

*IHM ASSOCIATES*



*from IHM Fingertip Facts  
revised 2006*

**Covenant of Association**

*Giving thanks to God who calls us into closer association and out of a mutual desire to further the reign of God in our hearts and world, we pause humbly to request a blessing on this solemn commitment*

I,

intend by this covenant to commit myself  
as an Associate of the IHM Community  
in order to deepen and strengthen  
my living the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
through conscious association,  
and participation in the Life and Mission of  
the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary  
for a period of \_\_\_\_\_ years.

SAMPLE

I pledge to share with them the support  
of my personal interest and concern,  
to receive them with warm hospitality, and  
to open my life to the transforming value  
of their friendship.

With this covenant we, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary  
receive into our midst

as an Associate of our Congregation in  
\_\_\_ prayer, \_\_\_ community, \_\_\_ ministry.

We accept and rejoice in her commitment.  
We join with her in loving support and pray that  
our association will challenge each of us to a  
deeper living of Christian community and Gospel Service  
in the spirit and charism of the IHM tradition.

We pledge to share with her the support  
and strength that comes from affiliation with a community,  
to receive her with warm hospitality and to open our lives  
to the transforming value of her friendship.

*Recognizing this covenant as a mutual and precious gift, we choose in all ways to reverence the bond it establishes among us.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
IHM Associate

\_\_\_\_\_  
IHM Associate Companion

\_\_\_\_\_  
IHM Associate Coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_  
IHM Leadership Council

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**IHM ASSOCIATES**

APPLICATION FOR IHM ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Lifestyle: ( ) Single ( ) Married ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion/Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Which IHM Associate relationship(s) do you desire?

\_\_\_\_Prayer \_\_\_\_Community \_\_\_\_Ministry \_\_\_\_Unsure

What draws you to consider an IHM Associate relationship?

REFERENCES **SAMPLE**

Please include at least one IHM Sister whom you know personally. Other references could include your present employer, co-worker, pastor, friend, etc. Please do not include family members. These references will be confidential.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_

On separate paper, please provide a 1-3 page autobiographical sketch. This might include your personal, family and religious background, experience with IHM community, work experience, leisure activities, and any other information you may wish to share. Please return this form, your autobiographical sketch and, if possible, a photo of yourself to:

IHM Associate Office, 610 West Elm Ave., Monroe, MI 48162-7909

**Overview**

Established in 1977 in response to requests from both inside and outside the Congregation, the IHM associate reality invites persons into a formalized relationship with the IHM community based on shared values and a recognized desire for mutual enrichment. By its very nature, it expands the options for connection with the Congregation beyond that of vowed membership and opens up possibilities for exploring Christian partnership among a more broadly based community of persons.

Having learned from the experience and desires of those who have chosen to journey with us, the associate relationship has been refined to include three areas of association: prayer, community and ministry. While not mutually exclusive, these categories permit associates to clarify for themselves and for the Congregation the primary focus of their involvement. The specifics of each associate relationship are expressed through an individualized covenant of commitment.

Both the birth and the development of IHM associates is rooted in the experience of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. The rising consciousness of interdependence on personal and global levels, the restructuring of religious communities and re-identification of religious experience, the awakening of an adult spirituality among Christian laity, the need for conscious bonding in a world of increasing fluidity and alienation . . . these and many other factors are a part of the world reality out of which the associate movement has grown and to which it responds.

At heart, the associates are recognized as the gift of God’s creative spirit among us. The insights and decisions to which their gifts will draw us personally and communally will become clear only as we evolve together into the future.

**Policies and Guidelines**

Since the inception of the IHM associate reality in 1972, and since the commitments of associates, which began in 1977, associates have been recognized by the Congregation as an outpouring of the Spirit among us. Great care has been taken to respond to the Spirit’s lead and not block the Spirit’s creative work. These policies and guidelines are offered in the hope of assisting rather than stifling the development of associate relationships within the Congregation. Their intent, then, is to articulate our present reality without limiting our evolving vision.

1. IHM associate commitment establishes the context for a formalized, non-vowed relationship between an individual and the IHM Congregation.
2. The intent of this associate relationship is to provide an experience of mutuality: the associate offers to the Congregation a pledge of ongoing support, a shared commitment to faith and gospel living, and the investment of personal time and talent. Together with ongoing mutual support, the Congregation offers to the associate the opportunity to deepen prayer life, to strengthen the bonds of friendship, and/or to share opportunities for ministry.
3. Associate relationship is formalized through an individualized covenant and is established for a specified period of time, normally one to three years. The end of this time period signals the opportunity for mutual review of experience and the possible renewal of commitment of one to five years.
4. A period of orientation, normally at least nine months, precedes associate commitment. During this time, the applicant is enabled to develop a deeper understanding of the IHM Congregation, to explore mutually enriching relationships, and to clarify expectations and desires. Request for application to IHM association is made to the associate coordinator. During the orientation process, the applicant is assisted by an IHM companion.
5. Many former members of the IHM Congregation have been welcomed as associates. However, in respect for mutual freedom and to ensure clarification of relationships, former members of the Congregation are not eligible for the associate experience until two years after leaving the Congregation.
6. Each IHM associate is asked to choose one or more of the three focuses of her/his involvement with the Congregation:
  - a. **Prayer Association** – identification with the IHM charism of prayer through a bond of prayerful interdependence with the Congregation. Prayer association establishes a reciprocal commitment to prayer: the associate praying for and with the Congregation, the Congregation praying for and with the associate. This relationship supports spiritual growth and enrichment on both sides and offers to the associate increased opportunities, if desired, for growth in spirituality, shared prayer experiences and communication with specific prayer intentions. The possible development of a “prayer partnership” with a retired or infirm sister is a treasured part of prayer association which requires a mutual

manifests an enthusiasm for the associate presence within the IHM community.

reflects and shares on the Orientation Journal with the candidate.

maintains communication with the coordinator.

keeps contact with the associate candidate by means of correspondence, personal visits, and phone calls and is willing to share opportunities for personal growth with the candidate, e.g., community celebrations, days of renewal, special speakers, etc.

acquaints the associate candidate with the Motherhouse.

invites mission units to extend invitations to the associate for group meetings, prayer and celebrations.

participates with the coordinator in the review of the relationship between the candidate and the companion as well as between the candidate and the Congregation.

discusses with the candidate and the coordinator the terms of the individual’s covenant.

participates in the covenant celebration of the candidate.

encourages the new associate to develop many relationships within the IHM community while remaining in some contact with the new associate after the orientation phase is completed.

4. Ongoing Association
- According to IHM congregational guidelines and specification of Associate Covenant.
  - Periodic reflection/review with possibility for commitment renewal.

Some specific questions often asked regarding the IHM association are answered here for your information:

The Associate Covenant is individualized, meaning that each person's commitment expresses her or his own interests/desires for a mutually enriching relationship with the Congregation.

The length of commitment for new associates is normally one to three years. Associates renewing their contracts can choose a span of one to five years for their commitment time.

The orientation process, while individualized, normally takes at least nine months. There is no desire to rush into commitments, but rather to appreciate and flow with the Spirit's own timing.

### ***IHM Companion for Associate Candidacy***

A companion for an associate candidate is one who shares the spiritual journey of the one seeking association with the IHM Congregation. Once begun, the initial relationship between the IHM companion and the associate candidate is a special one. The companion, especially during the journal experience, meets regularly with the candidate to explore such topics as the life, history and work of the Congregation, prayer, call and community, and to respond to the questions the candidate might have.

The companion:

is usually a vowed member of the Congregation.

is knowledgeable or willing to learn about the IHM associate reality, history, procedures and policies.

commitment to prayer but does not necessitate frequent presence at community gatherings. While prayer associates are a welcome sight at the Motherhouse or local houses, this form of association is possible with little physical interaction. Much effective spiritual dialogue can happen by phone or mail, and it is the bond of prayer which holds us together.

- b. *Community Association*** – identification with the IHM charism of communal life through shared life experience.

Community association focuses on interpersonal interaction within the framework of Christian companionship. By establishing concrete bonds of friendship and shared activity, it seeks to provide for all involved a deepened experience of supportive community to which we are all called by the Gospel.

A community associate normally makes a commitment to share ongoing social interaction with a local IHM house or mission unit. In addition, she/he is supported by periodic meetings among the associates themselves and is welcomed as a participant in larger IHM gatherings. Shared experiences through volunteer service with or among IHMs is also available for those who desire. It is the open acceptance of one another as disciples of Jesus which enlivens and sustains the community association.

This form of association requires a commitment to some physical presence, participation and solidarity, according to the individualized covenant of each associate. The mutuality of sharing, while requiring an investment of time and energy, bears fruit in the enriched Christian lives of all involved.

- c. *Ministry Association*** – identification with the IHM charism of extending the redemptive mission of Jesus through collaboration in ministry.

For some, the ministry form of association implies working alongside IHMs in a specific service commitment. For others, it means a bonding with IHMs who share ministry in another geographical location. For all, it seeks to provide a deepened experience of support and collaboration as we strive to share our ministries in the redeeming mission of Christ.

Ministry associates enter into an active relationship of support and sharing with their IHM ministry partners. Opportunity for exchanging resources, discussing concerns, and/or combining gifts and expertise provides a

mutually enriching base for sustaining ministry involvement. For some, the possibility of shared living opens a further door towards supportive bonding.

Ministry association requires a serious commitment of time and active involvement in some form of public Christian ministry. Normally, it is chosen by persons already actively engaged in ministry who desire to give and receive support through IHM association. The fruits of the ministry association experience include a mutual recognition of expanded scope and effectiveness beyond what any one of us could achieve alone.

7. Associates and vowed members of the Congregation mutually enrich one another. However, because associates are not members of the IHM Congregation, in either ecclesial or civil law, they do not hold the rights and responsibilities or the financial obligations and benefits of the members of the Congregation. Associates remain responsible for their own financial support.
8. The Congregation is encouraged to welcome associates into participation in assemblies and representational groups (mission units, etc.), where their involvement in discussion can contribute significantly to the shaping of IHM attitudes and decisions. By the nature of their non-vowed commitment to the Congregation, associates do not have formal voting privileges and do not serve as official representatives to governmental structures within the Congregation. They are welcome to submit proposals to governmental structures in conjunction with IHMs as co-sponsors of each proposal.

One associate is elected by the associate members to act as the Associate Representative to the Coordinating Council. That individual, while not a voting member and not a representative for all associates in the same sense that a Mission Unit representative represents her Mission Unit, shares in all of the discussions and helps keep alive an awareness of the vitality and importance of the associate presence within the community.

9. IHM associates play an active part in the on-going life of the Congregation. Their participation in IHM meetings, their involvement in committee work, and their presence and support in good times and bad are treasured assets to the Congregation. In the same way, members of the Congregation seek to stand beside their associates in the unfolding realities of their lives. A spirit of openness and sharing on the part of all encourages mutually beneficial relationships as together we seek to respond to the call of God.

*Approved by SSIHM Congregational  
Governing Board, November 1986*

## ***Becoming an Associate***

### **Who is an IHM associate?**

Each associate is a gift of the Spirit to the IHM Congregation as our bonding together (partnership) in the mission of Jesus (discipleship) creates the fruits of mutual enrichment and benefit. The mission of Jesus benefits as our partnering together impacts more lives with the Spirit's presence (gospel values, peacemaking efforts, personal growth). We touch the future in terms of perpetuating the charism of the IHM Congregation by encouraging each person to be a compassionate, healing, liberating presence in the world of today.

### **What the process involves.**

The formal process of involvement as an IHM associate proceeds in four stages:

1. Application Process
  - Completion of application form. (See sample form.)
  - Gathering of letters of reference. (The applicant provides names; coordinator sends request form.)
  - Interview between applicant and associate coordinator.
2. Orientation Process
  - Selection of IHM companion on the journey.
  - Reflection and sharing based on Orientation Journal.
  - Involvement in IHM experiences to develop/deepen IHM relationships.
  - Periodic gatherings with associate coordinator and other associates.
3. Formalization of Commitment
  - Shared discernment with associate coordinator regarding readiness.
  - Development of desired Associate Covenant.
  - Affirmation of intent by member of IHM Leadership Council.
  - Signing of covenant and celebration of commitment.