



Deep Faith. Courageous Spirit. Action for Justice.

Welcome!

We welcome you as an IHM Associate Candidate.

May this process be a rich time for you.

This journal is provided to assist you during your candidacy. You are asked to read and reflect on it. Since each person comes to this relationship with unique life experiences of IHM community, church and God, you and your companion(s) will need to discover as you move along to what extent the journal will be helpful as a format for your times together. Often, it will simply provide a basis for reflection.

We invite you to participate in events for candidates and associates, and to build relationships as you further develop your affiliation with the IHM sisters and associates. As you move through this time of spirit-seeking-Spirit, please be in touch if we can assist you in any way.

IHM Associate Office

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Rev. 1/21/2019 3:40 PM

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Table of Contents

Called By God	5	Going Deeper –	
Going Deeper –		Community –	
History of your faith journey	6	Knowing and Being Known	51
My Faith Story	7	Community: Unity in Diversity	51
Scriptural Images of Being Called	8	Community: Common Life	52
Called by Name	9	Community of Goods	53
The God Who Calls	10	Characteristic Virtues	53
Called into IHM Association	12	Co-responsibility and Service	53
Called into Prayer	13	Community, Authority, Conflict	54
Taking Stock –		Community: Concentric Circles	55
History of your prayer journey	13	The Associate Relationship:	
Personal inventory of prayer	14	A Sacred Trust	57
Prayer of the Heart	15	Policies and Guidelines	58
Alphonsian Prayer	17	Three Dimensions of Association	58
Praying with St. Alphonsus	19	What About the Future?	58
Teresa of Jesus: Doctor of Prayer	20	IHM Associate Program –	
IHMs and Prayer	22	Policies and Guidelines 11/86	59
Exploring the Vision	23	Having Come This Far	62
Going Deeper –		Formalization of Commitment	64
Praying with Scripture	24	Writing the Associate Covenant	64
Further Suggestions		Covenant of Association Sample	66
for Scriptural Prayer	25	Shaping a Ritual of Commitment	67
Praying through Drawing	26	Ongoing Associate Life	67
Other Prayer Notes	27	Excerpts from the Constitutions	68
Many Styles of Prayer	28	Chapter 1:	
Called into Mission	31	Commitment to Jesus Christ	
A Particular Focus	33	and His Redeeming Mission	69
Options for the Poor,		Chapter 2:	
an Attitude of Mind	35	Commitment through Ministry	
A Prayer of Mission	36	To Participate in the Mission	
The IHM Experience	37	of Jesus Christ	70
Going Deeper –		Chapter 3:	
Ministry – a journey with a past		A Commitment to be a	
and a future	39	Christian Community	73
A Special Word For and About		Chapter 4:	
Women	40	Commitment to Prayer,	
<i>Yesterday’s Dangerous Vision</i>	41	Reflection, and the Celebration	
Assembly/Chapter Directions	44	of the Eucharist	77
IHM Affirmations of Assembly 1987	44	Chapter 6:	
Going Deeper	45	Heritage of the Constitution	78
Called into Community	47	Candidate Request for Association	81
What the Scriptures Say	49	Companion Recommendation	83
The IHM Perspective	50		

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Called By God

Your interest in the IHM Associate relationship does not exist in isolation. It is intimately connected with the present circumstances of your life; with the inner realm of beliefs, concerns, and desires out of which you relate to the world--and your past history of experiences, relationships, successes and discouragement. At heart, it is part of a life-long journey in which you are seeking to respond to God's call--the process through which She/He has been consistently showering you with invitations, seeking to lead you into an ever fuller experience of life in relationship to yourself, to others and to God's own reality.

If you have been baptized, that sacramental encounter has established the basic direction of God's call to you. Through the waters of death and rebirth, you have been united with Christ in an exodus journey from slavery to freedom, from sin to grace. It is the risen Christ himself who leads you on the path; the Spirit alive within you provides you with the ability to respond--bit by bit--to God's transforming love.

Lord, Jesus,
you call us out of darkness
into the light of faith...
Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus,
you call us out of discouragement and fear,
and give us a Spirit of hope...
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus,
you call us out of bitterness,
selfishness, and indifference,
and teach us to love...
Lord have mercy.

What Do You Say?

- 1) Are you used to thinking of yourself as being called by God? What feelings/thoughts/images/ memories does this awareness raise within you?
- 2) How would you describe this time in your life, which sets the context for your interest in the IHM associate relationship?
- 3) How will you know if involvement as an IHM associate is really part of God's call to you?

Going Deeper

History of your faith journey

Faith, like life itself, is lived forward but seems best understood backward.

Life is dynamic, with ups and downs, peaks and valleys. Frequently, in order to reach the peaks, much arid and rocky ground must be traveled. Allow yourself to acknowledge all kinds of terrain in your journey, knowing that with God absolutely nothing is wasted. God uses every event to tell us of Her/His fidelity.

In silence, feel the movement of your life. Let it come to you in images, memories, similes and metaphors. List events from your life that spontaneously come to your awareness, some painful, some joyful, without concern for chronological order.

Then, beside each event, write your feelings about it.

Reflect on God's presence with you in each event: supporting, guiding, celebrating, sustaining...inviting you now to see Her/Him in that event. Can you see in these events the unfolding enfleshment of your baptismal call? Use these stepping stones as a skeleton from which you write your faith-story on the next page. (Add more pages, if you desire.)

My Faith Story

**“We live by remembrances and by story, our source
of being energized. Without a past to remember,
there’s not a future worth dreaming about.”**

**Conversion & Discipleship
by Rev. Thomas Clark**

Scriptural Images of Being Called

Take special note of how these persons (or other persons in Sacred Scripture) had an experience of God that compelled them to risk everything in response to the awesome word spoken to them.

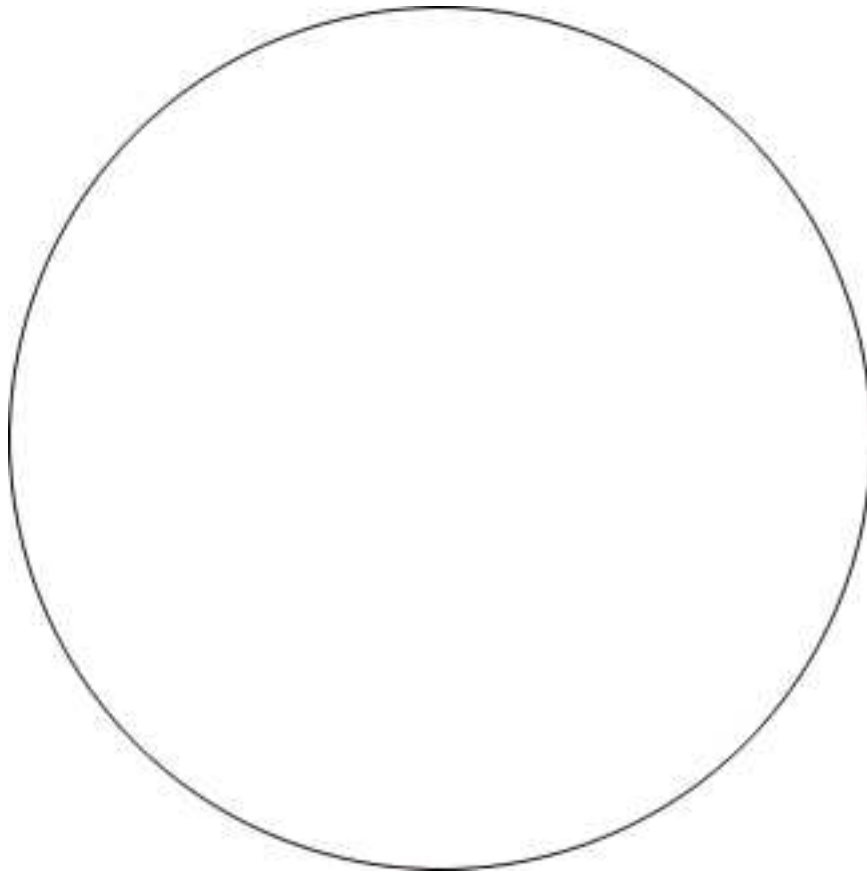
Genesis 12: 1-9	...the call of Abraham
Exodus 3: 1-14	...the call of Moses
Esther 4: 1-15	...the call of Esther
Luke 1: 26-28	...the call of Mary
Mark 2:13-17	...the call of Levi
Acts 9: 1-19	...the call of Saul (Paul)

- 1) How did they recognize the call as coming from God?
- 2) How could they determine what it was they were being asked to do?
- 3) Once they understood in some way what God wanted, what possible assurance did they have that things would “work out”?
- 4) What similarities do you see in the stories? What differences?
- 5) In which of these stories do you recognize yourself?
- 6) Are you familiar with other “modern day persons” who experienced a sense of call from God?

Called By Name

Our name, like the promise of our Baptism, unfolds in meaning throughout the journey of our lives, by the experiences we have and by how we respond to these experiences. In a very real way, we “grow into” who we become. The scriptural assurance that God calls us “each by name” suggests the intimate knowledge God has of each of us, the uniqueness of our own faith journey, and the uniqueness of ourselves in relation to God’s call.

In the circle below, write your own name. Then, in either words or pictures, create in the circle a collage of the unique YOU which this name represents...the qualities, life roles, inner desires, etc. which have become part of the meaning of your name.



Talk to God about this reflection experience, the feelings/awareness with which it leaves you. Can you see the hand of God or feel God’s presence in the unfolding reality of your name? Do you like who you are becoming?

The God Who Calls

- 1) What do you recall as your earliest image of God?

- 2) What other images have had a marked impression on you at some time in your life?

Scripture reveals God in many different ways: Father, Mother, Creator, Friend, Lover, Spirit – to name only a few. At this time, how do you see God? Which of these faces are you most comfortable with? On the line between the contrasting aspects of God mark an X where you feel most comfortable:

A stern, judgmental God	_____ / _____ /	A kind, loving God
A God controlling the world and people's lives from without	_____ / _____ /	A God living and acting within people and events, cooperating with them
A God of might and majesty desiring our obedience and worship	_____ / _____ /	A God who is a loving parent whom we can address as "Daddy" or "Mommy"
A God described by attributes such as all- powerful, all- merciful, etc.	_____ / _____ /	A God as seen in His/Her actions in the lives of people
A God who never changes	_____ / _____ /	A God who seems to change
A God whom we can never really understand	_____ / _____ /	A God whom we can understand and describe

Adapted from ***Becoming a Catholic***,
by James Killgallon, pp.16-17

After filling in your responses, step back from this exercise and try to identify the feelings aroused by your thoughts about God. If talking to God does not satisfy these feelings, you may want to write them down to discuss with a spiritual companion whose knowledge of God you trust.

Some Scriptural images with which you may want to spend some time in prayer:

God the POTTER, who firmly yet gently molds people into His/Her own image...

Genesis 2: 4-7, Jeremiah 18: 1-9

God the PHYSICIAN, who heals the sick and suffering...

Genesis 2:18-22, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 6: 1-6

God the SHIELD, the ROCK, the FORTRESS, the DEFENDER, who reaches out and protects people...

Genesis 15:1-6, Psalms 18:1-4, Psalm 31:1-9

God the SHEPHERD and HOST who cares for his people/guests...

Psalm 23: 1-6, Psalm 36:6-10, Matthew 18:10-14

God the MOTHER who loves and nurtures her people...

Hosea 11:1-4, Isaiah 49:14-15, Matthew 23:37-38

Adapted from ***Becoming Catholic***
by James Kilgallon, p 34

Are there other scriptures that reveal God's face for you?

Called into IHM Association

Spend some time before God in prayer, reflecting back over your interest in the IHM associate relationship.

- 1) In what ways would involvement as an IHM associate grow out of, and further enrich, the faith journey to which you have been called by Baptism?
- 2) How does it fit in with your other “stepping stones”?
- 3) Do you expect that your participation as an associate would add to, detract from, or leave unchanged the meaning of your name?
- 4) What images or awareness of God do you imagine are “alive and well” within the IHM Congregation?
- 5) How would you like your involvement as an associate to affect or be affected by these images?
- 6) What are you willing to offer the congregation, to help it in responding to God’s call?
- 7) What would you like to ask of the congregation, to help you in responding to God’s call?

Called into Prayer

We experience God's call. We seek to respond. As we acknowledge these movements in our lives, we become more deeply conscious of a dynamic relationship between God and ourselves. Our understanding and experience of prayer shape the tone or "color" of that relationship.

Prayer is, most simply, communication with the Beloved. As such, it is fundamental to every spirituality, just as communication is fundamental to every human relationship. The method of prayer may differ from person to person and from group to group; but commitment to prayer is necessary for anyone who is growing into the life of God.

Most of us received our first education in prayer at a very early age. Our "prayer attitudes" and our "prayer skills" have developed from the people and experiences of our lives. If our history has included active church involvement, then we have developed not only personal prayer styles, but communal patterns of prayer as well. By personality, we may find ourselves more attracted to specific types of prayer. All of us, whatever our age, are still learners in the school of prayer, and will be as long as our human journey compels us onward in search of the Divine.

Taking Stock

History of your prayer journey

As you think about prayer in your life...

- 1) How did you pray alone and/or with others as a child? (e.g., what are some concrete "prayers" that you said, devotions in which you participated, etc.)
- 2) What feelings did prayer have for you as a child?
- 3) Has your prayer grown or changed since childhood? How would you describe these changes? What seemed to cause the changes in your prayer?
- 4) What about your prayer has not changed? Why?

Personal Inventory of Prayer

For you, right now in your life, prayer is more like...

___ a tedious burden

OR

___ a pleasant adventure

___ talking with a friend

___ dwelling in mystery

___ concentrated attention

___ frantic distractions

___ a head journey

___ a heart journey

___ a part of each day

___ an occasional endeavor

___ connected to life

___ a separate world

___ being at rest

___ searching for something

___ saying words

___ total involvement

How do you feel about your prayer life right now?

How does it make a difference to you if you pray or not?

How does your prayer relate to your daily life experience?

What do you most want, right now, in terms of your prayer?

Prayer of the Heart

The root of prayer is *interior silence*. Both Hebrew and Christian scriptures are filled with passages that pertain to silence in prayer. Hebrew Scripture speaks about finding God in silence. The psalmist says “Be still and know that I am God” (46:10) and Zechariah says “Be silent everyone in the presence of the Lord” (2:13). In the beautiful story of the prophet Elijah, the Holy One says to Elijah, “Go outside and stand on the mountain; God will be passing by.” A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing the rocks, but God was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake fire blazed up but God was not in the fire. Then came a gentle breeze and a still small voice and God spoke to Elijah in the silence. (1 Kings 19:11-13)

In Christian scripture we find the words of Jesus, “The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say, ‘Look, here it is’ or ‘There it is’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21) Jesus also says, “When you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the street corners so that others will see them. Amen, I say to you, they have their reward. But, when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to the Beloved in secret. And the Beloved, who sees in secret, will reward you. In praying, do not babble on as the hypocrites who think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your heavenly Abba already knows what you need before you ask.” (Matt 6:5-8)

There is a deeper way of prayer than words. We can seek God in the silence and stillness of our own hearts in daily periods of prayer. In ages past, coming to an inner silence and stillness in prayer was referred to as contemplative prayer. This kind of prayer enjoys an ancient and venerable history in the Christian tradition. In contemplative prayer we step aside and allow the Holy Spirit to pray in us. St. Paul gives us a further hint of what prayer is all about when he states, “We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit prays within us.” (Rom. 8:26)

Every age has its Christian contemplatives; women and men, teachers and leaders from various countries and cultures who emphasized contemplative silence in prayer. Over the centuries, ways of cultivating contemplative prayer has been called by various names corresponding to the different forms it has taken. At various times this kind of prayer has been known as Pure Prayer, Prayer of the Heart, Prayer of Faith, Prayer of Simplicity and Prayer of Simple Regard. In our time, we speak of Christian Meditation, a method attributed to John Cassian, who lived in the fourth century, and Centering Prayer, based on the fourteenth century *Cloud of the Unknowing* and the teachings of John of the Cross.

Thomas Merton, the great American Cistercian monk and writer, came to realize that contemplation was not an esoteric call but a universal call to everyone because of our basic humanity. He came to understand also that the contemplative call for Christians flows from baptism. In *What is Contemplation*, Merton writes,

The seeds of contemplation are planted in every Christian soul at Baptism. But seeds must grow and develop before you reap the harvest. There are thousands of Christians walking the face of the earth bearing in their bodies the infinite God of whom they know practically nothing. The seeds of contemplation have been planted in these souls, but they merely lie dormant. They do not germinate.

It is helpful to remember that it is Christ who takes the initiative in deepening our prayer and it is Christ who extends the invitation. The call to silent prayer is a gift and a grace from the Beloved: "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts". (Ps. 95:7-8)

Alphonsian Prayer

While there have been many teachers of prayer within the development of Christianity, the IHM Congregation treasures in a particular way the writings and example of St. Alphonsus Ligouri. St. Alphonsus lived in Italy during the 18th century and founded the Redemptorist Congregation of priests (whose rule and spirit were adapted to shape the original IHM constitutions). St. Alphonsus was a deeply gifted man in many ways--writer, scholar, confessor, painter, musician, poet. He has been proclaimed a Doctor ("teacher") of the church for his writings on Moral Theology.

St. Alphonsus taught that prayer is accessible to everyone, not just to the elite. The grace to pray, he insisted, is always given to every person, and through prayer all other graces are attainable. Prayer, then, is the great means of salvation for people in every walk of life and in every culture.

For St. Alphonsus, as for all of us, attitudes toward prayer were directly affected by his understanding (image) of God. St. Alphonsus truly understood the Holy One to be a God of Love:

- pouring blessings upon us through all the gifts of creation,
- pardoning and overlooking our sinfulness long before we ask for mercy,
- sending Jesus as Redeemer, making visible the full outpouring of God's compassion and
- longing for closeness with us and always offering us the grace to pray.

**"Realize that God does not wish to be feared as a terrible tyrant
but wishes to be treated as a most affectionate friend..."**

**Therefore, God desires that we speak often
with familiarity and with no restrictions.**

Converse with God with the greatest possible confidence.

**In return, God will speak with you--
not that you will hear audible words in your ears,
but words that you will clearly understand in your heart."**

From ***Praying to God as a Friend***
by St. Alphonsus Ligouri

Thus, Alphonsian prayer is marked by the absolute confidence that God has first loved us. “You were not yet in the world,” St. Alphonsus would have God say to us, “and I already loved you. As long as I am God, I love you; as long as I have loved myself, I have also loved you.”

For St. Alphonsus, prayer was the means of relating to God in a personal and intimate manner as father/mother/sister/brother/spouse/friend. It is from this deep relationship with God as LOVE that one is energized to be the redeeming presence of Jesus in the world.

St. Alphonsus himself learned to pray by reading St. Teresa of Avila. Like St. Teresa, he developed a strong and tender--even affectionate--manner of praying. For St. Alphonsus, prayer only begins when the heart responds in some way, with or without words: “My God, I love you.”

**My Redeemer,
I feel within me a great desire to love you.
This is a gift of your grace, and I know it comes from you.
Give me also the strength necessary to put it into practice
and make me from this day forward, say to you sincerely,
and repeat to you always,
‘My God, I love you, I love you, I love you.’**

**O Mary, see how I run to you.
You pray for so many others, pray for me, too.”**

St. Alphonsus Ligouri (adapted)

What Do You Say?

- 1) In your own prayer, do you find yourself relating to a tender, loving God, or is there another image that dominates your thoughts and feelings? Do you feel at home with the warm, affectionate prayer that St. Alphonsus encouraged?

- 2) Who would you identify as your “teachers” of prayer?
What attitudes/skills have you learned from them?
How did they teach you?

Praying with St. Alphonsus

Take time to prayerfully read and digest the pamphlet: *Praying to God as a Friend*. Chapters might be used for reflection on consecutive days/weeks. Take time to reflect on these questions:

- 1) Are you able to receive the love God has for you, or do you struggle to believe in a loving God?
- 2) Do you take time to reflect upon the love of Jesus, especially in His passion, and to respond to Him in love?
- 3) Are you comfortable speaking to the Beloved in your own words
as with your father or mother,
sister or brother,
spouse or closest friend?
Which image fits best at this time in your faith journey?
- 4) When you pray, do you ask for what you want most, for what is the deepest desire of your heart?
- 5) Which reflections or prayers of St. Alphonsus touch you in a special way?
What can you learn from his prayer to enrich your own?

Before ending this reflection, take time to talk to God about your own prayer life, about how it is and how you would like it to be. Ask for God's grace, and trust that She/He will provide the grace you ask for. Remember: you do not need to win approval of the Beloved for your prayer. God loves you, and is pleased simply by the fact that you are praying, whatever shape that prayer may take.

Teresa of Jesus: Doctor of Prayer

St. Alphonsus called St. Teresa of Jesus “my teacher,” “my saint Teresa,” and revealed his regard for her as his true mentor by writing a short book about her spiritual teachings. Alphonsus’ later masterworks on the Christian life are judged by Redemptorist scholars as expansions on his earlier insights gained from studying Teresa’s books, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Book of Her Life*, and *The Interior Castle*.

In 1970 Teresa was named a doctor of the Church—one of only two women acclaimed as official teachers. Long before this, Alphonsus and IHM sisters had revered her as their special teacher.

The best way to appreciate Teresa is to read her own words. Although written in 16th century Spain, they speak to contemporary women and men through a conversational style and a message that comes from reflection upon her life.¹ Teresa’s teaching is a description of this reflection upon her own experience of God’s amazing love for her and for the world. Her prayer and life was a response to God’s movement toward her, giving her love and gifts of deep prayer even while she was full of faults and ingratitude. Teresa described this movement and response through two central images: water and a castle.

Teresa’s *Life* includes her famous analogy of spiritual development as four “waters”. Based on her own experience, she noticed that when we begin to take our spiritual lives seriously, we need to “draw water from the well”. We study Scripture; learn to know and love Jesus through love of neighbor, quiet meditation, and liturgy. We struggle to really know and love ourselves as God does, that is, as loveable in our faults and in our giftedness. Gradually, we develop an authentic relationship to Jesus as our friend and “look at Christ as he looks at us” (Teresa’s definition of prayer). The “water wheel” begins to lessen our need to do so much and we sense that we are really sharing with Christ a common life and work. Only after time spent in the desert of dry prayer and listlessness is another kind of water available. We discover deeper aspects of ourselves and learn to love even when we do not have the sensible satisfaction of earlier life and prayer. Finally, a veritable “river” takes us into deeper relationship with Christ when we can trust, letting go of all security and certitude. Eventually, Teresa experienced the “rain” of abundant gifts of prayer and leadership for the sake of the Church and the world.

Reflection Starter: Describe the waters of your life. What is Teresa saying to you?

¹A good introduction to Teresa’s life and writing is Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (Morehouse Publishing, PO Box 1321, Harrisburg, PA 17105). Excellent yet reasonably priced paperback editions of her works are published by ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2131 Lincoln Rd. N.E., Washington, DC 20002.

The Interior Castle is Teresa's most comprehensive image of Christian maturity. To find God we move within to discover, little by little, that the center of our self is the dwelling place of our friend, Jesus Christ, whose Spirit is transforming our desires into union with God, our Parent, source and happiness. What makes this interior movement possible is the simultaneous energy of God's love radiating from the center and our habitual self-knowledge. Teresa advocates a self-knowledge that is habitual and quiet, like the knowing involved in driving a car. Such knowledge is always there to prevent interference with the motion of traffic and to allow us to reach our goal, but it does not block our seeing the world around us. So knowledge of our personal histories, our weaknesses and strengths, our developmental needs, of what we can and cannot expect of ourselves needs to be held within a deep awareness of being a creature loved and sustained by God's friendship, and connected to the cosmos.

All movement into the interior depths of prayer is done, according to Teresa, "for the sake of good works, good works." Rowan Williams summarizes the point well:

Being a contemplative is simply not, for Teresa, the exhaustive definition of anybody's vocation; what is definitive is our identification with Christ's offering to the Father, which is wholly directed at once to God and to the life and healing of the world. (p. 139)

Reflection Starters:

- 1) Are "good works" your test of authentic prayer, rather than "good feelings"?
- 2) How do you understand the relationship of prayer and action?
- 3) How is your self-knowledge a foundation for prayer?

Commentators on the impact of Teresa's lessons on prayer say "Her purely human qualities and gifts, the saintliness of her life by which they were illuminated and overshadowed, the naturalness and candor of her manner and style--these are some of the reasons why her name is not only graven upon the enduring marble of history but taken on the lips of generations with reverence and love." (E. Allison Peers)

Reflection Starters:

- 1) How does hearing Teresa referred to as a *mystic and contemplative* affect you in looking to her for guidance?
- 2) How do you see Teresa's ability to speak to you and people in our time and culture? Her relevance?

IHMs and Prayer

Building upon the heritage of St. Alphonsus and St. Teresa, the IHM Community has, throughout its history, treasured prayer as a source of conversion, a means of intercession, and an indispensable grounding to our life of active service. The commitment of each member to personal and communal prayer, the presence of prayer spaces in local houses, the prayerful spirit of the Motherhouse community, and the development of Visitation Center for Prayer and Spirituality, River House and Maxis Spirituality Center give strong witness to the centrality of contemplation to all that we are and do.

Article 4 of our Constitutions, which seeks to articulate the characteristic “spirit” of the congregation, gives clear indication of the intimate connection that we experience between contemplative prayer and apostolic zeal:

**Nourished and strengthened by prayer,
by reflection on the word of God
by ministry and life in community, and
by sharing the life of Jesus Christ
in the Eucharist,
we desire to be filled
with the spirit of Jesus Christ,
the Redeemer,
who in unbounded love
sacrificed himself completely
for the redemption of each person
and of the whole human family
in fulfillment of his Father’s will.**

IHM Constitutions, Article 4

Recognizing the importance of a deep and active prayer life to sustain involvement in mission, each IHM seeks fidelity to a life of prayerful openness, nourished by reflection on the Word of God, participation in Eucharist, meditation on the Incarnation and passion of Christ, and a love for Mary. Engaged in a wide variety of ministries, it is the mutual commitment to active and unceasing prayer that sustains us as a community, and brings fruit to our human endeavors.

Exploring the Vision

Spend time in prayerful reflection on Chapter 4, 32-37, 44-51 of the IHM Constitutions which may be found at the back of this journal.

- 1) What seems to stand out in the IHM community's commitment to prayer?
- 2) Name specific ways in which you see these sections of the Constitutions lived out in the lives of IHMs whom you know.
- 3) How do you see yourself in relation to what you have read here?
- 4) What are you willing to offer to the community to support it in its commitment to prayer?
- 5) What would you like to ask from the community to support you in your own prayer journey?

Going Deeper

Praying with Scripture

The following Gospel passages offer glimpses into Jesus as a praying person. Use them as sources for meditation to grow closer to Jesus, asking Him to share with you His own understanding of/commitment to prayer:

Luke 6:12

Luke 3:21

John 16:32

Matthew 4:2

John 19:9

Matthew 26:36

Matthew 6:9

Matthew 21:13

Mark 1:35

Mark 15:34

As you watch Jesus in these passages:

- 1) What meaning does prayer seem to have to him?
- 2) How does he go about his prayer?
- 3) What attitudes toward/about God and spiritual life seem to be the “context” his prayer? (You might check Matthew 6:6-7 for more insight into these attitudes.)
- 4) How would you compare his experience/practice of prayer with your own?

Talk with Jesus about all this... (Remember that meditation can prepare us for prayer, but it is the personal dialogue between ourselves and God which is prayer itself.)

Further Suggestions for Scriptural Prayer

- 1) If meditating on an incident in Scripture, consider...

Who is involved?
What is happening?
What does it mean to you?

- 2) Take time with the passage...

Read the passage slowly
Let the words wash over you
Stay with the words that especially catch your attention
Allow your being to be still
If nothing strikes you, read the passage again, still slowly

- 3) Place yourself into the situation as if you were there...

Listen to what is being said
Watch what happens
Identify with a particular person
Become part of the unfolding experience
Use your imagination to get the feel of the story

- 4) Take a look at Jesus in this incident

What is going on in his soul as he says these things?
To whom does he address this, then and now?
What difference does it make for society, for your own life, if you hear this message?

- 5) When you feel drawn, leave the passage behind and enter into your own dialogue with Jesus, with God.

- 6) Before ending your prayer, go back and read the passage one more time, noticing how your prayer may have brought you to a new awareness of what is there.

Praying through Drawing

Preparation: Choose a comfortable place and a relaxed, unhurried space of time. You will need a large piece of paper (newsprint is great), and some chalk, crayons, colored pencils or markers in a variety of colors. Set these things on the table or floor in front of you--gently, reverently--and let them sit there peacefully as you begin to focus within yourself.

Process: Choose a comfortable posture. Sink into the quiet atmosphere, becoming centered within yourself and conscious of God's presence with you. (You may wish to use quiet music/ the Jesus prayer/ a lighted candle/ Zen stillness...whatever helps you to become quiet and centered.)

- As you become conscious of God's presence, be attentive to how you feel/experience yourself in relation to God. Be aware of God's feeling in relation to you. Do not strive for word or thought, but sensation and awareness.
- Without disturbing this awareness, become conscious again of the paper and colors in front of you. They are inviting you to express the awareness you sense between yourself and God. It is a blank and open page, waiting for your expression of this moment of time. You may wish to place your hands, palms down, in the center of the paper --gently, reverently--sensing the contact. Let your hands move gently across the surface of the paper--blessing this blank, inviting space and feeling connected to its openness.
- Choose a color to which you feel drawn and use it to begin your drawing. Allow the color and your hand to express the inner world of awareness between yourself and God. As you draw you may become conscious of an image you wish to create on paper, or you may stay just with the flow/movement of color. Allow the colors to change, the images to change, the drawing to emerge as you stay focused on expressing the awareness within you. Take all of the time you need, until you feel content with what you have "spoken" on paper.

Reflection: When you have finished the drawing experience, sit back from your creation. Be attentive to it in its entirety and let it speak to you, revealing its meaning back to you as you "listen" to what it expresses to you. Allow this dialogue between yourself and your drawing to lead you into dialogue between yourself and God. Stay as long as you feel drawn to linger.

- You may want to capture the significance of this prayer experience through journaling. You may also want to place your drawing somewhere where it will continue to speak to you through the day/week ahead.
- Would you consider sharing this drawing and this experience of prayer with a listening friend? Allow them time to reflect to you what they see in your drawing...

Other Prayer Notes

The following suggestions may prove helpful for those seeking to build a pattern of personal prayer, as well as those who already have a long developed pattern and who wish to refresh themselves.

- 1) Prepare yourself for prayer by choosing a time and place conducive to a relaxed and attentive dialogue with God. Any posture is suitable for prayer, provided that it allows you to be relaxed, quiet and attentive. You can discover your own best posture by experimentation.
- 2) Begin your time of prayer by realizing your profound need for God. Become attentive also to God's desire to share with you in prayer.
- 3) Ask sincerely for the grace that you most need or want during this time of prayer.
- 4) Enter into the method of prayer you have chosen for this time. If you are using a scripture passage for prayer, use your memory, imagination, understanding and heart to assist you in exploring the passage you have chosen.
- 5) Conclude your time of prayer with a conversation with the Beloved, using the image of God you feel most drawn to.
- 6) When you reflect on your prayer
 - What passage, word, image or idea particularly struck you? Why? Did you stay with it?
 - Is there any passage, word, image or idea that disturbed you or that you avoided?
 - What were your feelings during prayer? Peaceful? Loving? Joyful? Grateful? Trusting? Dry? Sad? Anxious? Discouraged? Were these feelings fleeting or did they linger? Where did these feelings lead you?
 - What distractions did you have during prayer? What did you do with them?

Many Styles of Prayer

With today's developing interest in spirituality, there are workshops/experiences being offered in a great many "styles" of prayer. Below is an inventory of some of these. You may discover some old friends, as well as some inviting strangers among them.

	Have not experienced	Experienced, do not enjoy	Enjoy but do not often use	Enjoy and use regularly	Would like to try
1) formal, traditional prayers	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2) warm, affectionate, conversational prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3) quiet, wordless prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4) spontaneous, vocal prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5) charismatic prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6) sung prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7) dance prayer/body prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8) drawing prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9) walking prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10) scriptural meditation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11) psalm-based prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12) guided meditation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13) journaling prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14) centering prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15) liturgical prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
16) creation-centered prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17) feminine-conscious prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18) small group prayer	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------------------|--|
| 19) | directed retreat | |
| 20) | group retreat | |
| 21) | private, non-directed retreat | |
| 22) | 30 day retreat | |
| 23) | peace vigils/global-focused prayer | |
| 24) | the Jesus prayer | |

After completing this inventory, sit back and notice what it says to you.

- What insights does it offer you into your own prayer preferences?
- Does it move you to some decision making? If so, be specific.
- If you do not already have a spiritual director, is this something you would like to investigate with your associate companion or associate coordinator(s)?

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Called into Mission

The call to be in mission grows out of our Baptism, as the flame of faith enkindled in our hearts invites us to stand with Christ in active witness and service to our world.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel basket. They set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine before all people so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to God.

Matthew 5:14-16

The mission we share is in fact the mission of Christ: the task of spreading the good news of salvation, and of reconciling the world to God. As light through a prism, that one mission is reflected in a variety of ministries, each one offering a particular style or color of Christian involvement in the world. Healing, teaching, administering, comforting, challenging, inspiring, transforming, supporting, confronting, creating, unifying--all of these and many others are the verbs of ministry, ways of being involved with Christ in His mission of redemption.

For some of us, the thought of having a particular Christian witness or service to give to the world feels unnatural and awkward. At one time in the Church, "mission" and "ministry" seemed identified with a particular state or calling: a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. The laity were considered to be more passive, more in a position to be ministered to, rather than of being ministers.

Today we recognize that every baptized person has a sharing in the power of Christ's Spirit, and that the process of discovering our particular gifts for ministry and of choosing to use those gifts actively is a natural and necessary part of Christian maturation. The laity of the Church is valued as having an essential and inescapable role to play in bringing Christ's message and love to the world.

For the Christian community is never closed in on itself. The intimate life of this community--the life of listening to the Word and the apostles' teaching, sharing in Christian love and in the breaking of the bread--this intimate life only acquires its full meaning when it becomes a witness, when it evokes admiration and conversion, and when it becomes the preaching and proclamation of the Good News. Thus it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important to the whole.

Evangelization in the Modern World

The apostolate of the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which a person lives is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed by others.

Declaration on the Apostolate of the Laity, #13

What do you say?

- 1) Can you give concrete examples of times you felt called to share the Good News?

- 2) What gifts/training/talent/experiences do you bring to ministry?

- 3) In what situations have you found yourself tempted to hide your light under a bushel basket?
- 4) Who are your inspiration figures for ministry? (People, past or present, from whom you draw insight and/or motivation for acting out your Christian faith in the world.)

A Particular Focus

Like most of us, St. Alphonsus did not experience the call of mission all at once, but rather as an unfolding reality in his life. His early ministry of comforting the dying, preaching to street people, accompanying condemned prisoners to the gallows, etc., led him little by little into the world of the abandoned. His sensitivity and compassion were stretched beyond the familiar environment of his own noble background, opening him to the needs of the abandoned poor: to feel with them their experience of life, to be converted by them to a gospel vision of the reign of God.

Although St. Alphonsus was an outstanding preacher, a master organizer, a talented musician and artist, nothing in his past prepared him for the experience of meeting the rural poor – goatherds and shepherds – of the hill country near Scala, Italy. The impact of understanding for the first time that the poor did not have the gospel preached to them never left him throughout the rest of his 91 years. In his encounter with these simple country people, St. Alphonsus was himself evangelized by the poor. All of the ministries of women and men who have followed the spirit of St. Alphonsus since 1732 A.D. (the founding date of the Redemptorist Congregation) are rooted in St. Alphonsus' conversion and consequent commitment to preaching the good news to the poor.

St. Alphonsus' life was geographically limited; but his missionary spirit took him where he never expected to go. In a similar manner, many religious people of today are standing with the poor in direct ministry and/or in efforts to change unjust social structures which prevent persons from realizing their full human potential as members of God's global community.

- 1) In your awareness, who are the "poor" today? Who are "the abandoned"? Who are "the oppressed"?

- 2) Do the lives of these people touch your life in any way? If so, how do you find yourself affected? (You may want to jot down some names or events here and let your sharing be one of storytelling)

- 3) Do you find yourself inspired, threatened or unmoved by St. Alphonsus' zeal for the poor and abandoned? Can you claim his spirit as your own?

Options for the Poor, an Attitude of Mind

Are you frightened by the thought of making an “option for the poor”? Do you feel that this means packing your bags and heading for the Third World or down to the local soup kitchen?

Making an option for the poor, as Jesus did, is much more profound. It is an attitude of mind and heart that encompasses all that we do, wherever we are at the present moment.

IHM's currently struggling with this option are expressing it in many ways. A few are listed here:

- tutoring the illiterate
- linking suburban and inner city peoples;
- providing opportunities for studying current Catholic social teaching
- demonstrating links between militarism and poverty;
- including the reality of Third World poverty and oppression in school curricula;
- sharing what we have (food, furniture, clothes, etc.) with those we see who are in need;
- working for welfare reform that really serves the poor;
- working against racism
- lobbying in person and with letters for the rights of the poor and marginalized;
- empowering others to reach out to the less fortunate;
- struggling to live simply so that others may simply live; and
- bringing the poor and marginalized before our God in prayer.

A Prayer of Mission

O my Lord Jesus Christ!
How can I thank you enough,
since you have called me
to the same ministry
that you did yourself on earth:
namely, to go in mission
to invite people to accept God's salvation.
I will serve you with all my strength.
See, I offer you all my labor,
and even my blood, in order to serve you.
Nor do I attempt by this service
to do what I feel like
or to win appreciation from others;
I desire nothing but to see you loved by all
as you deserve.
I treasure my happy call,
and consider myself fortunate
that you have offered me this great ministry
in which I seek your glory.
I wish to love you
and to see you loved by others.
Give me the strength I need
to follow your mission.

Mary, my supporter,
you who love people so much,
help me.

St. Alphonsus Ligouri (adapted)

The IHM Experience

As a congregation founded in response to immediate educational needs within the Monroe area of Michigan, the IHM community has a strong tradition of excellence in educational ministry. In boarding schools and day schools, in academics and the enrichment of fine arts, in urban and rural settings, from kindergarten through university, we have endeavored to bring the good news and liberating power of education into the lives of people from all walks of life and all levels of society. It is certainly true that classroom teaching remained the primary focus of the IHM congregation for more than one hundred years. But, even then, IHMs were also serving in religious education, care of orphans, contributions to the poor of the world and the devotion of time and energy to address various needs as they emerged. In looking back over those years in which our lives were very structured around classroom teaching, we find that the love and goodness of God was communicated to others through the many ways in which IHMs extended themselves in loving service.

Since the Second Vatican Council, with its encouragement to express more consciously our Alphonsian spirituality, the two strong currents of educational ministry and zeal towards the poor and abandoned have mingled with increasing intensity, propelling us into a variety of ministries and expanding our involvement in addressing areas of discrimination, poverty, and related issues of injustice. The spark of missionary spirit which can be traced throughout IHM history, the leadership of women such as Mother Theresa McGivney, the call of the Vatican Council to “read the signs of the times”, the experience of people among whom we have lived and worked, and the opportunity to bond with associates, have all contributed to a transformation of apostolic lives which might be described as “an explosion of soul”.

Read Chapter 1-2 of the *IHM Constitutions*, provided at the back of this journal.

- 1) From what you already know about St. Alphonsus, where do you notice his spirit reflected in these chapters?
- 2) Unity and diversity are both highly valued by the IHM community. Where do you detect these values echoed in the beginning chapters of the IHM Constitutions?
- 3) In what ways do the Constitutions address diversity of ministry for all members of the IHM community?
- 4) The IHM Constitutions are the officially approved document of/for the vowed membership of the IHM Congregation. How do you see associate members living the same SPIRIT?
- 5) How do you try to balance these values in your own life?
- 6) If you were creating your own “constitution”, how would you deal with the tension between personal gifts/needs/limitations and the common good?

Going Deeper

Ministry--a journey with a past and future

Follow the development of the apostles through these stages

- A. Their first calling - Matthew 4:18-25
- B. Their first missionary efforts - Matthew 10:1-42
- C. Their darkest hour - Matthew 26:31-55
- D. Their coming of age as fearless preachers - Acts 2:1-14

- 1) What do you notice about each phase of growth?

- 2) What from these experiences of the apostles, do you think might be true for any Christian seeking to follow Christ?

- 3) How would you describe your present experience of participating in the mission of Jesus?

- 4) Thinking back over your life, what would you list as some of the “stepping stones” that have brought you to where you are in ministry?

- 5) Do you have any sense of where the future may be drawing you?
How does IHM association fit in here?

The following passages from scripture offer images of the mission of Jesus and our participation in that mission:

Ezekiel 34:11-16

Luke 4:17-21

Matthew 13:31-33

John 15:1-8 (life-line)

9-17 (commandment to love)

18-27 (experience of opposition)

Read through each passage slowly and prayerfully. Then choose the one that attracts you most personally. Use this passage as an invitation for you to respond in some creative way, possibly in writing, drawing, singing, or movement.

A Special Word For and About Women

Because of the particular experiences of our time and culture, reflecting on mission and ministry often raises issues or concerns about the role of women. The following article is reprinted from *Sojourner* magazine and expresses some important consideration (for both women and men) about the place of women in the Church. Rather than dwelling on all that causes pain and anger for women today, the article seeks to identify how full participation of women in all aspects of Church is supported by the best of our Catholic tradition and by the example of Jesus himself. It also seeks to identify some specific contributions the feminist perspective offers to our Church and world.

- 1) After reading the article, you may want to take note of both your thoughts and feelings, so that you might share them with your companion

- 2) If you are a woman, how does the article affect your self-image? Your sense of being called into mission?

- 3) If you are a man, how does this article affect your self-image? Your image of the women in your life? Have you experienced in your own life the need/value of a feminist perspective? How do you view women carrying out their ministry in the Church?

Yesterday's Dangerous Vision

Christian Feminism in the Catholic Church

by Joan Chittister, O.S.B.

It was the spring of 1984. I was sitting on a stage at Stanford University. The hall seemed like a black cave to me. All I could see were bright klieg lights and, far in the back, the outline of exit signs over the auditorium doors. I had just delivered the closing address for a three-day symposium on "Communities of Women."

The symposium had been organized by the research arm of *Signs*, a journal then located at Stanford University that was entirely devoted to interdisciplinary scholarship on questions of women in culture and society. Women from all over the San Francisco Bay area were in attendance, and the vibrations of feminism were running a very heady high.

It was as if the outside world, with all of its institutionalized sexism, no longer existed; that this was the real world where competent women recognized and respected competent women; that the millennium had finally come.

And there I sat in the midst of it, sister-hood brimming over, until suddenly a voice out of the darkness on the other side of the lights called me very quickly and very firmly back to the real world. "Sister Joan," the voice said, "I would like to ask you a personal question. How and why does a woman like you stay in the Catholic Church?"

The message was very, very clear. Many times before I had heard all the tones of passion and anger and pain underlying the question. And then the woman's voice went on.

"I was a Catholic once," she said, "and the misogyny was so bad I knew it was either get out or have a breakdown. I would like to know how and why," she repeated, "someone like you stays in a church like that?"

A story from Sufi religious literature is, I believe, an answer. This story tells that a seeker arrived at the monastery in search of a spiritual guide:

"People say that you have found wisdom," the seeker said to the Holy One, "and I have come to ask if that is true."

"You could say so," the Holy One said in a matter-of-fact way.

"But what makes one wise?" the disciple asked.

"Wisdom," the Holy One said, "is simply the ability to recognize."

"I know that," the disciple said, "but the question is, to recognize what?"

"Spiritual wisdom," the Holy One said, "is the ability to recognize the butterfly in a caterpillar; the eagle in an egg; the saint in the sinner."

I know intuitively, at least where women and the church are concerned, that the Holy One is right. I find myself, as a Christian feminist, in the peculiar position of someone who sees the unseen. Like a boater out of sight of land, I have been taken, by the very same current, away from one shore to the edges of a distant other, in storm and in darkness but with confidence and a good compass.

The fact is that I am a feminist precisely because I am a Catholic – not as a reaction to what is wrong about the church but as a response to what is right about the church. My Christian feminist commitment to the equality, dignity, and humanity of all persons and my determination to change structures to enable equality does not come as a result of rejecting what I see as bad in the church. It comes as an inevitable recognition of what I see as the great, the magnetizing, the empowering, the energizing good that is inherent for women in the church and promised for women in the church, even when I cannot see it yet being brought to fullness, even in the church.

The fact is that what is right about the church for women is the vision of Jesus. And everything it manifests.

JESUS, WE MUST ALWAYS remember, was a good Jew. Jesus went up to the temple, and taught the Torah, and kept the high holy days, and went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and studied the Law. Jesus knew what was expected of him, and Jesus did it. Except, of course, when an even greater revelation of the will of God demanded change. In those very departures, by Jesus from Jewish revelation to new insights about the mind of God, we see most clearly the Christian dispensation.

Therefore, to understand the impact of what Jesus did, we must understand what Jesus was expected to do. We must remember that the Jewish culture and religious code by which Jesus was formed left little doubt about the role and place of women. And we can expect Jesus to honor that code unless, of course, it is those very concepts that must be challenged with a fuller notion of the will of God.

"Better that the Torah be burned than placed in the mouth of a woman," the rabbis preached. A woman's place is in the home or in the outer court of the temple, the Law said. Women's bodies were polluted and polluting, the Torah taught. Women were not to speak to men in public – not to their husbands, not to their fathers, not to their sons.

Women were for childbearing, not for thinking, the scholars said. Women were domestic servants, not developed adults. Women were for inheritance and for convenience – not for religion, not for law. "When a boy child comes, peace comes," the rabbis taught. "When a girl child comes, nothing comes."

Oh, yes, Jesus knew the Jewish teachings about women, all right. And then despite it all, in great, grandiose, graphic gestures, Jesus came and swept it all away. Jesus spoke to women in public. Jesus let women follow him out of the house. Jesus discussed theology with women, sought out their companionship, and valued their

friendship. Jesus told women – and only women – that he was the Messiah. And Jesus sent women to give testimony to his Resurrection; Jesus sent women as apostles to the apostles.

It was women who anointed him, women who proclaimed him, women who prepared him for burial, and women who pronounced his return. It was women, in fact, whom Jesus put at the very center of the only two mysteries of the faith that are basic and essentially differentiating to the faith – the Incarnation and the Resurrection. And not only were women there at the Incarnation and the Resurrection, but *only* women were there.

Jesus taught women. "Mary has chosen the better part, and it shall not be denied her," he said of the woman learning at his feet.

"Go and tell the others what you have heard," he commissioned the Samaritan woman as the first evangelist to the non-Jews.

"Arise and walk," he said to the corpse of a dead and worthless woman.

"Do whatever she tells you," he instructed the menservants.

"And there were women in the crowd," scripture reads. "And women followed him, ministering to him," scripture reads. "Woman, your faith has made you whole," scripture reads. "And power went out of him to her."

Oh, yes, if you are a woman, the images are strong, bold, clear, empowering, life-giving, and preserved by the church. Etched on our minds forever, thanks to the scriptures of the church, are the figures of the strong, present, prophetic women of the gospels.

Indeed, when the church – its documents and structures, its symbols and language, and its laws and liturgies – forgets or foregoes or forswears the place of women in the Christian dispensation, there in its scriptures the vision of Jesus with women stays vibrant, vital and unable to be forgotten. And without it the church is so much the poorer.

What is right about the church, then, is that, whatever else it does or does not do, the church sustains the memory of Jesus with women and always recalls it and has often heeded it, at times in genuinely significant ways.

THE CHURCH MAKES AT LEAST six contributions to Christian feminism that flow from the vision of Jesus. In the first place, the church has from the earliest times preserved the notion of an alternative lifestyle for women. The



admission of women to recognized religious orders in the church and the confirmation of the single state as a recognized call from God to women, as well as to men, has been and continues to be a strong affirmation of the integrity and spirituality of women.

This implies that women can receive a call from God that is uniquely theirs and have the soul, the grace, and the mind to respond to it. A woman, in other words, does not have to be defined by a man, owned by a man, coupled to a man, identified by a man, or controlled by a man to be a fully adult and functioning human being. Women, it seems, are fully rational and equally spiritual beings in their own right.

The implications are great. If women, like men, can be called alone and separately to do God's service, then God's grace is simply not sexist. God's grace simply cannot be trusted to limit itself.

If grace is not gender specific, then God may ask the same things of women that God asks of men – or else it is not the church that is being held hostage to sexism, it is God who is being held hostage to sexism. God may want absolutely outrageous things of women. God may have absolutely outrageous plans for women. Grace once released is a dangerous thing.

The second contribution of the Catholic Church to Christian feminism is the idea of sainthood. All the saints have been given to all the church for emulation. So female role models have always been defined and upheld in the church as models for men as surely as John, Sebastian, and Francis of Assisi are for women.

Sainthood – the fullness of service and the fullness of self – is accepted and applauded and expected of women as well as of men in the church. Teresa of Avila, doctor of the church; Catherine of

Siena, counselor to the Pope; Therese de Lisieux, seeker of priesthood; Joan of Arc, leader of men; Gertrude and Mechtilde and Hildegarda, abbesses of great dual monasteries; Hilda, convener of church synods; and Jane Frances de Chantal, wife and mother with a second career, are indeed holy hopes and worthwhile ideals to be aspired to by women as well as by men. If the litany of saints in the Catholic Church says anything at all, it says that women's lives have made a difference, both to the church and to the world – a position, incidentally, rarely conceded by other institutions in their history books.

The third contribution of the church to Christian feminism is the Roman Catholic concept of sacramentality – the notion that drives grace is given without prejudice to sex. Sacramentality marks women as well as men as channels of God's grace, and it is, therefore, an important contribution to the recognition of the full humanity of women. Why some graces work on women – baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, and marriage, for instance – and some do not – ordination, for instance; and why women are impediments to some graces but not to others, are yet to be explained, of course. But at least we have a clearly developed theology of baptism, grace, incarnation and redemption that legitimates the question.

Women, it is now argued, can receive grace; they simply cannot give it. God's grace goes powerless when it gets to women – blocked apparently by some deficiency of nature. But ironically and gracefully enough, it is the best doctrines of the church itself that continue to challenge that thought.

THE CHURCH'S FOURTH contribution to Christian feminism is a feminine spirituality that originated with the nonviolent Jesus, who instructed Peter to put away his sword and told the apostles to feed the famished five thousand, and continues to mark the church to our own time.

It is interesting to note that the two most prophetic and most troublesome Catholic documents of our own day, the bishops' peace pastoral and the bishops' pastoral on the U.S. economy, are also the most feminine. In a world that calls for power, superiority, control, order, domination, and a logical approach to an enemy world, these pastorals call for cooperation, flexibility, support, and a compassionate concern for the poor and oppressed. And it is precisely on those



grounds that they are being criticized as foolish, incompetent, weak, and even ridiculous. Women have known that kind of criticism for eons.

At the same time, no documents of the U.S. Catholic Church sound more like the Gospel – unglossed, unwarped, and undistorted. The church, it seems, affirms the feminine and needs it for the fullness of the gospel, and it suffers when it realized that. Strange. Interesting. Disturbing. Hopeful.

The fifth contribution of the church to Christian feminism is a sense of sin, a call to repentance and conversion, a consistent reach for reconciliation in the work of righteousness.

Paul confronted Peter for rejecting the vision that lifted Jewish dietary laws from Christianity, and Peter repented. Peter confronted the early church for rejecting Gentiles in the Jewish Christian community, and the early church repented. Vatican II confronted the contemporary church with its anti-Semitism and its failure to respond to the Protestant reformers, and the church is attempting to repent.

If the church is true to its own best doctrines, its own best insights, its own best graces, its own best definition of church, and to the vision of Jesus that it preserves, sustains, and preaches, it is inevitable that one day it will also confess and repent the sin of sexism.

Finally there is an overarching contribution of the church to Christian feminism that defies the diminishment of half of the human race. The image of Mary, the mother of God, and the mother of the church, is a strong affirmation of the independence, the fullness of grace, and the necessary

participation of women in the divine work of salvation. Some years ago one of the pillars of Marian piety was a book titled *A Woman Wrapped in Silence*. In that book Mary came across as remote and ethereal, unreal and unreachable. She swept on and off its pages in gossamer and shawl. She was docile and bowed and passive. Strong, in suffering, yes, but not like women who had to bend their wits to live, bear, and survive. Not like women who gave their entire lives for the salvation of others.

Mary was portrayed simply as a pawn in the will of God. But a 'pawn in the will of God' is a contradiction in terms. There simply cannot be a 'pawn in the will of God.' The will of God is something that must be chosen and that costs. The will of God is not a trick played on the unsuspecting. The will of God is always and offer of co-creation. Mary was asked, and Mary said yes.

Mary was a partner in the plan, not a pawn. Mary was free to say no, not enslaved in a pseudo yes. Mary was invited to depart from the system in order to fulfill it. If we understand that, then we begin to understand Mary in a new way. And we also begin to understand the role of women in church and society in a new way.

It wasn't that Mary was "a woman wrapped in silence." It was simply that her actions spoke more loudly than any number of words could ever do.

We, all of us, women and men, need to understand those actions now. The fact is that Mary is not simply "Mary, the mother of God." No, on the contrary. The mother of God is the image of women everywhere. The mother of God is Mary, independent woman; Mary, the unmarried mother; Mary, the homeless woman; Mary, the political refugee; Mary, the Third World woman; Mary, the mother of the condemned; Mary, the widow who outlives her child; Mary, the woman of our time who shares in the divine plan of salvation: Mary, the bearer of Christ.

Mary could withstand and confront every standard of her synagogue and of her society and take the poverty, the

oppression, and the pain that resulted, because the will of God meant more to her than the laws of any system. That's the kind of woman God chose to do God's work. That's the kind of woman the church raises up for women to be. That's the woman who made the Magnificat the national anthem of women everywhere.

Indeed God was with her. And because of Mary, God is also with us. How can we possibly do less?

THE CHURCH HAS PRESERVED the vision of Jesus, and an alternative lifestyle for women, and the witness of women saints, and the concept of sacramentality, and a consciousness of conversion, and the call to feminine spirituality, and the model of Mary, mother of God, and mother of the church. How can we possibly do less?

What is most right about the church to a feminist is that moment in time when Jesus said, "Woman, you are healed of your infirmity," and straightened to full size the woman too stooped to stand. And he did it while he was teaching the Torah in the middle of the synagogue in the presence of the Pharisees, on a Sabbath and despite the Law.

How can a woman like me stay in the church? Precisely because I am Catholic. What is spiritual wisdom? Spiritual wisdom is the ability to recognize the butterfly in the caterpillar; the eagle in the egg; the saint in the sinner.

"I have no idea what tomorrow will bring," the disciple said, "and I don't know how to prepare for it."

"You fear tomorrow," the Holy One said, "not realizing that yesterday is just as dangerous."

It is not on novel doctrine that Christian feminists depend. On the contrary; it is on yesterday's dangerous vision that Christian feminism stakes its hope. And that is very right.

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PLEASE RETURN TO THE REFLECTION QUESTIONS PRECEDING THE ARTICLE

Assembly / Chapter Directions

The Affirmations of Assembly 1987 are reprinted below. The *Chapter Directions* adopted during the Chapter(s) of Affairs 2000, 2006, 2012 and 2018 are found in the back pocket of the journal. Please read the Affirmations and Directions. Notice how some themes are recurrent over the years. Spend some time with your companion discussing the spirit of and reflecting on each of these guiding documents in general, and then more specifically the significance of the broad Chapter 2018 Statement and the Implementation Steps that emerged. Please continue with the *Going Deeper* discussion questions.

IHM Affirmations of Assembly 1987

In order to reflect on the “heart of the matter” for IHMs at this time, some 800 Sisters, Associates and friends gathered in Monroe in August, 1987. In light of the Gospel and our IHM Constitutions, we commit ourselves over the next six years to the following directions:

Holistic Spirituality

Consistent with our tradition of integrating work and prayer, we commit ourselves to deepening a holistic spirituality that is mystical, prophetic, contemplative, and grounded in our experience of the liberating mission of Jesus.

Affirmation 10

In the spirit of Affirmation 10 and with a growing sense of the interdependence and unity of all creation as central to an emerging world view, we feel compelled:

to stand in solidarity with those who suffer in a world characterized by fragmentation, violence, and poverty.

to participate in the shaping of a new order consonant with Gospel values of harmony and unity, peace and justice, and an equitable sharing of the world’s resources.

to nurture a reconciling and healing community among ourselves and beyond.

to live and work non-violently toward a world of peace with justice.

to give priority to the claim of the materially poor on us.

to implement the above wherever we serve, and, at this time, particularly in the city of Detroit.

Feminist Perspective

Reflecting on our experience as women in the Church and society, and sensing the need for a critical understanding of what we have experienced individually and corporately, we consciously choose to educate ourselves to the feminist perspective, and to operate from our understandings as they develop.

Education

Given that formal education is a fundamental, long, and rich IHM tradition and that education in its many forms can be a process for liberation, we commit ourselves to ongoing education of ourselves and others in areas crucial to our life and ministry. At this time we particularly pledge ourselves to:

analyze, critique, and transform structures that keep the laity voiceless in the Church and which keep women in a state of oppression in both Church and society.

acknowledge our own aging process, plan and prepare for retirement, develop ministries with and for older persons, and celebrate the lives of older persons as sources of power and wisdom.

Constitutions

Recognizing the call of the Spirit to participate in the evolution of religious life as a prophetic gift to the Church, we affirm our present Constitutions as a faithful articulation of our experience and understanding of religious life, and we will engage in ongoing dialogue among ourselves, with other religious communities, and with other members of the Church about the nature and structure of religious life.

Going Deeper

- 1) As someone interested in association with the IHM Congregation, which, if any, of the directions hold particular appeal to you?
- 2) Are there any concrete, realistic decisions you could make that would allow you to participate in the Chapter 2018 Direction at a deeper level?
- 3) Do any aspects of the Affirmations and Directions seem unclear or troubling to you? Can you say what it is that is troublesome or irritating?
- 4) As an IHM associate candidate, how do these statements challenge you?
- 5) What do you think is the call of Chapter 2018 Direction and Implementation Steps to all IHM sisters and associates?
- 6) How are you already implementing the spirit of Chapter 2018 Direction?

Called Into Community

“No matter how liberating and healing our particular ministry, it can never replace community, being with sisters and brothers beyond the level of doing.”

Len Desroches

No one is an island. No human being stands alone. The truth of this awareness becomes clear to each of us as we mature in our Christian life. Whether we look backward to trace the patterns of our life journey, or forward to chart the course of future directions, or around at the present reality of who we are, the interconnectedness between ourselves and others remains a constant factor of our existence. To the extent that we are blinded to this factor, our perception of reality remains distorted and incomplete.

It would seem, then, that the term “community” would be easily and naturally understood as a part of normal human experience. In fact, however, it may be the very closeness of the experience that makes the term elusive. Like “beauty”, “love”, and “friendship”, the term “community” connotes different things to different people, and is commonly used in ways so diverse as to leave a clear meaning unattainable. Consider, for example, the following list of “communities”:

- the family in which you grew up
- the family you now experience
- your particular parish
- the Church as a whole
- neighbors, whose homes all share one “neighborhood”
- the friends you “hang around” with
- co-workers, such as the “GM community” or the “banking community”
- charismatic community
- peace community
- global community
- the community of saints
- religious communities, such as the IHM congregation
- the early Christian community, or “gospel community”
- the earth community—all of creation

Does every group of people qualify for the name “community”? Or does the term suggest some particular characteristics, some distinguishing characteristics?

- 1) How would you distinguish “community” from organization, club, general society, clique, family, nation?
- 2) Thinking back over your life, consider the communities of which you have been a part. Share something with your dialogue partner about these experiences. How does each of these influence your present understanding of/feelings about “community”?
- 3) Let your mind shift to think in pictures, rather than in words. If you wanted to express your understanding of community through an image, diagram, or symbol, what would you draw?
- 4) Does your image include the earth community?

What the Scriptures Say

As Christians, the example and teachings of Jesus powerfully affect our understanding of community. It is clear to us that the development of his disciples into a community of faith was a primary concern for Jesus during the last years of his life. Both by his personal example and by the teachings passed on through his disciples, Jesus sought to share with all of us his own understanding of this important dynamic in our lives.

Each of the following scripture passages offers an insight into the experience of community. Read each passage prayerfully, and then respond to the questions following:

John 17:21-23

Matthew 5:23-24

John 13:1-17

Acts 2:42-46

Ephesians 4:1-7

I Corinthians 12:4-11

1 Peter 3:8-12

- 1) What do these passages suggest as important characteristics or qualities of a Christian community?
- 2) Looking at community from this perspective, would you say that your own life has been **poor** or **rich** in the experience of community? Which characteristics have you experienced most strongly? When? Which ones seem foreign to your experience?

The IHM Perspective

A religious congregation, such as the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is an example of an *intentional* community, that is, we bond together through a conscious choice in a commitment to uphold one another in the living of values held in common. For religious congregations, the intention that draws us together has to do with a conscious living of the Gospel.

Since members are brought together, not by fate or happenstance, but by deliberate and discerned commitment, intentional communities are at times more able to enter fully into their expressed and common commitment than can a less focused community, such as a neighborhood, parish or family. These latter groups could, of course, become intentional communities, but this implies an added level of commitment beyond the historical factors which first brought them together. Some take this added journey together; many do not.

Read Chapter 3: “Commitment to Be a Christian Community” from the IHM Constitutions (Articles 18-31). As you read, ask the following questions:

- 1) What seems to be important to the IHM sisters about the experience of community?

- 2) How does what is stated here match with my own concrete experience of IHMs?

- 3) How do these constitutions compare with my own experience of living community? What common elements do I find between the IHM experience and mine? What differences?

- 4) Am I presently a part of one or more intentional Christian communities, apart from my involvement with IHMs? What does this commitment require of me? Does my involvement with IHMs include an intentional commitment to community? In what ways?

Going Deeper

Community: Knowing and Being Known

One of the most basic, and yet most profound, dynamics within a Christian community is the **revelation** that happens through telling the stories of our personal lives, and reflecting together on our shared experience. The scripture passage of the disciples on the road to Emmaus has often been used as a model for understanding this dynamic, since the passage so clearly demonstrates the God-discovery and self-discovery that happens through open and shared reflection on our life experience. From a human viewpoint, such experiences of knowing and being known within community allow for the manifestation of mutual support, affirmation, challenge, and celebration.

Ponder this dynamic within each of the following gospel friendships and then reflect on how the same dynamic has/is operating within your own life journey:

- Disciples on the road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-35
- Mary and Elizabeth Luke 1:39-56
- Martha and Mary Luke 10:38-42 John 11:1-44
- Peter, James and John Luke 5:1-11 Matt 17:1-13 Mark 14:32-52

This may lead to a time of sharing with your dialogue partner, of stories involving IHM friendship in your life. You may want to invite some of the other IHMs involved in these stories to a time of shared storytelling with you, discovering together more of the meaning within the stories, and celebrating their truth and beauty.

Community: Unity in Diversity

St. Paul uses the analogy of the human body to help us understand our interrelationship within the community of the Church. This analogy can carry deep wisdom for us, particularly as we become more deeply attuned to the marvelous mystery of our own body, how it functions, how it moves toward health.

Read and ponder: I Corinthians 12:12-31

- 1) Apply the wisdom of this passage to the present realities of your parish and of the entire Church. What does it say to you in this context?
- 2) Apply the passage to the present realities of your family life. What does it say to you here?
- 3) Apply the passage to the present realities of national and international politics and economics. What does it say to you?
- 4) How do you see the truth of this passage lived out in IHM circles? What more does it call us to?

Community: Common Life

For religious communities, one way of tapping into the reality of community is to speak of our “common life”. Often this term is used to refer to “community of goods” or the sharing of our material and financial resources. It can also, however, refer to characteristic attitudes or virtues that we hope are manifest within our congregation, as well as to the co-responsibility and service we owe towards one another.

Participation in and responsibility towards this common life of the congregation is a key element of congregational membership. Since your own interest is in associate relationship, rather than vowed membership, the same expectations do not apply. Nevertheless, we invite you to strengthen your understanding of this corporate life as a vital aspect of knowing us as a congregation, and as a reference base in clarifying your own relationship to the IHM congregation as an associate. The community is always most grateful for the light you can shed on our life through comparison with your own.

Community of Goods

- 1) Reread Article 22 of the IHM Constitutions, and talk with your dialogue partner about her understanding of/experience of “community of goods” within the congregation.

- 2) How is this dynamic the same as/different from your own experience of shared resources within your family life? Other life experiences?

Characteristic Virtues

Traditionally, **humility**, **simplicity**, and **zeal** have been identified as characteristic virtues of the IHM congregation. Discuss with your dialogue partner her understanding of each of these virtues and their significance in her life as an IHM sister.

What would you identify as the virtues you most seek to embody in your own Christian life? In your family life? In your associate life with IHMs?

Co-responsibility and Service

- 1) Reread Article 23 of the IHM Constitutions, and talk with your dialogue partner about the importance of this article in the life of the congregation.

- 2) How does this relate to your own experience of co-responsibility and service within your family life or within other communities of which you are a part? Are there ways in which it is different?

You may wish to close this time of dialogue by a time of prayer together. Pray for the life of the IHM congregation. Pray for your own life and the relationships that characterize your own specific lifestyle. Pray for the deepening life between you and the congregation.

Let a part of your prayer be a time of listening!

Community, Authority, and Conflict

Our present experience of life within the Christian community of the Church raises many questions and often much pain around the issues of leadership and authority. As a Church, we have been invited to grow into a new way of imaging ourselves since Vatican II: a recognition of ourselves as co-responsible adult members of the Church founded by Jesus Christ, with leadership as a position of service within the community. Visually, we have moved from the image of a **pyramid** to the image of a **circle**. There is pain and confusion as these two images conflict with each other in the historical realities of our American and global Church.

Within this Church context, the IHM congregation has also undergone a transformation in understanding the dynamics of leadership and authority within our congregational community. Being smaller, and in some ways freer, than the universal Church, we have struggled toward creating a new and consistent image of how authority lives and functions among us. While we also have experienced both pain and confusion in the process, we feel good about the new life constantly surfacing among us.

Reread Articles 24-28 of the IHM Constitutions.

- 1) What characteristics are stressed here in identifying the place of leadership/authority within the congregation?

- 2) In what ways does this image compare/contrast with the functioning of leadership/authority within the Church as a whole?

- 3) In what ways does this image compare/contrast with the functioning of leadership/authority within your life? Within your work context? Why?

Community: Concentric Circles

Much of our reflection in this chapter has focused around the dynamics of community within our personal lives and the lives of concrete groups of which we are a part. Nevertheless, the reality we are contemplating can become as large as the world of which we are a part, informing us of the hungers and dreams of the whole earth, the “global village”.

Like its correlatives of “love” and “peace”, “community” is a dynamic reality that is first learned locally, but then can shed its light on the structuring of all our human relationships. We thank you for joining us on this journey!

“As a community, we desire above all to be known as Jesus’ disciples by our love for one another and for all whom our lives touch, particularly our associates and co-laborers.

We unite in a special way with our sisters and brothers in the community of the Church and, still more, we endeavor to create with all peoples everywhere a global community of justice, love, and peace.”

Article 31, IHM Constitutions

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The Associate Relationship: A Sacred Trust

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 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 dimensions of association: prayer, community and ministry. These dimensions form an integral part of their lives as they share in the life and mission of the IHM community.

Both the birth and the development of IHM associates are rooted in the experience of 21st 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 relationship 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.

Adapted from the Background Statement for IHM Associates

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

- 1) Reflect on the origins/history of your own interest in associate relationship with the IHM congregation. What were the factors of your own life that gave birth to this desire within you?
- 2) What experiences have been part of your associate involvement to date? Would you say that they fall more into the area of prayer, community or ministry? How does this relate to your original desires to become an IHM associate?
- 3) From where you now stand, what would you identify as the values you share with the IHM congregation? What do you see as the possibility for/realities of mutual enrichment between you and the IHM congregation?

Policies and Guidelines

On the following pages are printed the Policies and Guidelines which currently govern the associate relationship to the IHM community. While necessarily legal in tone, we hope they clarify the present realities without sacrificing the spirit of the associate experience.

Please study these policies carefully and discuss with your IHM companion any points that are unclear. Questions that cannot be satisfactorily answered in your own discussion should be referred to the IHM Associate Coordinator(s).

Three Dimensions of Association

Policy #6 identifies **PRAYER**, **COMMUNITY**, and **MINISTRY** as three dimensions of association, and describes each of these in some detail. Associates, through their studies with a companion, have reflected on the reality of their lives as associates and realize these three dimensions form an integral part of their lives as they share in the life and mission of the IHM community.

What About the Future?

The associate reality has both an evolving history and an evolving future. In this way, the IHM Associate experience (and, indeed, the IHM community itself) is much like the mystery of the Church or the mystery of human relationships. Most of us have hopes for what the future can be; none of us can clearly write that future at this time.

Thus, you may find as you study these policies that there are ways in which you wish that IHM associate involvement could be *more than* or *different from* what is described here. We encourage you to share those dreams with your dialogue partner and/or with the IHM Associate Coordinator(s). It is by the sharing of our dreams that we creatively envision the future together.

At the same time, there is a word of caution. Just as a friendship or marriage suffers when entered into with the intent of changing the other, so an IHM associate covenant must be based on a commitment to the present reality and to the current realities of each other's lives, not to a projected future.

IHM ASSOCIATE PROGRAM

Policies and guidelines

Approved by IHM Governing Board November, 1986

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 to 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 five 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 able 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. Associates, through their studies with a companion, have reflected on the reality of their life as an associate and realize that three dimensions: prayer, community and ministry form an integral part of their lives as they share in the life and mission of the IHM community. In light of this the associate makes their Covenant as an associate to include the three dimensions described below:

Prayer

The IHM community encourages all to a personal commitment of daily prayer. In recent years, we have explicitly been urged to engage in both communal and private contemplative, silent prayer. The many diversified prayer/meditations practices, devotions and prayer forms are all respected as the personal choices of individuals as to how they wish to relate and communicate with God. We are open and respectful of different faith expressions while being enriched by our Catholic faith traditions. The new universe story expands our understandings of God and, consequently, encourages exploration of a deeper, intimate prayer life.

Community

The gifts and fruits of IHM community life are extended to all associates and, in turn, enrich the lives of the whole IHM community. Associates are welcome to participate in the life and mission of the community, activities and annual celebrations. Associates are encouraged to participate in a mission unit to nurture personal friendships and social interactions, as well as volunteer in various IHM ministries..

Ministry

As Christians, we are called to serve in God's mission and to bring peace and healing to this world and earth. Ministry refers to both professional and volunteer works that are active, committed ways of serving our God, church and others. The IHM community offers informal encouragement and support to individuals discerning God's calling to service and their chosen expression of ministry. We strive to walk with one another, facing the many joys and struggles of ministry together.

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 frequently welcomes 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 a 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 Community Circle representative represents her Community Circle, shares in all of the discussions and helps keep alive an awareness of the vitality and importance of the associate presence within the community.

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

Approved by IHM Leadership Council, August 2015

Note: Associates have had one rep. on the CC since 1994. With the new Community Circles structure, associates are invited to have two representatives. The structural change was proposed by the Governance Committee and approved at Chapter 2018.

Having Come this Far...

Since this reflection journal has been used as a part of the orientation process, this would be a fitting time to pause and evaluate your experience of that process to date.

The **goals** of the orientation process, which you have already discussed with the Associate Coordinator(s), are again listed here for your consideration:

- 1) sharing reflection on human growth and spiritual development in the light of the gospel, current life realities, and the charism of the IHM congregation.
- 2) increasing general knowledge of the IHM community, including its history, constitutions, and processes of interaction; taking advantage of Roots and Relationships presentations, tapes, books, etc.
- 3) establishing effective networks of relationships, such as:
 - joining a community circle, any of various committees, connecting with a local house, with someone in overseas missions,
 - becoming a ministry partner, connecting with other IHMs in similar ministries, with IHMs in various peace and justice groups, volunteering at Motherhouse,
 - forming a prayer partnership with someone in Health Care or confined to their home, joining in prayer opportunities at Visitation and/or River House, attending wakes/funerals of deceased Sisters and Associates,
 - attending IHM celebrations: IHM Jubilee day, IHM Associate commitment ceremonies, and other IHM social and/or fundraising gatherings, whenever possible.
- 4) continuing discernment regarding the mutual benefit of Associate commitment.
- 5) developing the desired associate covenant, along with IHM Companion; to be submitted for approval to IHM Associate Coordinator(s) and Leadership Council.

Regarding your own involvement in this orientation process, in what ways have each of these goals been fulfilled? Where do you still feel a need/desire for further attention in fulfilling these goals?

Did you identify other specific goals during your orientation process? If so, what progress has been made toward these goals?

In formalizing an associate commitment, it is important that the relationship we celebrate be a **present reality**, not a future hope. Knowing this, do you feel ready and willing to formalize your associate relationship at this time?

When you are ready, you will need to discuss your desires with the Associate Coordinator(s). In preparation for that discussion, you and your companion should reflect upon and complete the Candidate's Request for Association and Companion's Recommendation forms, respectively. You'll find these forms at the back of your journal.

The type of ceremony you envision, as well as possible dates, and other details, may be part of the same discussion. The coordinator(s) and your companion can discuss various options with you. Additional information about formalizing your commitment and planning the ritual can be found on the upcoming pages.

Following your meeting with the coordinator(s), she will write a recommendation on your behalf. Your request and the recommendations will be reviewed by the Leadership Council Liaison (to the Associates) for approval.

Formalization of Commitment

The **Covenant of Association** and the **Ritual of Commitment** are two ways to give expression to and celebrate the reality of associate relationship, once this relationship has taken life between an individual and the IHM congregation. While neither the covenant nor the ritual are the relationship itself, each of them seeks to express the reality of this relationship in the hearts and lives of the persons involved. Choosing a time to express and celebrate your associate relationship in this way allows the IHM Community the opportunity to CLAIM its reality, to RATIFY your commitment to its life, and to BLESS it towards continued fruition.

Entering into IHM association in this way can be likened to the forming of any covenant relationship; this one is between the individual and the IHM Congregation.

- There is a sense of **sacredness** in how the association is expressed and celebrated, thus reverencing the divine life within the relationship.
- There is **freedom** and **deliberation** on both sides in choosing to enter into this commitment with each other.
- There is a **mutuality** of commitment, matching the recognition of mutuality in the dynamic of the ongoing relationship.
- Fidelity to the commitment is based on a strong sense of **trust** and mutual **reverence** between the parties involved.

Writing the Associate Covenant

A sample copy of the IHM Associate Covenant is provided here for you. You will notice that there is additional space provided to make promises personal to your own associate relationship, should you wish to do so. In this way, the covenant becomes individualized, expressing something of the uniqueness and the concreteness of your relationship with the congregation.

1. Take time reflecting on the written covenant form, noticing how each of the elements of the covenant relationship, described above, is reflected in the covenant wording.
2. Think back over discussions you have had about your associate relationship with the congregation. What words, phrases, or images seem to best describe:

the qualities or “color” of that relationship?

the concrete shape which that relationship has taken/ is taking? (Reviewing parts of the Associate Journal may help you in this process.)

3. Using these words, phrases, or images, put together some tentative wording for each section of the covenant. Reflect on what you are asking of the IHM Community in this covenant.
4. Ask your IHM Companion to also consider the above questions, from the viewpoint of the congregation reflecting on its relationship with you. Share in dialogue with each other the fruit of your reflection.
5. You may want to ask other significant IHMs to also share with you in this process of “finding words” to fit the realities and hopes of your relationship. The Associate Coordinator(s) may also offer valuable insight from her perspective.
6. If you have chosen to personalize it, when you and your IHM Companion are satisfied with the wording of your covenant, please submit it to the Associate Coordinator(s).

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 (1 to 3 years.)

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
dimensions of prayer, community and 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

_____/_____/_____

Shaping a Ritual of Commitment

As the associate covenant attempts to acknowledge and express something of the mystery of relationship through printed words, so the commitment ceremony attempts to acknowledge and express that same relationship through a RITUAL OF COMMITMENT.

Unlike the ceremony of formalizing vowed membership, which is somewhat structured in its design, the celebration of associate relationship can be shaped in any way which is mutually desirable to the persons involved. We encourage you to be free and creative in planning this celebration, letting it express something of the uniqueness of your own associate relationship. Some things to consider:

- 1) Sacredness, trust, and mutuality: What type of ritual could capture these elements for you?
- 2) Persons involved: Whom would you hope to be present and in what ways would you like them to take part?
- 3) Timing and place: You might want to consider both the appropriateness of a particular time or season or place to what you are celebrating, as well as the convenience and comfort of that time and place for the persons involved.
- 4) Elements of celebration: all rituals include action, most include words, and many include color/decorations/music and/or dance. What kinds of actions, words, music or decor could capture something of the quality of your associate relationship?

Often, in planning rituals, it is helpful to do some free brainstorming about these types of questions before settling on a specific design or framework. As you continue in the planning process, The Associate Coordinator(s) might offer input on “what has been done before” or “what has never been done but might be appropriate here.” Other friends, of course, can also add their input, and you might want to invite someone experienced in ritual planning to work with you in shaping your celebration.

Ongoing Associate Life

We trust that the process of this reflection journal, as well as the enfolded realities of your Involvement with the IHM community during the orientation process have been helpful in deepening a basis of shared recognition, understanding, and reverence between yourself and the IHM congregation. Certainly there are many more topics that could be explored in this type of process and we hope that you will continue to enter into meaningful times of in-depth dialogue with others in the congregation.

We invite you to discuss with your dialogue partner how to bring closure to this particular reflection experience, and the future of your own relationship with each other.

Excerpts from the Constitutions

**of the
Sisters, Servants
of the
Immaculate Heart of Mary
of
Monroe, Michigan**

**These constitutions
were approved
by the
Chapter of 1988
and
received
approval
from
Rome in 1989.**

Chapter 1: Commitment to Jesus Christ and His Redeeming Mission

1. The love of Jesus Christ
unites us in community and
impels us to proclaim the good news
of salvation. *Jn 13:34-35*
Col 1:29

2. Urged by the love of God,
revealed in Christ Jesus and
“poured out in our hearts
by the Holy Spirit
who has been given to us,”
we share in Christ’s own redeeming mission
in the reality of our times
through a variety of ministries. *Rom 5:5*
Eph 4:11-12

3. We are drawn together in community
by Jesus Christ,
whom we love and in whom we believe,
and we rely on the Holy Spirit
to preserve the bond of our unity and
to empower us to serve God’s people. *1 Jn 4:7-12*
1 Pet 1:8
Eph 4:3
Acts 1:8
Phil 3:10

4. Nourished and strengthened by prayer,
by reflection on the word of God,
by ministry and life in community, and
by sharing in the life of Jesus Christ
in the Eucharist,
we desire to be filled
with the spirit of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer,
who in unbounded love
sacrificed himself completely
for the redemption of each person
and of the whole human family
in fulfillment of his Father’s will. *Jn 6:34-35, 51-53*
Lk 24:31-35
Acts 2:44-47
Jn. 17: 1-6

5. Animated by this same spirit
of sacrificial love,
we express our total life-long commitment
to Jesus Christ
and his redeeming mission
through public profession
in the Church
of consecrated celibacy, obedience, and
poverty. *Lk 9: 23-26*
Jn 15:13
Phil 3:7-16

6. As Jesus’ disciples,
we are inspired by Mary, his mother,
the perfect servant of God
who by her life teaches us how
to hear the word of God and act on it. *Lk 1:38*
Lk 8:21

7. We cherish and are inspired
by the lives
of those who founded our
Congregation,
 Louis Florent Gillet
 Marie Therese Maxis,
 our pioneer Sisters, and
by the lives
of all our Sisters
who have gone before us.

We are united with them
and with one another
in our common history
and our Alphonsian heritage.

Phil 3:17
Heb 11:1-40; 12-1-2

8. Like them, we pray that
humility, simplicity, and zeal
will mark us servants of Jesus Christ
and of his people.

In serving others,
we hope to give and to receive,
to enrich and to be enriched,
to share and to grow together.

Lk 18: 16-17
Jn 2:17
Mt. 10: 8-11
Gal 6: 6-10

Chapter 2: Commitment through Ministry To Participate in the Mission of Jesus Christ

9. Jesus announced his own redeeming
mission in the words of the prophet Isaiah:
--words often used by Saint Alphonsus Ligouri--
"The Spirit of God is upon me;
therefore God has anointed me.
God has sent me
to bring glad tidings to the poor;
to proclaim liberty to captives
 recovery of sight to the blind
 and release to prisoners;
to announce a year of favor from our God."

As members of the Church
and of this community
we continue Jesus' liberating mission.

Lk 4:17-21
Lk 7:18-28
Mk 16:15-20

10. With Jesus,
we share the joys and hopes
the griefs and anguish
of all our sisters and brothers
in the human family.

With him
we hear the cry of all God's people,
especially of the poor and abandoned
and, with the power of the Spirit,
we respond to their cry
through a variety of ministries.

Therefore, we encourage one another
to use in the service of God's people
the many and unique gifts
God has given us
both personally and communally.

Gaudium et Spes, 1
Ex 3:7-10
1 Cor 12:4-7

11. In our struggle to live the gospel today,
we recognize our call
to serve the needs of God's people
not only through the traditional works of
mercy,
but also by working with others
to eradicate the causes of injustice
and oppression and
to help create structures that will
promote justice and peace
and bring unity among all peoples.

In a special way,
we are committed to the work of education,
a ministry in which our community
has been engaged for
over a century.

Mt 25:31-46
Justice in the World
(Synod of Bishops, 1971)
Dn 12:3
Mt 5:19

12. While many of us experience
the desire of Louis Florent Gillet to be
everywhere when we see so many needs, we
realize that we cannot respond to every need.

Therefore, we commit ourselves
to prayerful discernment
in our choice of ministry.

Louis Florent Gillet
April 13, 1845
Acts 6: 1-6

13. In that discernment,
we urge one another
to be conscious of the poverty,
hunger, and injustice suffered
by the great majority of the human family and
to make choices which clearly reflect
that, with Mary of the Magnificat,
we stand with and for the poor.

1 Jn 3:16-18
Lk 1: 46-55

14. We reverence the work of the Spirit

in each Sister

as she discerns her ministry

in the light of

- her individual gifts,
- congregationally established goals and priorities, and
- the current needs of the Congregation,
- the Church and society and

in consultation with

- the people she hopes to serve,
- her co-ministers
- her local community, and
- our community leaders.

As a community,
we affirm each Sister
who is sent in ministry
by our elected community leaders.

Rom 12: 6-8
Lk 9: 1-2
Jn 20:21
Acts 13:3

15. Striving to be attentive to

the signs of the times

and sensitive to

the needs of particular groups of people,

the community itself

may undertake corporate works and

call members of the community

to ministry in these works.

Acts 6: 1-6
Acts 13: 2-3

16. In all we do to respond

to the needs of God's people

and to proclaim the reign of God,

we rely on the strength and inspiration

of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, we dare

to speak God's word with boldness and

to risk deeds our own hearts could never dream,

so that, whatever the outcome,

we may say

in the spirit of Louis Florent Gillet:

I began without thinking of the future
of the work, leaving it to God alone
to bless it and make it prosper,
if it were pleasing to God
and useful for the good of others.

2 Cor 4:5-10
1 Cor 2: 2-5
Col. 4: 3-4
Eph 3: 14-21
Acts 4: 29
Louis Florent Gillet,
May 4, 1891

17. Finally, we commit ourselves to

mutuality in ministry,

desiring that our love, reverence,

and support of one another

be reflected in the way

we affirm, encourage, and work

with our co-ministers and

with each of the persons
among whom we serve.

Phlm 1:4-7
1 Thess 1: 1-8

Chapter 3: A Commitment to be a Christian Community

18. We are drawn together in community
by Jesus' call to each of us:
"Come, follow me!"

Jesus is the center and meaning
of our life together
and his Spirit is the bond
of our unity.

Mk 1: 16-20
Jn 1:35-51
Eph 4:3

19. Jesus loved his disciples
and formed them into a community
- calling each by name,
 - recognizing each one as unique,
 - forgiving each one's weakness and sin,
 - teaching them that the greatest
should be the least and servant of all,
 - praying that they might be one,
even as his Father and he are one, and
 - sending them to proclaim the good
news of salvation.

In Jesus' Spirit, we struggle
to love one another with a genuine love,
to accept, affirm, and forgive one another, and
to encourage and challenge one another
to live the gospel of Jesus Christ,
to proclaim the reign of God, and
to be faithful to the discipleship
we have publicly vowed.

Mk 3: 13-19
Jn 1: 43-47
Lk 22: 24-27
Jn 13: 1-6
Jn 17: 21-27
Mt 28: 16-20
Col 3: 12-17
Rom 12: 9-10

20. Together, we know Jesus Christ
in the breaking of the bread and
in sharing the cup of salvation.
We believe that
where two or three are gathered
in his name
Jesus is in our midst,
and that whatever we ask in his name
he will give us.

Lk 24: 30-35
Mt 18: 19-20
Jn 14: 13-14

21. Sharing a common commitment
to participate in Christ's redeeming mission,
we encourage one another
in our diverse ministries,
recognizing that a variety of gifts
enriches the community
and furthers the reign of God
in multiple ways.

Mt 28: 18-20
1 Cor 12: 4-11
1 Pet 4: 10-11
2 Tim 1: 6-8

22. As in the early Christian community
we hold all things in common.
From this community of goods
each one's needs are met, and
to this community of goods
each one contributes
according to her ability.

More than this,
as a community, we commit ourselves
to live a simple life style,
to share what we have with those in need,
and to use our resources in action
on behalf of justice.

In this way,
we express our interdependence
with one another and with all peoples
and, recognizing our human weakness,
give thanks for God's mercy and saving power.

Acts 2: 44-45
Acts 4: 32-37
1 Cor 16: 1-4
2 Cor 9: 1-15

23. Through co-responsibility and service
in community
we strive to grow in our understanding
of love.
For, just as Jesus laid down his life
for us,
we are called to lay down our lives
for one another.

We affirm that all our members
are mutually responsible for
the life, mission, and common good
of the community.

There are varieties of gifts,
and each Sister contributes to
the formation of community and
the direction of its mission
in one Spirit.

We urge one another
to participate in community meetings
to enter into processes of decision making,
and to implement community decisions.

24. We recognize the service of authority
in community,
a service which Jesus exemplified

- by washing the feet of his disciples,
- by praying for and with his followers,
- by instructing, encouraging, and admonishing his companions, and
- by laying down his life for all as friend.

We ask our Sisters called to this service
through election or appointment,

- to respect, affirm, and support individual members and local communities,
- to express our unity in charity,
- to focus our communal purpose and efforts,
- to exercise authority and make decisions in accordance with these Constitutions
- to coordinate the implementation of community decisions,
- -and to speak in its name.

Jn 13:1-15
Jn 17:11-19
Lk 11:1-4
Lk 6:20-26
Lk 12:31-32
Jn 15:13
Mk 9:35
Lk 22:24-27
1 Jn 3:16
Acts 15:5-29
1 Thess 5:12-24

We, in turn, promise
to our Sisters in community leadership
our respect, affirmation, support
and collaboration.

25. We believe that community
governance,
founded on Jesus' presence in our midst and
on our love and respect for one another,
enables us more fully
to live the gospel
and to proclaim the reign of God.

We are committed, therefore,
to governance which expresses

- faith in Jesus Christ,
- love of one another,
- respect for the individual,
- participation and collaboration,
- corporate decisions and actions.

Mk 28:16-20
Mt 18:15-20
1 Thess 5:12-24
Acts 15:5-29

26. We recognize that
the highest authority
in the Congregation
is the General Chapter
when it is in session,
and at all other times
is the President
who works with and is assisted
by a council.
- Acts 15:1-35*
Acts 6:5
Jn 21:15-17
27. In our life together,
we call one another
to mutual accountability
- member to member,
 - leaders to members,
 - individual members and
 - local communities to leaders.
- 1 Thess 5:12-22*
Mt 18:15-18
28. We acknowledge
our continual need
for conversion, healing,
and growth in holiness.
- We accept responsibility,
both as individuals and as a community,
for our on-going formation, learning,
and development.
- Mt 5:48*
Mk 14:38
Acts 22:10
Lk 9:11
29. To new members, called to share
our life and mission,
we offer our love, our support, and
all that we are and have.
We are grateful for the unique enrichment
- They will best understand who we are
by entering into our life
- a life of faith and prayer
 - of zeal for the extension of God's reign,
 - of true love for one another.
- Jn 13:34-35*
Acts 2:42-47
Acts 4:32-35
Rom 13:8
Col 3:12-17
30. New members are integrated into the
community through a process centered in
- personal love of Jesus Christ,
 - commitment to his redeeming mission
 - In the reality of our times, and
 - the gospel values emphasized
 - in our community tradition
 - and expressed in these Constitutions.
- Jn 21:15-17*
- A Sister is fully incorporated
into the life and mission
of the Congregation
when she makes profession
of perpetual vows.
- Jn 15:9*
Lk 4:18
Lk 9:46-48
Jn 13:34-35
Acts 2:42-47

31. As a community,
we desire above all
to be known as Jesus' disciples
by our love for one another
and for all whom our lives touch,
particularly our associates and
co-laborers.

We unite in a special way
with our sisters and brothers
in the community of the Church, and,
we endeavor to create
with all peoples everywhere
a global community of justice, love
and peace.

Jn 13:34-35
Gal 6:10
Phil 2:25
Acts 18:1, 18
Mt 28:16-20
Rom 10:12-15

Chapter 4: Commitment to Prayer, Reflection, and the Celebration of Eucharist

32. We ask Jesus to teach us to pray,
even as he taught his disciples,
and to help us to pray always
even as he urged his followers to do.

Like Jesus, who prayed
-in solitude
-in the midst of action, and
-in public gatherings of his people,
we promise to be faithful
to personal and communal prayer.

Lk 11:1-4
Lk 18:1
Mk 1:35
Jn 11:41-42
Lk 4:16

33. Following the example of Jesus, who,
early in the morning and during the night,
went in search of deserted places
so that he might pray alone
to his Father,
we promise to be faithful
to daily personal prayer, and
to regular times of solitude and silence.

Mk 1:35
Lk 5:16
Lk 6:12

34. We continually strive
to hear the Spirit who prays in us, and
to make our whole life a prayer,
so that whatever we do, in word or act,
all will be done in the name of Jesus
and by the power of his Spirit.

Rom 8:26-27
Col 3:17
Phil 3:10
Eph 3:20-21

35. We believe that when we come together
in his name,
Jesus is in our very midst.
Our communal prayer
bonds us in love, forgiveness,
and reconciliation and
strengthens us to respond to the cry
of God's people.
- Mt 18:19-22
2 Tim 1:6-7
Col 3:27-29*
36. In our struggle to integrate
prayer and service, reflection and action,
we look to Mary, the mother of Jesus,
a woman of faith who
- questioned the words of the messenger,
 - went in haste to visit her cousin,
 - pondered in her heart the words and
events she did not understand,
 - acted to provide wine for the wedding,
 - searched out Jesus in his public ministry,
 - stood beneath the cross, and
 - prayed in the midst of the
resurrection community.
- Lk 1:26-45
Lk 2:19,51
Jn 2:1-11
Lk 8:19-21
Jn 19:25-27
Acts 1:14*
37. In the celebration of Eucharist,
we unite with communities of Christians
all over the world to
give thanks and
to remember,
enter into, and
proclaim Christ's self-giving
in his life, death, and resurrection.
- Through Christ's saving action,
we are formed into a community
and are missioned to proclaim
the reign of God in our midst.
- Lk 22:14-20
1 Cor 11:23-26
Jn 17:18-23
Lk 24:13-35*

Chapter 6: The Heritage of the Congregation

44. The Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with its Motherhouse at Monroe, Michigan is an apostolic religious institute of pontifical right. As an institute and as individuals dedicated to service in the Church, we are bound in a special way to its supreme authority, according to the norms of law.
45. Since the time of our foundation by Louis Florent Gillet, a Redemptorist missionary, our Congregation has been apostolic in nature and Alphonsian in spiritual tradition.
46. The Eucharist is central in our lives.
- Daily participation in the Paschal Mystery is essential to our personal and communal growth in Christ.

- As frequently as circumstances of our life and ministry allow, we gather for the celebration of Eucharist.
- Whenever possible, we continue our Alphonsian tradition of having the Blessed Sacrament reserved in each local house.

47. Through a life of prayer, we experience the Spirit's continual call to conversion. Open to this call, we frequently celebrate our conversion/reconciliation within our communities and in the Church's sacrament of Reconciliation.

48. The life of prayer taught by Jesus is our inheritance from Saint Alphonsus Ligouri, who also gave us, as a model, Saint Teresa of Avila, a woman of contemplation and action.

In our personal lives, we develop patterns which regularly allow for more extended times of prayer and for an annual retreat.

49. Love of the Scriptures and the spirit of the liturgical seasons, inform and characterize our morning and evening communal prayer. This is especially evident in our celebrations of

- Advent, Christmas, Epiphany; and
- Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost.

50. In keeping with our Redemptorist heritage, the patrons of the Congregation are:

- Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception;
- Saint Joseph;
- Saint Alphonsus Ligouri;
- Saint Teresa Avila

Traditionally, therefore, we celebrate in a special way:

- The feast of the Immaculate Conception, our patronal feast (December 8)
- The feast of St. Joseph (March 19)
- The feast of St. Alphonsus Ligouri, from whom we have received our spirituality and orientation in mission (August 1)
- The feast of St. Teresa of Avila, woman of prayer and doctor of the Church (October 15)
- Founders' Day, honoring the day of our official beginning as a community. (November 10)
- Marian feasts according to the current liturgical calendar.

We commemorate in a special way the lives of the deceased members of the Congregation, both in actual celebration of their funeral liturgies and each year on the anniversaries of their deaths.

51. Continuing the long-standing tradition of our congregation, whenever possible we renew our vows publicly on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

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Candidate Request for Association

Please offer your reflections on how you envision living out the IHM charism as an IHM associate. Return your request to the Associate Office.

How did working through the journal with your IHM companion affect your journey? Why do you desire to become an IHM associate? (Continue on reverse if desired.)

Having explored my desire to join the IHM sisters as an associate, I would like to request formal association with the IHM community. Tentative dates* for my commitment ceremony are:

Candidate Name (Print) _____ Date _____

Candidate Signature _____

Associate Coordinator Approval _____ Date _____

LC Liaison Approval _____ Date _____

**The date for the ceremony must be approved by the Associate Coordinator and LC Liaison before it can be calendared.*

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Associate Companion Recommendation

Please return completed form to the Associate Office

_____ has explored his/her desire to join the IHM sisters as an associate, and as the companion on the journey, I make the following observations

on our experience of working through the journal:

on his/her understanding of IHM charism:

of his/her desire to become an associate:

of his/her vision of living out the associate commitment:

Additional comments:

I, _____ IHM companion, (recommend) or (do not recommend)

_____ be accepted as an IHM associate. Date _____

Associate Coordinator Approval _____ Date _____

LC Liaison Approval _____ Date _____

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