The story of formation at the heart of Good Shepherd mission continues to unfold as we developed new consciousness and deepened our understanding of our life and formation during the second week. We started with the reflection on the goal of formation and the task of the formator in the context of today’s rapidly changing world. We recognized the necessity for a deep rootedness in God “to foster the growth of courageous and daring disciples of Jesus in the process of becoming a compassionate, loving and reconciling presence in all relationships especially with those in vulnerable situations” (2014 Formation Guidelines).

In a process of co-learning, we shared on how to accompany those in formation to learn about contemplation and the qualities that need to be nurtured for someone to be a prophetic presence.

We then went through a cosmic walk that led us as far back to 13.7 billion years of creation in the New Universe Story. We reflected on the implications of the principles of the universe: diversity, interiority and communion in our life and in formation. In contemplation of creation, we experienced God’s energy flow through everything and through ourselves. We also felt enriched by Philip Pinto’s talks given during the Congregational Chapter.
Our reflections found expression in our creative works and were gathered into collective wisdom as we shared in the group:

There was deepened awareness of interconnectedness with all of creation, a growing appreciation of our common origin. We are not simply made by and for God, but we are made of God. At the same time, we humbly accept that in midst of this diverse beauty, there are places of disconnections.

We are on a journey, constantly moving, dynamic and changing. We feel the invitation of the “Holy Mystery” to open ourselves to something new and unknown, to listen to the silence within, to allow ourselves into the “Holy Chaos” that will bring about new life.

We have gained wisdom from creation. The joy of seeing the fruitfulness resulting from nurturing of a pear tree bear fruit after long years of “barrenness” was an invitation to be more life giving in community and mission. The dry leaves that wither and fall to the ground tell us of the need to let go as we also welcome budding leaves. The transformation of a cocoon to a butterfly taught us to be patient with process.

There are uncertainties, fears and limitations. But we don’t have to go through these alone. Together we realize we can go further. We embrace our limitations and respect each one’s process. This helps us to be open, to reach out and collaborate. We may be incomplete on our own, but together we make a beautiful whole.

The journey of our contemplative sisters is also one of evolution, from changing of names to continuous deepening of understanding of what it means to be contemplatives in an apostolic congregation, to see our changing world with a contemplative eye and to be true containers of divinity.

For diversity to be beautiful and life giving, there must be deep interiority. Only then can true communion happen. It is difficult, but walking in another’s shoe helps us find ourselves anew.

Our understanding of the shifts brought about by new discoveries in science left us with questions about our life. We surfaced the many questions in our hearts:

- Is religious life evolving and relevant?
- Why are the young not attracted to religious life?
- How do we deal with communities that are not functioning well?
- What is the impact of the new consciousness on religious life for mission today?

As we gained wisdom from one another, we saw the need for creating sacred spaces of conversation in communities, to be daring in opening ourselves to the world, “to smell like the sheep” as we respond to the needs of the mission, to make radical decisions about ministries that are no longer relevant, and to take seriously our life of contemplation which leads to transformation.
We looked at our understanding of the vows during the time of our initial formation, how this has evolved, and the challenges of the new understanding of the vows as counter-cultural witness. Vows are means to free us for mission and we felt challenged to take some shifts and to undergo inner transformation in order to be more relevant.

**These are some of these new stirrings and challenges:**

The vows must be lived out from our deep consciousness of our interconnectedness with all of creation which give them more meaning and newness.

In this age of “throw away culture” poverty calls us to a deep valuing of creation.

Chastity calls us to deep friendships in community, to inclusivity.

Obedience requires of us deep listening to the voice within and to the inspirations of God. It entails dialogue and discernment. While there is acknowledgement that hierarchical structures still exist we are invited to move towards the holistic.

We are in search for new words to capture better our new understanding of the vows in a more dynamic way.

The witness value of our lives as religious gives us inspiration and hope. Remembering our own sisters who have lived authentically their Good Shepherd vocation gives us courage to continue amidst our struggles.
Elaine invited us to see St. Mary Euphrasia as an ordinary woman like us who had a vision. In a different context, we are again to ask, “Is God doing something new?” In Susan’s artwork, we saw a solid tree trunk indicating the foundational story of the Congregation with the new growth arising from our transformational journey. We see our mission as evolving guided by the Spirit.

It is a transforming journey where everyone is called to participate and is valued. We witness to an alternative culture of inclusion and compassion. As we enter into the “not knowing zone,” we are challenged to recognize the burning bush of the mystery of God today as we listen to the Spirit arising from the holy fire of chaos.

We were asked to identify the new seeds that were emerging in us. Many of us felt the invitation towards partnership in mission. As mission partners, sisters and lay, we are to grow in our Good Shepherd spirituality.

The arch dance which Elaine taught us aptly reflects this journey we are to undertake of opening new doors.