

# Responding to the Signs of This Time

By Kelly Marsicano, Communications Coordinator

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace 2022 Chapter Call states: “These new times demand a change of heart: to be, think and act differently.” It is a recognition that we find ourselves in a place we have never been. In recent years we have experienced a global pandemic, an escalating climate crisis, a decline in institutions, and a global racial justice movement. Pope Francis has described this as “... not living in an era of change, but a change of era.” However, he said the Church should not be afraid of change and, instead, be “implanted and rooted in Christ, allowing to be led by the Spirit. Thus, everything will be possible with genius and creativity.”

With this change of era, we have a choice: to try to reclaim what was or to respond in new ways. I sat down with the executive director of Peace Ministries, Maureen Donohue, for further discussion.

**Q: In many ways, Peace Ministries can be viewed as a direct response to this change of era. As sisters began to step away from active ministry roles, the Congregation formed Peace Ministries in 2014 to increase its ability to govern and advocate for their sponsored ministries. In what ways does Peace Ministries ensure the mission, core values and legacy of the Congregation continue?**

**A:** Today, the sponsored ministries (Holy Name, Peace Care, St. Joseph’s School for the Blind, Waterspirit and York Street Project) are expressions of the Congregation’s mission, and whether they are providing education, healthcare services or social services, each ministry is rooted in the core values of the Congregation. A primary role of Peace Ministries is to foster understanding and deepen awareness of the Congregation’s core values in an ongoing way.

Peace Ministries articulates its mission through 11 goals and the first two capture the heart of our purpose. The first goal is to maintain individual ministry identity and mission while fostering a common grounding in the spirit and principles of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, Catholic Social Teaching and Gospel values. The second goal is to work in partnership with the ministries to provide ongoing spiritual formation, leadership development, and mission integration for the board and staff of each ministry.

Peace Ministries was formed to assist the Congregation in carrying out this work through a variety of programs, aimed at strengthening relationships with the ministries and among the ministries themselves.

**Q: Formation days are held annually for the Peace Ministries Board of Trustees. What is significant about these days and how are they helpful?**

**A:** Formation has been a strong focus of Peace Ministries since the beginning. There was a recognition that the formation of trustees was essential for the board to carry out its sponsorship responsibilities in collaboration with the Congregation.

As stated in a recent article in *Health Progress*, “The role of formation is to create experiences that invite those who serve to discover connections between personal meaning and organization purpose.”

Each board meeting is structured to include an element of ongoing formation and prayer. We cover topics such as Catholic Social Teaching, the founding of the Congregation, the role of sponsors, principles of discernment, and much more.

The full-day sessions are held jointly with the Congregation Leadership Team and allow more time to go deeper with a given topic supplemented by prayer and reflection. These sessions strengthen the trustees’ sense of community and enable them to be a more effective board.



**Above:** Senior leaders and board members engage in conversation during the 2022 Fall Formation.

**Right:** Dr. Erica Torres, presenter at the 2022 Fall Formation, stands with Maureen Donohue, executive director of Peace Ministries, and Arleatha Williams, Peace Ministries board chair.



**Q:** The most recent formation day was in February 2023, where Sister Mary Pellegrino, CSJ, senior vice president of Plante Moran REIA, presented on the topic of change of era. Guided by the 2007 article “Nostalgia and Its Discontents” by Svetlana Boym in *The Hedgehog Review*, Sister Mary talked about reflective nostalgia (recalling, storytelling) vs. restorative nostalgia (restoring the past and recreating the conditions). Looking toward the future, which do you feel is more fruitful and why?

**A:** I think reflective nostalgia is much more useful. It’s reflecting on something and recalling what we liked about it, how it made us feel. Such reflection can be both inspiring and motivating.

Restorative nostalgia longs to bring back the old ways, often in denial of what is different. There is an unwillingness to accept change, which creates an obstacle to true growth and responding to the now.

**Q:** Annual formation days are also held for the senior leaders and officers of the sponsored ministries. This year’s event, which will be held in October, will focus on the theme “Reading the Signs of the Times.” Why do you feel that particular topic is of such importance?

**A:** Reading the Signs of the Times is one of the eight core values of the Congregation. It was a mandate of Vatican II and a value that the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace have embraced throughout their history. In light of this change of era that Pope Francis speaks about, we thought it particularly timely to focus on this core value with our ministry leaders. We know they are experiencing the implications of change on such a large scale and seeking to respond in new

ways that they might not have envisioned even two or three years ago.

This time we find ourselves in is so markedly different that our formation day gives us the opportunity to ask the question: What is this moment demanding of us differently than in the past? Our hope is that the attendees will be able to step back and gain new insights into how best to lead during this time of massive change and disruption.

**Q:** In Peace Ministries’ strategic plan, there are objectives that reflect the signs of the times, particularly on formation and orientation. How do these components benefit the ministries and those they serve?

**A:** Since one of our key purposes is to foster that common grounding in the charisma of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace and Gospel values, the plan addresses how we can strengthen the resources provided to ministries to educate and orient their employees and leaders. Recent efforts have resulted in an inventory of orientation resources, which we will continue to update with the feedback of our ministries to ensure they remain helpful and relevant.

Another critical area is the mission review process called Mission Alive. Developed by Peace Ministries several years ago, the process is being implemented in each ministry. This is a formational program that invites ministries to reflect on their mission through the lens of specific core values to deepen their connection to the ministry’s mission and explore ways to strengthen particular core values within their ministry.

continued on page 21

other similar warehouse companies and twice that of the competition. And yet, since I started writing this, I have mindlessly clicked multiple times on the Amazon app to get something delivered quickly from a warehouse that doesn't consider the safety of their workers a priority. Why don't I consider privileging my convenience at the cost of others a problem?

Organizations that work hard against union organizations are also unjust. According to an article from this April in Fast Company, "the National Labor Relations Board has issued more than 80 complaints against Starbucks for labor law violations; those violations include denying pay and benefits to unionized workers and illegally firing workers involved in the union." But how many of us still go to non-union Starbucks and buy our favorite caffeinated treat?

Finally, we need to fundamentally reframe the narratives we have around careers, for ourselves and our children. My father was very successful. Until he got sick with a rare heart disease. He died in his forties. I wish he'd spent less time at work and more time with me and my sister. My son died when he was nineteen. I wish I'd spent less time at work and more time with him and my daughter.

Recently, my four-year-old granddaughter, Ruby, spent the night with us. We watched an old G-rated movie about a mouse detective. Like Sherlock Holmes, the mouse wore a deerstalker hat and smoked a Meerschaum pipe. Ruby kept asking about the pipe. I realized she's never seen anyone smoke. She watches mostly *Sesame Street* and *Curious George*, and no one in her family smokes.

I tried to explain it to her, but she couldn't quite understand why anyone would put something in their mouth and set it on fire. Fire is dangerous, right? "Does it hurt?" she asked me, her brows pulled together in concern.

That's a generational change. She is growing up in a time and place where fewer people smoke, and there are fewer depictions of smoking in media.

I hope that by the time she has children, we will have gone through a similar cultural change in how we work. And that some older person will be explaining to a child watching an old movie that people used to work long hours and bragged about sleeping at their offices. That people had to go to work sick, and very soon after they gave birth; that individuals had to work long hours and they still risked being laid off with no notice and losing their health insurance. And the child will look at the older person with the same mystification. "Didn't that hurt?"

## Responding to the Signs, continued from page 19

The Mission Alive process involves data collection and discussion among ministry employees to assess and enhance their understanding of the mission. For example, through St. Joseph's School for the Blind's recent process, they focused on collaboration and respect for human dignity, which led to the first-ever employee wellness committee with a focus on social, physical, mental and financial well-being.

**Q: The strategic plan also focuses on recruitment, including a commitment to diversifying boards and making room at the table. Can you explain why this is so crucial?**

A: Peace Ministries and each of the sponsored ministries rely on the generosity and talents of volunteers who serve on our governing boards. To respond to the signs of the times and support our ministries into the future, we need to ensure that these boards reflect the diversity of our communities and those we serve. When I say diverse, I mean it in the broadest sense of the word—age, race, ethnicity, gender, expertise, faith and perspective. We want to cultivate board tables where each person feels included, welcomed and where their gifts are honored. It is that diversity of thought and perspective that will make for stronger governing boards, better able to lead our ministries into the future.

**Q: In conclusion, is there anything you would like to add?**

A: The Congregation Leadership Team and Peace Ministries continue to grow in the understanding of our shared ministry of sponsorship. We continue to ask ourselves what this time requires of us and what the ministries most need from us to support their viability while retaining the legacy and values of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace.

At our recent formation day, Sister Mary spoke with us about legacy as a blend of continuity and innovation. She said one can speak of vision in the same way. A vision for the future carries the essentials of the past forward and innovates them for the needs of the day. Rooted in the Congregation's mission to make Christ's gospel of peace come alive through works of justice, may we be courageous in following the promptings of the Spirit as we respond to the signs of this time.