

December 2017



Photo: UISG Website

A message from your UISG Delegates . . .

Advent blessings from your two U.S. Constellation delegates to the UISG, Constance Phelps, SCL, and Patricia Siemen, OP. This is our first communication with you since we were elected the new delegates from the U.S. Constellation. We learned much about each other during our 18+-hour journey to and from Manila, Philippines, where the Council of Delegates met the week of November 5-11, 2017. Upon arrival, we soon met new Sister-friends arriving from each of the 36 international constellations. We were a total of 60 delegates (photo below), which included the UISG board members and staff.



Photo: UISG Website

The hospitality of the Augustinian Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation and staff at the Villa Consuelo Retreat House in Novaliches, outside of Manila continued to be outstanding throughout the week. And although the plenary sessions were all conducted (or translated) in English, Spanish, French, or Italian, our meals were punctuated by the common language of laughter as we struggled to share our stories with each other. We met each morning in our language groups for *Lectio Divina*, sharing our reflections on the daily Scripture readings. This was a special way of connecting our heart space with each other.



Sharing of *Lectio Divina* group. (GSR photo / Gail DeGeorge)

The evenings found many of us glued to the seats in the lobby of the retreat house, as it was the only place where we could access Wi-Fi. During these informal evening gatherings, we had opportunities to share and pool experiences, to exchange information personally and professionally, to reflect upon the challenges we face in our congregations and our constellations, to strengthen our common bonds, to enjoy one another, and to experience the commonality of women religious in all its diversity.

Sisters Pat Murray, IBVM, Executive Director of the UISG, and Carmen Sammut, MSOLA, President of the UISG (both attended our 2016 US Constellation gathering in Atlanta), welcomed us. We soon learned that Pat runs an expansive and well-organized organization. Notable among the UISG growth goals are: 1) to increase collaboration with Continental Conferences and Bishops, 2) to realize the aims of UISG in regard to its relationship with the Vatican, 3) to explore new ways of collaboration with other faiths and religions, 4) to continue to support members through provision of specific services, e.g., Canon Law service, and 5) to strengthen communication between the Constellations and the members.

There remains a concerted effort among the Board and UISG staff to continue consulting and identifying ways to change and improve UISG for the future. They strive to animate the Union's purpose "*to build bridges that span distances, borders and boundaries in order to create ways for members to be in communication, in community and in communion.*" This stated purpose was a tangible reality during our meeting. We hope to address more of this and share our "TO DO" list during our Constellation meeting in August (on the Saturday following LCWR).

Delegates were invited to bring a piece of cloth symbolic of the happenings in their Constellation since May 2016. Following prayer at our initial gathering, we formed a colorful procession (photo below) as we chanted our way to our meeting. These colorful materials, arranged as the meeting room focal point, visually illustrated what transpired during the week among the delegates as we communicated, collaborated, and deepened communion. The solidarity of women religious internationally was evident. Indeed, unity was not, is not, grounded in uniformity.



Photo: UISG Website

Carmen's opening address grounded us in the theme of building community in an intercultural world. Given that vocations to consecrated life are coming primarily from the Global South, membership in many congregations is becoming more and more nationally, culturally, and linguistically diverse. The need to grow in cultural awareness and appreciation, the challenges of different languages and diverse communication patterns, and the various preferences in food and ways of sharing prayer and faith together all contribute to the need to develop skills for intercultural living. Fr. Antonio Pernia, SVD, in his keynote presentation addressed the difference between "multicultural" and "intercultural" living. He described multicultural living as often living "side-by-side" each other, often each one living in her own silo. In contrast, intercultural living is intentional engagement with each other. Community members work to understand and value the differences to enjoy the richness of being in communion with each other. Development of communication skills is essential for meaningful intercultural living as well as willingness to set aside one's cultural biases. Several Sister presenters shared with the delegates their experience of living in community with Sisters from four or five differing countries. One of the clear calls of the Spirit of God is an invitation to women religious to find ways to live together in harmony and to celebrate the gifts of diversity in community life. While this is challenging, it is also the call to become a beloved community and to give witness to the possibility of being a global people of God.



Four young sisters from Asia share their views on the benefits and challenges of living in multicultural communities in a panel discussion at the UISG delegates' meeting. (GSR photo / Gail DeGeorge)

In closing, we thank you for trusting us with the privilege and responsibility of representing you within the UISG. We both became keenly aware of the unique position of the UISG. Its global international identity distinguishes it from the national identity and role of our LCWR. And, in this 21st century, both organizations are essential. As today's women religious become more unified internationally, we can better see the intersectionality of the challenges facing the Church and our concern for the well-being of people and Earth. Our solidarity and friendship with each other is one way of building the beloved community for which Jesus prayed. UISG is a beacon of light that makes our unity visible and attractive.



From left: Sr. Illumina Virginia Jenny Katsukunya of the Little Children of Our Blessed Lady in Zimbabwe; Sr. Patricia Siemen of the Adrian Dominicans of Adrian, Michigan; and Sr. Constance Phelps of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, during the ceremony in which delegations presented cloths representing their regions of the world to each other at the UISG delegates' meeting (GSR photo / Gail DeGeorge)

Note: Please visit the UISG website (<http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org>) for photos and more regarding our Meeting of the Council of Delegates.