**Accola Programs & Opportunities Committee**
**Monday, October 12, 2026; 2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**
**Via Microsoft Teams**

**Attendees:** Karen Gervais; Mari Ann Graham; Anne Weyandt; Sandy Vargas

**Staff:** Andrée Aronson; Matt Halley

**Excused Absence:** Comfort Dondo; Colleen O'Malley, CSJ; Adele O'Sullivan, CJS; Lacy Sietsema

The Accola Programs and Opportunities Committee convened online at 2:30 p.m.

**DEI Statement:** Andree read the DEI statement.

**Spiritual Centering:** Anne led the committee in spiritual centering.

**Minutes:** The August minutes were presented for approval. Hearing no changes or corrections, Sandy moved to approve and all present members voted to approve the August minutes. The September minutes were presented for approval. Sandy moved to approve the September minutes. Andree reviewed a revision to the minutes. With this change, all present members voted in favor of approving the September minutes.

**Discussion: Wisdom Ways**
Matt provided a brief overview on where the Wisdom Ways project has been and where it currently stands. The Programs & Opportunities Committee discussed a proposed reimagining of Wisdom Ways that would preserve its core commitment to the intersection of spirituality and social justice while shifting from a traditional program model to a community-driven partnership model.

The emerging vision positions Wisdom Ways as Accola's "big open door"— a way for Accola to both welcome people in and engage directly with communities (neighbors would set the priorities). Rather than offering numerous staff-designed classes and workshops, Wisdom Ways would convene larger gatherings shaped and led collaboratively by community members, advocacy networks, thought leaders, and partners. These gatherings would build relationships, deepen shared understanding, and encourage action toward justice and systemic change.

The Programs and Opportunities Committee charged staff to develop a recommendation that is evaluated against the following four criteria:

- Reduce expenditures.
- Test new approaches, assess results, and adapt over time.
- Maintain a strong integration of spirituality and social justice.
- Center authentic partnerships and shared leadership.

Committee members emphasized that the previous model faced challenges because of declining participation, changing religious and demographic patterns, organizational silos, and an approach in which Accola largely acted as the expert and convener. The committee provided feedback about how to address these challenges.

The new vision for Wisdom Ways would reflect:

1. Wisdom Ways is Accola's open door.
2. Gatherings are exchanges of wisdom.
3. Accola facilitates access and reduces barriers.

The new model will emphasize the lived experience of the "dear neighbor," especially people connected to Accola's current programs, while also extending to broader communities and established social-justice networks. Partners would contribute in different ways—including social capital, relationships, expertise, outreach, facilities, or funding—with responsibilities and accountability shared rather than controlled solely by Accola. Accola's distinctive contribution would be the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph: love of God and neighbor without distinction, a commitment to unity, and the integration of spirituality with justice. The committee provided feedback on language that is empowering and inclusive.

The committee discussed/provided feedback on the following questions:

- What unique contributions does Accola bring to social justice action convenings?
- How do the perspectives of new US residents differ from those of established underrepresented communities?
- How is success measured?
- What role should Wisdom Ways and Accola play in event follow-up?

It was reported that other committees are separately considering finances, advancement and communications, mission, and approaches to organizational change. Additional focus groups, community consultation, and small-group discussions with Accola and Board members will help refine the framework.

The Programs and Opportunities Committee is aiming to confirm direction at the October Board meeting, continue developing the model through November, address communications and the potential community concerns associated with changing a beloved 30-year program, and reach a Board decision in December. Committee members expressed support of the reimagined proposal as consistent with the Sisters' charism, and as something that upholds Accola's commitment to partnership, experimentation, and meeting the needs of the time.

**Adjournment:** The committee adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lacy Sietsema, Accola