

MARIANITES OF HOLY CROSS
ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

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by

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The aspect of Associate Members, as we have heard, was something advocated and fostered by our founder, Fr. Basil Moreau. The Marianite Community has always had a strong association with the clergy and the laity.

Such association was called for by our founders, enabled by our charism of compassion, and enflashed through our spirit of hospitality. Nevertheless, it is only during the past 15 years that the reality of an organized program for Marianites of Holy Cross Associate Members has been slowly developing.

Associate Membership was first discussed by our Congregational Delegates at the General Chapter of 1973 and General Directive #33 was passed stating that: "A study of Associate Membership with all its implications will be made. When this study has been satisfactorily completed, the General Council is empowered to permit experimentation when request is made by a Province."

During the next two years, each province engaged in research studies, seeking and sharing information gleaned from other communities who already had in place various forms of Associate Membership. The research and development of the Marianite Associate Membership Program was entrusted to the Formation Team.

The vision for Associate Members evolved at that time was to provide Catholic women with opportunities to express their love for God and others as vital members of the Christian Community while at the same time sharing in the life, spirit, and work of the

Marianite Congregation.

Though they would not be bound by vows and would remain financially independent of the religious community, the Associates would participate in experiences of prayer, community life, and apostolic service along with the Sisters. In this way the Associate would receive the spiritual and moral support of the community to enable her to live the spirit of the community within the context of her chosen life style.

Guidelines for Associates developed by each Province indicated a desire that: Associates would be women, aged 20 or older; there be some type of contract between the Associate and the Community stipulating responsibilities of each, particularly in areas of finances, health insurance, education and other benefits.

There was also a strong emphasis on the need for a specific formation program for Associates: to study the history and spirit of the community; to deepen her spiritual life and assist in enfleshing gospel values in her lifestyle; to share in community experiences of prayer and celebration; and some form of apostolic involvement. This formation process was to include a probationary period with evaluations on both local and provincial levels.

The research, guidelines, and proposed procedures for experimentation were presented and approved at the General Council Meeting in July 1975. During the next few years, a tentative procedure for Associate Membership was initiated.

The Associate Program was placed under the auspices of the Formation Team. However, at this time, the Formation Program

itself was undergoing much fluctuation and revision, and a new Affiliate Phase was being introduced. There was much confusion on all sides between "Affiliates" and "Associates" with the result that the Associate Program floundered.

Somehow, the topic of Associate Membership was not included in the Agenda for the General Chapter of 1977. Thus it remained in a voluntary experimental stage until the Congregational Chapter of 1981 passed the following recommendation: "Each Province should implement a Program of Associate Membership as approved for experimentation at the General Council meeting of 1975."

Associate Membership then became the responsibility of the Provincial Administration rather than the Formation Team. Subsequently, each Province did implement some type of Associate Membership Program as Sr. Raymonde Marsollier notes in the Congregational Administration Report of 1985: "While each province has implemented a program of Associate Membership, it is experienced differently in each province. The results in number and type of commitment vary but the relationship of prayer is common to all."

The Program developed by the Louisiana Province offered several types of Associate Membership, one of which was shared community living. In 1984 a survey was made to surface Sisters and/or local communities willing to share their community life with interested Associates. A proposal was also prepared calling for the establishment of an Associate House where Marianites and lay women would live together. However, this has not yet been able to be implemented.

The restructuring mandated by the 1985 Congregational Chapter led to the merging of the four provinces of Canada, Louisiana, Moreau and Princeton into one Province which encompasses the whole continent of North America. Along with many other province programs and policies, the four separate Associate Membership Programs were adapted and combined into one.

The present Marianites of Holy Cross Associate Membership Program has 250 members enrolled in one or more of the 4 forms of association available.

The majority of our members have chosen the first and simplest form of association: UNION OF PRAYER - wherever they are, whether there are Marianites in the area or not, they daily join their prayers with ours.

At least 50 associates have chosen not only to offer prayer support, but also indicate a willingness to be UNITED IN CELEBRATION with us. Whenever possible, they join us for celebrations in local houses or on a province level.

Twenty five associates have chosen to be united with us as PARTNERS IN MINISTRY. These are persons who work with us in the same area of ministry and in many cases, their very presence allows us to continue a ministry which without their help we would not be able to sustain.

Another 20 members have indicated a desire to be COLLABORATORS IN MISSION, living in community with the Sisters as well as working with them in their ministry. Although a program has been developed for the Collaborators in Mission phase, resources are

not yet available to allow us to begin implementing this.

All Associates have received prayer cards and information about our founder and our community heritage. They are in our daily prayers and are especially remembered on their birthdays and in a monthly Mass. They receive a Quarterly Newsletter keeping them posted on events and inviting them to be part of our celebrations and Days of Prayer.

The present concept from which we operate views Associate Members as persons who desire to be more closely united to the life, spirit and mission of the Marianites of Holy Cross. Associates are Christian women and men, single and married, laity as well as members of other communities, and some former Marianites, who commit themselves to live, pray and serve others in the spirit of Holy Cross.

Associates, wherever they may be, are united daily with the Marianites through prayerful support of the members and the mission of the Congregation.

REFERENCES

1. Minutes of General Chapter Meeting of 1973
2. Report of Louisiana Province at General Council Meeting of 1975
3. Minutes of General Chapter 1981
4. Report of Congregational Superior 1985