

Chapter 4: Our Associate Relationship

VISION STATEMENT

As Associates of the Sisters of St. Francis,
we yield to the Spirit who forms us
in the Gospel values of
prayer, simplicity, poverty, charity and justice,
as modeled in times past by Francis and Clare, and
as lived in modern times by Mother Alfred Moes
and the women who follow her today.
We believe that we are part of a new creation
of Associates and vowed members
which is coming to birth in the Church,
in the world, and in this particular Congregation

COMMITMENT STATEMENT

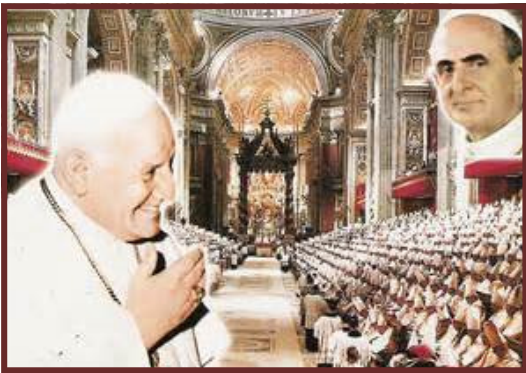
In solidarity with the
Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate,
we commit ourselves through relationship
to living more fully the mystery of community
where we, as Associates,
though separated by time, space and lifestyles,
are drawn together through prayer, and
bound together through mutual support.
As baptized Christians, we commit ourselves
to rebuild the Church in the image of Jesus,
and to discover the presence of the Spirit in the world.
Rejoicing in the Franciscan Clarean charism
which strengthens and encourages us,
we commit ourselves
to deepen and celebrate our faith and
to en flesh the ideals of the Gospel
and the spiritualities of Francis and Clare
among our families, friends and
all those with whom we interact daily.
As advocates with and for the poor and oppressed,
wherever they may be,
we commit ourselves to work for peace, justice
and the integrity of creation.

Reflecting on the Associates' Vision and Commitment Statements

Read the Vision and Commitment statements out loud, slowly, hearing the words, repeating phrases that talk to you.

- 1. How do you see Associates being “part of a new creation”? societally?*
- 2. How do you see yourself as “part of a new creation”? What could it actually mean in your own world—“family, friends and all those we interact with daily”...?*
- 3. What does “rebuild the Church” mean in our era? in your life?*
- 4. Which part of the commitment is natural to what you tend to do?*
- 5. Which part of the commitment will be more challenging?*
- 6. What meaning will this commitment have for you?*

HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP



Vatican II called all Christians to a universal holiness by virtue of their Baptism. Women and men in religious life set about rediscovering their roots and the lives of their founders. Out of this emerged new and creative ways of being vowed religious. The laity responded to the Holy Spirit and began to minister in ways that had never been open to them before. Into this bubbling pot of graced energy, the paths of many religious and laity began to cross. As they worked together, prayed together and responded to the times, some lay people, in small numbers at first, began to request of their vowed religious co-workers or friends, a way to join them as a kind of lay companion. They felt a desire to share and learn more about the unique spirituality each Congregation espouses, its charism, its particular gift to the Church.

Soon the numbers grew, and today there are more than 45,000 Associates in North America. What is called the Associate Movement is growing around the world.

The Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate (Joliet Franciscans) welcomed their first Associate over 40 years ago and presently there are over 150 Joliet Franciscan Associates across the United States and in the interior of Brazil where the Sisters have served for the last 50 years.

The laity responded to the Holy Spirit and began to minister in ways that had never been open to them before.

By sharing the Congregation's charism and mission with the Associates, Sisters broaden the scope of their efforts to live the Gospel of Jesus and are mutually enriched through prayer, friendship and service. The Joliet Franciscans have a saying, "Where one of us is, we all are". Associates extend the mission of the Congregation in a unique way, especially as Franciscans.

In 1974, Margaret Guider became our first Associate. She went to serve with our Sisters in Brazil as a volunteer lay missionary. Upon her return to the United States she entered the Congregation. During the 1970s, a number of former members of the Congregation became Associates. Some were married and raising families, but all had remained Franciscans "at heart." It was during this time that the first Director of Associates was appointed.

Starting in the 1980s the demographics began to change significantly. Individuals interested in becoming Associates came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were lay women, some lay men, some ordained deacons or priests; others were family members, and an increasing number were those who had labored alongside our Joliet Franciscan Sisters as co-workers in schools, parishes, prayer groups, hospitals, retirement homes, offices, residence halls, and faith-based organizations. Regardless of age, background, location, or form of life, the one thing that our Associates shared in common was a strong attraction to the Franciscan spirit of prayer, community and ministry that they witnessed and experienced in their encounters and relationships with one or more Joliet Franciscans. Even though some had never been in Joliet, they were drawn to the spirituality, mission and vision of the Franciscan Sisters they knew and loved. Today, the attraction remains and it is not only Sisters but Associates who witness the charism that calls others.

Since the beginning of the Associate program, over 210 individuals have been welcomed into the relationship. Among the 150 Associates that are active today, 128 live in 14 different states across the United States. Twenty-two Associates live in the state of Goiás Brazil, South America. Although the number changes as Candidates join and Associates die, on average, the percentages remain the same: 84% are women and 14% are men. Five former Associates have become vowed members; some Associates have died and a few have chosen not to renew.

In 2004, ten individuals from our missions in Brazil were welcomed as Associates. Since that time 22 Brazilian men and women have made their commitments as Associates. Associates in Brazil call themselves *Collaborators* because the word *associate* in Portuguese means *member*. Canonically, Associates are not *members* of the Congregation.

The Brazilians Sisters and Associates live close to each other and interact together frequently, often daily, from attending Mass, to ministering, to eating together.

The governance of the Brazilians is directed by the Central Governing Board while the ministries, including the Associate Relationship, are managed by the Brazilians.



PROFILE OF AN ASSOCIATE



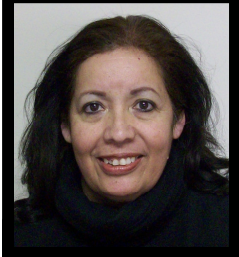
Coming from diverse backgrounds, our Associates are partners in mission who truly represent the world church. Aligning themselves in different ways with the vision, goals and values of the Sisters, they participate in God's mission by responding to the universal call to holiness. In their following of Jesus Christ, they share in the spiritual tradition of Francis and Clare as they embrace the missionary legacy of Mother Alfred Moes, the Congregation's foundress, and the Gospel witness of her Sisters – yesterday, today, and tomorrow.



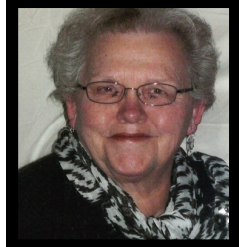
Associates have a common desire to deepen their spirituality through their relationship with the Sisters and other Associates. They continue to live their lives fully with family, work, and social obligations. Associates and Sisters meet in small and large gatherings and keep in touch in creative ways as Associates adapt the Congregation's vision, mission and charism to their own life situations.



Most are lay women and men, some of whom are married, widowed or divorced, some have never married. A few Associates are permanent deacons or priests. Women and men interested in applying to become Associates must be persons who:



- are at least 18 years of age or older.
- are of a Christian faith.
- desire to be in a formal relationship with the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate.
- remain financially and legally independent of the Congregation.



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to deepen their spirituality
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REASONS FOR BECOMING AN ASSOCIATE

Over the years, from large and small gatherings, conversations and more formal presentations, a common thread has emerged from Associates when asked why they became Associates. They seek a deeper relationship with God. In turn, Associates strongly desire to share in that journey with a Congregation whom, over 150 years, has lived the mission and spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare.

ENGAGING WITH THE CONGREGATION

Associates share in the mission and ministry of the Congregation.

Associates become a witness to Franciscan peace, joy and compassion.

Associates commit to daily prayer and meditation.

Associates gather in small and large groups with Sisters and other Associates.

Associates celebrate special events with Associates and Sisters.

Associates attend days of ongoing spiritual and personal renewal.



Through prayer, correspondence or visits, a Candidate forms a special relationship with a Companion, a Sister or Associate. This relationship is vital during initial orientation and may continue as long as the Companion and Associate desire. The Associate (and Candidates) may volunteer in Congregational ministries and services such as participating in a mission experience, peace and justice committee, environment sustaining program, and various other activities. Associates (and Candidates) are welcome at Congregation celebrations, special events and prayer services.



Every organization has its story. The pages of this manual describe our Associate Relationship. The Associate Movement is linked to Vatican II when Religious Congregations were challenged to look at their ministries differently. Many, like ours, expanded their ministries to foreign countries; we chose Brazil. In turn, Congregations opened their arms to embrace lay people, sharing their charism, in intimate, meaningful ways.

Reflecting on the Associate Relationship

- 1. In what way do you align with the profile of an Associate? How are you the same? How are you different?*
- 2. How do you see yourself engaging with the Congregation? What would you find hard to do? What would you want to add? How do you expect that these engagements will advance your spirituality?*
- 3. What concerns do you have about introducing this level of activity in your life?*