions that Catholic couples faced as they discussed contraception? Other examples that you'd care to add?

The Facilitator continues: One School Sister of Notre Dame was asked: "What's the most dangerous thing you ever did?" Without a moment's hesitation she responded: "Learn to read." Do you find that your own ability to read, to reflect critically on what you hear enables you to be a "voice of change" for others? Are there some examples you'd like to share?

After all have shared The Facilitator says: I'd like to share this story of an SSND who was a "voice of change" to the pastor with whom she worked.

A few years ago Regina Cotter (Mary Philip) told this story. She had been sent to be the principal of a high school where a strong German pastor ruled with an "iron" hand. Two previous principals had found it impossible to work with him and Regina had been sent to "stay and stabilize" the high school. As she recounted her experience those first months she remembered how difficult it was working with the pastor. However, at Christmas the pastor insisted on talking with her. As they sat down for their conversation he handed her a small gift and asked her to open it. What she found was a little toy bear that when wound up, only shook its head "no." They both laughed heartily and she recognized a mutual respect beginning among them.

Consider writing to an SSND who was a "voice of change," or contact her by phone, email, or a visit. And if she has died why not pray to her for guidance and courage. We'll conclude now with a "voice of change" prayer known as The Serenity Prayer:

Oh God,

Grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
the courage to change the things we can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

