

General Chapter Progress Report
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SHALOM
THE INTERNATINAL NETWORK
FOR JUSTICE; PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION
of the congregation of
School Sisters of Notre Dame

Five years ago the 19th General Chapter gave us the Mandate for Action. Part of that Mandate states and I quote: *"We work locally and congregationally against unjust structures, especially as they affect women and youth. As a congregation, we will establish an International Network for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation"*. That Network has been established and is now known as SHALOM. Today we are here to give you, the 20th General chapter, a progress report on the establishment of SHALOM.

1992

In late 1992 SHALOM was founded in the response to the call of THE MANDATE FOR ACTION.

1993 &1994

1. An **ad hoc committee** was formed and organized the work of establishing the network.
2. A **questionnaire** was distributed and the answers collated, so that the entire congregation had input into the creation of this network.
3. The network was **named** SHALOM and you can see the roots from which it has grown.
4. The SHALOM **document** was written; and it was approved by the present General Council.

1995

1. In keeping with the SHALOM document, we **two coordinators** from two different cultures were chosen.
2. We went for **language study** to facilitate our work in coordinating this network.
3. Our first Shalom presentation was made to the newest members of the congregation during the **Bonding Program** in Rome.

1996 & 1997

1. Vienna, Austria was chosen as the site for the International Shalom Office, and we were responsible for furnishing and equipping this office after moving to Vienna.

We used the following criteria in choosing the site for our International office:

- By establishing the SHALOM center in Europe it would provide a balance with our NGO's work at the United Nations. The collaboration between the Shalom Office and the NGO Office would be another link of the congregation on both sides of the Atlantic.
 - Vienna is considered to be the gateway between western Europe and the former eastern Europe, and would further strengthen the bonds among our sisters there.
 - Austria is one of the oldest foundations of the Congregation, and as the tomb of Father Job is there, it helps fulfill the criteria of "...a place that is meaningful...and sacred to the charism of the congregation".
 - It has the technological sophistication needed for the ease of international communication.
 - Transportation systems are good and reliable.
 - ...And last but not least, the Provincial Council of Austria, through the General Council, had extended an invitation and offered space at their Motherhouse for the SHALOM Office.
2. We developed the structure of the SHALOM Network.

Part 2 Structure

[A major task during our first year and a half was to build the structure through which SHALOM and its 6,000 sisters and associates would function. In order to do this:]

1. We have met with the 21 Provincial Councils and the two Regional Councils.
2. We have conducted workshops and/or meetings for the SHALOM Contact Sisters of Europe, Africa and Latin America; and attended the annual meeting of what is now the SHALOM branch of North America.
3. We have visited the 3 provinces of South America, the 10 Provinces of Europe as well as the countries of Sweden and

England. We attended the Latin American Conference in Guatemala, and visited our sisters and their work in Honduras, El Salvador, Peru and Puerto Rico.

4. Our first Annual Branch Meeting with the 6 SHALOM branch Representatives, was held at the International SHALOM office. It was preceded by a visit to the province and country of Hungary, and a retreat in Romania. The retreat was entitled: *The Gospel, YAS and the Mandate for Action*. All of this was in compliance with our document which states that the purpose of the Annual Branch Meeting is not only for dialogue, planning and evaluation, but also to broaden the global vision and to heighten the cultural sensitivity of SHALOM.

Since our major task thus far has been the building of the structure of SHALOM, we would like to explain that development in detail-

In March, 1996 we met with our first leadership group in Rome. This was the Major Area of Europe Meeting, at which all the Provincial Councils of Europe were present. We suggested five models for the structure of the SHALOM Branch Europe. Model 4 was: any combination or alteration of Models 1, 2, and 3. Model 5 was: design a completely new model. Model 4 was overwhelmingly preferred, which after all the modifications and adjustments looks like this:

Each Provincial Council of Europe and the county of England chose one sister to be their SHALOM Contact. Those 11 Contact Sisters met with us and together chose a Branch Representative from among themselves.

Despite the fact that the SHALOM document says that: "Each branch creates its own model..." Europe had set a precedent and all the other branches have based their model on the one designed by the European Provincial Councils.

Africa chose two Contacts for Ghana and Nigeria, because of the spread of sisters in these countries. Each of the others chose one. Together they chose their branch representative for SHALOM AFRICA.

North America has one contact per province, one of whom is the branch representative.

Because of the complex political, social, and economic realities of the Latin American countries as well as difficulties with the communication systems, a decision was made to have one branch with two divisions. One division is South America. The other division known as MECCA

including Central America and the Caribbean. Each division has its own branch representative. The South American Division has one contact per Province, which the other countries with small numbers of sisters are paired in order to share a contact.

The Regions of Japan and Guam are to be applauded as they basically did a good collaborative job between them after hearing our SHALOM presentation at the Leadership Conference in Mankato and then meeting briefly with the two of us. They have a contact for each region and a branch representative.

This is the structure of our SHALOM network. It consists of 5 Branches, (with one branch having 2 Divisions). There are 41 SHALOM contacts including 6 branch representatives. This would not have been possible in so short a time if we had not been able to visit so many parts of the congregation, to meet with the leadership and the SHALOM contacts. If a picture is worth a thousand words, seeing a situation first-hand has saved us years of struggling to understand the reality of many situations, and as a result we can more effectively and efficiently promote the work of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation through our SHALOM network.

Part 3 Function

Structure of itself serves no purpose. The structure of SHALOM was created to facilitate its function, and that moves us to the final part of our report. We hope you are able to recognize SHALOM in your part of the world.

We paraphrase the words of Robert Frost as we begin the **Journey of SHALOM**;

“...the Woods are Lovely, Dark and Deep, but we have Promises to Keep, and Miles to go before we Sleep, and Miles to go before we Sleep.”

SHALOM takes a prophetic stance:

by joining its voice with those who cry for justice,
by providing a voice for those who are voiceless in their struggle for justice.

SHALOM takes actions which lead to reconciliation.

SHALOM is in solidarity with the oppressed.

SHALOM promotes human dignity.

SHALOM works against violence.

SHALOM works against the manipulation of truth.

SHALOM works against attacks on the family.

SHALOM works against dehumanization of women.

SHALOM works against the abandonment of children.

As SHALOM, we School Sisters of Notre Dame raise our consciousness and that of those with whom we minister:

when peace, justice and reverence for creation is incorporated into the curricula of our schools beginning with the kindergarten;
when we denounce injustice and change unjust structures;
when we strengthen just structures.

SHALOM collaborates with others in the building of peace.

As SHALOM, we use opportunities to exert positive influence on the mass media:

when we seek to improve communications in developing countries: We would like to take this opportunity to announce that we applied for and received a grant from the Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters. We hope this is only the first of two grants, for communications in the five countries of Africa where our sisters minister.

As SHALOM, we reverence the earth and seek to deepen our relationship with all creation.

We began our **Journey of Shalom**, with the words of Robert Frost:

“. . . the woods are lovely, dark and deep, but we have promises to keep, and miles to go before we sleep, and miles to go before we sleep”

We conclude the Shalom presentation with **Prelude to Song for the Journey**, a poem written by Sister Maura Eichner for 1997 celebrations of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Prelude to Song for the Journey

The very air is astonished with angels,
We are gathering light as we go.
But now --at this moment --we pause
on our journey—our wonder aglow

in our eyes. Why have we come
from the south and the north, the west
and the east, each lead by her heartbeat
to a place of thanksgiving—to offer the best

of desire, the purest of hope. The very air
is astonished with angels singing the praise
of the One who called and calls ever
again: Come, sing and be joyful. Raise

the cry of reverence for all creation;
be the voice for justice, be the voice
for women. With Alix, Theresa, Caroline
take courage. Be faithful, pray and rejoice

for the very air is astonished with angels.
With us, they gather light as we go.
Change is the coin of the kingdom.
We are faithful. With wonder our eyes are aglow

(Note: This report was accompanied by 46 slides to illustrate what was being explained. Any reference to slides was deleted during this typing.)