

*Where there is control . . . let me sow collaboration*

## THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

**Sr. Barbara O’Dea, DW**

A few years ago at a provincial chapter, a decision was made to initiate a new mission. Its mandate was to study the development of an international/intercultural community and to reach out to a growing new population in our midst. The long-term goal was for this new community of Daughters of Wisdom to be situated within a community of need and to participate in the life and growth of it giving special attention to human needs, life-giving relationships, justice issues, and the building up of faith. At the end of the process, the Hispanic population became the focus of our attention.

**How it began:** Shortly after the meeting, I was asked to chair a committee which included Sisters Ann Nielsen, Marilyn Soeder, and Diane Capozzi to see to the implementation of this study. It would take all the enthusiasm, creative imagination and collaboration in us to realize the challenge. But, we shared a passion for our mission and faith that if the project was of the Spirit, it would happen. In the process, we experienced what collaboration could achieve.

**The plan:** Visits were limited to communities in the dioceses of Brooklyn and Rockville Centre. Given the large Hispanic population and the influx of new immigrants and refugees, we set out to explore data on the numbers, needs, and areas most in need of services Daughters of Wisdom might provide. The committee set forth two by two to contact people experienced in ministry among the targeted population, hold interviews and make site visits. Results were pooled and discussed at committee meetings.

**Collaboration broadened:** Information and a consultation were sent to province members to discover who among us were willing to become involved. Those who responded were invited to a day of discernment with the committee and our provincial leader to discern the location of the ministry and future community members. At the conclusion of the day, there was a quasi-unanimous recommendation for Long Island as the location. Two Sisters expressed willingness to be members of the new intercultural community. We witnessed the Spirit of Wisdom at work in all present.

To continue the forward movement, a facilitator was engaged to assist us in our planning. During the course of a day-long process, the committee developed a plan subject to periodic adjustments. That evening we presented the results to the Leadership Team who affirmed them.

**The next challenge was to recommend a specific location for the project:** Sr. Margaret Smyth, OP in Riverhead who worked with Hispanic immigrants and refugees for decades and had built up invaluable networks proved an invaluable

collaborator. She identified places to explore across central and eastern Long Island, provided information on the waves of Hispanic immigration, including the latest arrivals, thousands of unaccompanied minors from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Sr. Margaret also called our attention to the importance of connecting with diocesan administrators responsible for Hispanic ministry: the Episcopal Vicar for Hispanic ministry, the deacon responsible for the Diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry, and eventually, the legal department of Catholic Charities to obtain R1 (Religious Worker) visas.

**The network of collaborators kept broadening:** The international congregation became involved. The US provincial communicated with our international leadership team. Arrangements were made for the project to be presented to the Council of the Congregation 2013 in the Philippines. She also established contact with the provincials of the Spanish-speaking provinces in the congregation as part of the search for personnel for the project.

**The pace quickened:** Good news came from Colombia and Peru! A Sister from each province responded to the invitation. The community of four was now



The Daughters of Wisdom's International/Intercultural Community in Huntington Station, NY includes (L-R) Sisters Teresa de Jesus Aguilar Avila (Province of Colombia), Marilyn Soeder (US Province), Maria Jesus Pinedo, (Province of Peru) and Sr. Bernadette Sassone (US Province).

complete. The Leadership Team designated Huntington Station, NY as the site of the new ministry. The two community members on site searched for a home and explored possibilities for ministries and networking. The new community could now

take its place in the province. The seemingly impossible dream was becoming reality. Together we had fulfilled our committee mandate.

**Today:** Hearts filled with awe for all that Wisdom had done through our collaboration and that of so many others, we witness the evolving mission of our Wisdom family now on site. **Wisdom** (does indeed) **traverse and penetrate all things** (Wis.7, 24).