

# *Amici Cordis*



## *Friends of the Heart*

# FORMATION MANUAL



*Sisters of Divine Providence*

Marie de la Roche Province

*Making God's Providence Visible*

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations, including the Divine Providence Canonical Vowed Members, the Amici Cordis and the Associates are organized around a shared identity. When that identity is embraced it becomes the center about how we live and how we serve the world. When we as a group read “the signs of the times” what we notice and invest in is based on how we understand ourselves. It is why a formation manual becomes the place where we capture our shared meaning, values, vision and mission. We use information that is already a part of us to make sense and give direction when confronted with something new. We use this shared sense of identity to organize our present and future contributions to the world.

Our coherent center is what will sustain us through turbulent times. It allows us to have clarity about what is important, what are the behaviors needed and the actions that our values require. The formation program puts us in the position to know and be clear about who and whose we are. What is in the manual presents the face we show to the world. What is in the manual presents the context for meaningful conversations between vowed members, the Amici Cordis and the Associates. The shared meaning is the foundation that allows diversity because we are strong enough in the core values, vision and missions to embrace all. We cannot prepare for a future many of us won’t see unless we build relationships where we know and trust each other.

These shared aspects of our live help us to engage the world in meaningful ways that transcend individual concerns when together we decide who we are and what we want to be carried into the future of the world. Nothing motivates people more than shared meaning. When there is a failure to implement or we don’t seem to care about the work or we’re all too busy to give it the time and thought necessary, then we need to question whether or not we need to make a different decision about moving forward.

Every spiritual tradition recognizes the oneness of everything in the cosmos. So does the new understanding revealed through science. The decisions we make have repercussions that will affect future generations.

# **AMICI CORDIS FORMATION PROGRAM**

## **History of the Divine Providence Community: Spirit and Charism**

- The Lure of Providence: History of the community especially in the United States
- How does the work of the Catholic Bishop of Mainz who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century still influence many aspects of life in Germany today? Clara Kreis
- Document: The Worker Bishop
- Book of Hour Vol. 1 and 2: Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Mother Marie de la Roche
- Catholic Social Teaching

## **Theology of Providence**

- Women of Providence in Collaboration Writings
- Divine Providence: Book compiled by Mother Mary Kenneth Kearns

## **Community Foundational Documents**

- Way of Life for the Amici Cordis: Vow of Fidelity and Vocational Call
- Discernment
- Mission and Vision Statements
- Policy Book
- Exploration of the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience in light of one's baptismal call.

## **Spirituality**

- Role of spiritual direction
- Prayer Life: Personal and Communal Practices
- New understandings of our relationship to the divine and the cosmos

## **Community Life**

- Desire for community
- Behaviors and virtues that foster healthy community
- Toxic behaviors that negatively impact community life
- Collegial process of decision-making

## **Service**

- Prophetic nature of witness
- Corporate sponsored ministries
- Ministry as an expression of mission

## HISTORY OF THE AMICI CORDIS

**FEBRUARY 3, 2018** – CDP Associate Pat Montgomery, CDP Associate Paula Gilchrist, and Nancy Robinson met for the first time to talk about the possibility of becoming non-canonical members with the Sisters of Divine Providence of the Marie de la Roche Province.

They began to meet monthly to pursue this dream. They phoned CSJ practitioners in Kansas, Erie, Springfield, MA, interviewing various directors of non-canonical members (known as “Agreges”) of the CSJ community and several Agreges.

**APRIL 14, 2018** – At a CDP Town Hall meeting, Paula Gilchrist and Pat Montgomery addressed this new form of non-canonical vowed membership informally and answered questions from those in attendance. From this point on, there has been a relatively steady stream of information about non-canonical membership going out to the CDP Community.

**JUNE 10-11, 2018** – At the annual CDP Provincial Assembly, Paula and Pat did an informal presentation, and again, questions were addressed.

**JUNE-DECEMBER 2018** -- The three Team members (Pat Montgomery, Paula Gilchrist, and Nancy Robinson) continued meeting periodically throughout this time, sharing all the research findings they unearthed about the Agreges from the three religious communities who had this form of membership.

**DECEMBER 18, 2018** – Pat, Paula, and Nancy submitted a proposal to the Provincial Leadership Team to begin this new form of non-canonical membership.

**JANUARY 9, 2019** -- The three met with the PLT and received their formal blessing to continue discovery and suggest adaptations for CDP acceptance. Sr. Ana Lydia was appointed as liaison.

**APRIL 14, 2019** – Paula and Pat gave an informal presentation at another CDP Town Hall meeting and again answered questions.

**AUGUST 2, 2019** -- Pat Montgomery was a member of the 2019 Assembly Planning Committee and was given a time slot to present once again at the Assembly about the membership the team of three was pursuing. She then answered any of the questions the Assembly participants asked. The talk on Agreges that Pat gave the Assembly gathering was posted on the CDP website for all to see.

It was during the Q&A portion of this event that two promises were made to all present: first, that a name for this non-canonical membership would be chosen by the entire Community once the team had considered a few suitable ones as possibilities; and second, that the final decision as to whether or not non-canonical membership would actually be embraced by the Community would be settled at the 2021 Provincial Chapter. Covid changed that to 2022. Those promises were repeated many times over at various community gatherings.

**AUGUST 16, 2019** – Paula Gilchrist passed away without having realized her dream of becoming a non-canonical member.

**SEPTEMBER 17, 2019** -- Pat addressed the Pgh/Ohio/Michigan Associates at their retreat concerning the development of this form of membership in our CDP Community. She also wrote articles about the concept of non-canonical membership that were published in the Associate newsletter.

**OCTOBER 18-20, 2019** -- Pat traveled to our CDP St. Louis community to accept their offer to address their seasonal Sisters-Associates Meeting so that all who had not been at the 2018 Allison Park Assembly could hear the presentation and be able to ask questions. It was at this meeting that Pat Montgomery was able to set up an Advisory Group of Sisters to vet any/all documents that the Team developed.

**FEBRUARY 26, 2020** -- Nancy Robinson and Pat Montgomery were invited to meet with the PLT. At this meeting the decision was made to find a Sister to head a Task Force to provide Pat and Nancy with continuing oversight and guidance in this process, which by then had progressed significantly. They had continued to develop documentation defining what CDP membership of non-canonical members would look like.

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2020** -- The CDP Community participated in an Education Day where Marcia Allen, CSJ, gave a presentation on the Agregee program of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia, Kansas. She described all the amazing and abundant graces that have come to their community through this new membership as they take a Vow of Fidelity to the Community. Marcia Allen entertained and answered by. This presentation as well as other information pertaining to this effort is available on our Community website.

**OCTOBER 2020** -- Sr. Lisa Paffrath volunteered to chair a Task Force to establish an Agregee program in our Province. A Task Force was assembled: Pat Montgomery, Nancy Robinson, Karen Snyder, Sr. Elena Almendarez, and Sr. Margie Modro.

**JANUARY 18, 2021** -- The Task Force met for the first time. Pat and Nancy gave a brief overview of their journey so far and the information they had collected. The group reviewed and discussed Sr. Marcia Allen's presentation.

**FEBRUARY-JULY 2021** -- The Task Force began meeting monthly. Their goals were:

- To decide on a unique name for the CDP non-canonical members;
- To create admission forms and documents describing the requirements, formation, and life of a CDP non-canonical member; and
- To submit a formal proposal for this new type of membership to be voted on at the 2022 Provincial Chapter.

**APRIL 2021** -- Sr. Margie proposed the name "Amici Cordis" -- "Friends of the Heart." The Task Force discussed and agreed.

**MAY-SEPTEMBER 2021** -- The Task Force worked on creating a document to be called the "Amici Cordis Way of Life" -- based on the Constitutions of the Sisters of Divine Providence of the Marie de la Roche Province.

**JULY 2021** -- Nancy Robinson asked to withdraw from the "Agreee" process.

**OCTOBER 2021** -- Sr. Lisa Paffrath, Chair of the Task Force, met with the PLT concerning the Amici Cordis. The members of the PLT were happy with the Amici Cordis Way of Life document. They agreed to the suggestion of a CDP Education Day and to a survey to be sent out immediately after.

**NOVEMBER 2021-MARCH 2022** – Task Force worked on Amici Cordis Admissions documents and prepared for a virtual Education Day.

**MARCH 12, 2022** – Virtual CDP Education Day on non-canonical membership. A survey regarding the Education Day was sent out to Sisters and Associates. The response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive.

**MARCH-JUNE 2022** – Task force continued to meet and prepare for the Amici Cordis Proposal to the Chapter of Affairs.

**JULY 31-AUGUST 5, 2022** – Provincial Chapter of Affairs. Amici Cordis Proposal to the Chapter was formally accepted.

**SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2022** – Task Force continued to meet periodically to prepare and refine the documents necessary for Amici Cordis formation and way of life.

**JANUARY 2023** – Sr. Lisa Paffrath resigned as chair of the Amici Cordis Task Force. Sr. Betsa Palomino Montalvo, elected to the Provincial Leadership Team at the 2022 Provincial Chapter of Elections, was appointed to chair the Task Force.

**JANUARY 2023-PRESENT** – The Task Force continued to meet monthly and work on the documents.

## PROCEDURES FOR ACCEPTANCE OF AMICI CORDIS

1. Letter of readiness from:
  - Candidate
  - Mentor
  - Coordinator of education services

Amici Cordis Team receives and reviews letters of readiness, then recommends continued education or steps to begin application for profession.

2. Three letters of recommendation to the Provincial Director
3. Verification of health status for ministry sent to the Provincial Director (paid for by candidate)
4. Psychological Assessment
5. FBI Clearances
6. State Clearances

Once all of the above have been completed, the candidate makes an appointment for a meeting with the Provincial Director.

7. Each of the following is prepared by the candidate and verification of having done them is sent to the Provincial Director before the interview:
  - Mutual Agreement (send to Provincial Director before profession)
  - Last Will and Testament
  - Power of Attorney Designation
  - Medical Directives

Send verification of having the last three items in place. Provincial Director has no need to see them or know what they contain.

8. Pre-commitment Retreat —the candidate makes a 4-6 day retreat as part of final discernment.
9. Ceremony of Commitment — the candidate and mentor plan her commitment ritual with one or more community members, sets the date in collaboration with the Provincial Leadership Council, and oversees the implementation of the ceremony.

## AMICI CORDIS APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ U.S. Citizen: ☐Yes ☐No

Place of Birth: Country \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

### EDUCATION

High School: Number of years completed \_\_\_\_\_ Diploma Received ☐Yes ☐No ☐GED

College: Number of years completed \_\_\_\_\_

Specify Degrees: Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Post-Graduate \_\_\_\_\_

### WORK EXPERIENCE (Please attach resume)

Retired from \_\_\_\_\_

Relevant Experience/Service/Volunteer Activities \_\_\_\_\_

### RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

Please write a few sentences about your religious/spiritual background \_\_\_\_\_

What do you do to nourish your spirituality? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you want to become an Amici Cordis of the Sisters of Divine Providence?



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What are you looking for from this Community as an Amici Cordis?

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What gifts do you bring to this Community?

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Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Please attach or include a recent photo of yourself with this application. Also, ask a friend, family member, co-worker, spiritual director, pastor, etc., to write a brief letter of recommendation. Submit this application, photo, and recommendation letter to your CDP Mentor.

## Mutual Agreement Between the Amici Cordis and the CDP Community

This Agreement, dated \_\_\_\_\_, is by and between the “Amici Cordis” and the Community of the Sisters of Divine Providence of the Marie de la Roche Province (hereinafter designated as “the Community”), until it is amended or terminated.

WHEREAS, the Amici Cordis, who has freely responded to the call of the Holy Spirit and is desirous of being united with a group of women whose mission is to make God’s Providence more visible in our world by co-creating a world of compassion, justice and peace, has requested to become a non-canonical member with the Community through the process established in the *Amici Cordis Way of Life*.

WHEREAS, the Community has determined that the Amici Cordis has experienced and responded to a call from God and requested this form of relationship with the Community, the Community has determined to enter into a Mutual Agreement with the Amici Cordis.

NOW THEREFORE, in view of this commitment, it is hereby agreed by and between the parties:

On the part of the individual...

The Amici Cordis accepts and agrees to live according to the *Amici Cordis Way of Life* and agrees as follows:

1. To make a Vow of Fidelity to the Community.
2. To engage in an annual discernment with her Spiritual Director to determine how her relationship with God, life experiences and service enable her to live the mission and vision of the Community.
3. To engage regularly in prayer with a local CDP community and to make an annual retreat.
4. To attend appropriate Community meetings as often as possible.
5. To provide service each year to the Community.
6. To accept all responsibility for her own living expenses, health care, medical insurance, retirement provisions, administration of her own property, funeral expenses, current debts or those she may incur, current or future liabilities for which she may become responsible, and similar personal obligations. She has provided documentation to the Community, with signatures of this Agreement, that a Will, Medical Directives, Financial Power of Attorney, funeral and burial arrangements, and all liability insurance have been completed.
7. To affirm that, should she enter into any dual relationship with the Community (for example, employment), she will adhere to the appropriate policies, procedures, and guidelines.
8. To make an annual financial contribution to the Community according to her personal means.

On the part of the Community...

The Community agrees:

1. To welcome the Amici Cordis with genuine acceptance and love.
2. To assist the Amici Cordis in living out the mission and vision of the Community.
3. To provide opportunities for active participation in the works of the Community.
4. To recognize that in ordinary Community gatherings the Amici Cordis has voice and vote in all matters except those relating to canonical norms, legal matters, Community finances, and matters pertaining specifically to the life of the Sisters. At Chapter the Amici Cordis has voice but no vote, since only canonically vowed members have the right to vote in Chapter.
5. To extend support and companionship in prayer and in sharing faith, life, and mission.
6. To include the Amici Cordis in appropriate Community notices, directories, and mailings.

7. The Community assumes no liability or financial responsibilities for the Amici Cordis. Both agree that the Amici Cordis is not responsible for any liabilities or debts of the Community.

This Agreement may be amended at any time by mutual agreement of both parties. It may be dissolved through a unilateral decision by either the designated authority of the Community or the Amici Cordis. Circumstances that may lead the Community to initiate dispensation of the Agreement include behavior not consistent with a public affiliation with the Community or with the document entitled the *Amici Cordis Way of Life*.

**AMICI CORDIS**

**COMMUNITY OF THE SISTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE  
OF THE MARIE DE LA ROCHE PROVINCE**

By \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name

Printed Name

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_,

before me, the undersigned, came \_\_\_\_\_ and

\_\_\_\_\_, who are personally known to me to be the same persons who executed the within and foregoing Agreement, and such persons duly acknowledged the execution of the same.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal; the day and year last above written.

\_\_\_\_\_, Notary Public

Term expires \_\_\_\_\_

**REQUEST TO MAKE A VOW OF FIDELITY TO THE SISTERS  
OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE OF THE MARIE DE LA ROCHE PROVINCE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Originally what drew you to the community and has that changed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Have you found what you were looking for in your association with the community? Explain.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. The legacy of Ketteler and Marie de La Roche holds their founding vision and charism, how do you see yourself furthering this vision and charism in today's world?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. We are to put on the "mind of Christ." How do you nourish your understanding and continued growth as to what that entails?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. As a Christian and/or member of this community in what ways do you see living the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience as a part of your way of life?

6. What gifts do you bring to the community and ultimately to the body of Christ?
7. What are your expectations of the community?
8. We are each called to discern the movement of Spirit in our lives. In your discernment process how did this decision manifest in order for you to decide to take this step?

## HISTORY OF THE CO-FOUNDERS AND THE SISTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

"I found great consolation in my belief in the truth of those sublime ideas that stirred the world to its depth in my day. I believed then, and I believe today, that not one of them is too high for humankind. I believe it is your duty to realize them, and to love the age in which you live for its mighty wrestling for them, however far you are from attaining them." *Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler*

### **Bishop Ketteler**

The history of the Sisters of Divine Providence starts with the life and times of its founder, Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, Germany.

On December 25, 1811, the Bishop of Mainz was born in Munster, Westphalia; one of nine children: six boys and three girls.

Ketteler is known to have been hot-headed and headstrong as a boy, once having thrown himself on the ground in a fit of rage when he missed shooting a rabbit while on a hunting trip with his

father. During his days at the University, he lost the tip of his nose in a duel.

He started out studying to be a lawyer, loving the challenge of the law, but under the iron hand of Bismarck, then the Chancellor of Germany, he resigned in protest when the archbishop was imprisoned. It was then that he began to seriously think about the priesthood. He was ordained on June 1, 1844.

As priest and bishop, Ketteler spent his time working on behalf of the poor. At the time of his priestly life, Europe was experiencing the Industrial Revolution, and there were many factory workers in need of just wages. Because the men were working in the factories during this time, many of the elderly were simply abandoned. Ketteler tried to help them.

Ketteler was installed as bishop on July 25, 1850. As bishop, he took the motto For the

Church, for the people. This was a most appropriate motto for a church leader of his time, since the liberty of the Church, while not always threatened directly, was often in a tenuous state; and because the poor found themselves in a state of powerlessness in face of the economic and social conditions of the time. Germany seemed to change overnight from a peaceful agrarian state to a restless industrial center. Steam and



electricity, those newly-discovered magical forces, brought about, almost instantly, profound economic changes in the city.

With the changes came some not so good things: factories. Soon, the people became slaves of the machines. A new class of people was formed (the working class), which soon grew into the Proletariat, devoid of rights, power, and protection. Slums began to appear.

When visiting the parishes and factories in his diocese, Ketteler learned of the many problems facing not only the Catholic industrial workers, but also the poor man: the laborer. Ketteler contacted the common people through the study clubs and lay associations that he established. The bishop recognized the values and ideas of the poor



laborer. He saw the children of the poor being abandoned and orphaned and in need of an education.

He founded the Brothers of St. Joseph and in 1859 founded the St. Joseph's Boys Home to educate orphaned boys. This community of Brothers no longer exists, but he would spend every opportunity he could with these abandoned boys.

His love for his people found expression in other institutions, such as hospitals and organizations for the benefit of craftsmen. He founded the Mainzer Journeymen's Association to provide a home away from home for young traveling craftsmen.

Ketteler soon realized that, while a change of heart was essential to any improvement in the socioeconomic plight of the poor, appropriate legislation was necessary. Ketteler began to speak out against the horrors of his times, the changes that had come because of the Industrial Revolution, and how to help protect the working man. He said, "No class stands in need of what unions should give to man in the natural order; namely, help and protection. Look at the evils that have arisen from the isolated condition of the workmen."

Ketteler began to write on behalf of these workmen, and in 1864 he wrote and

published his greatest work: *The Labor Question and Christianity*. This work influenced the political platform of the Center Party. This work, on behalf of the ideals of Christianity and the practical solutions to the problems of the have-nots, was the result of much research into the social questions of the day. Ketteler wrote that every dockhand, every day-laborer, and every peasant should be treated equal

to any prince or king and that human dignity should be placed far above class distinction.

Pope Leo XIII was a great follower of Ketteler, and later Ketteler's death, Pope Leo called him his great predecessor. In 1891, he wrote the first social encyclical, called *Rerum Novarum*. It is from this encyclical that all the social teachings of the Church flow. It is our legacy from our founder, Bishop Ketteler.

Much of Ketteler's struggle in his position as bishop involved securing the freedom of

the Church from the interference of the Prussian government. In his early days, he had to establish the role of the Church with the government. There was much concern at this time that the Church would

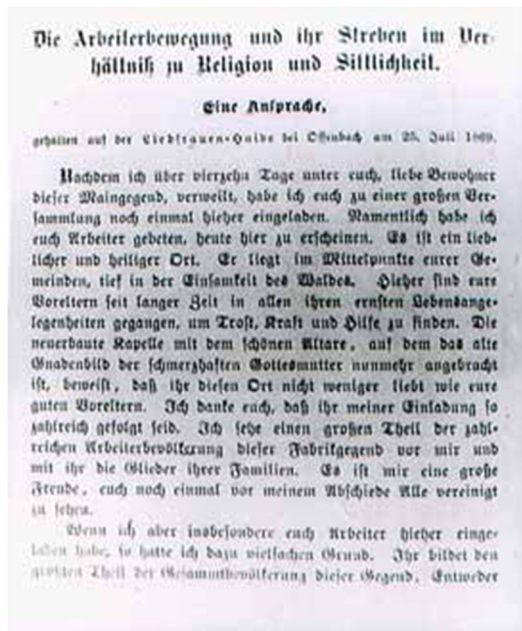
become too powerful politically. There was a lot of fear that the pope would somehow try to dictate the politics of the land.

The government had a great influence in the appointment of theology professors at the universities, which led Ketteler to establish the Mainz Seminary. He met with the other bishops of the Upper Rhine Conference to press the state to grant the Church greater freedom. They wanted to be able to appoint their own educational professors and leaders.

Pope Pius IX called for a General Council. Among the items on the agenda was the question of papal infallibility. Ketteler published a brochure about this, called "The General Council and What It Means for Our Time." In this document, he clearly stated what the doctrine of papal infallibility meant. However, in his own thinking, he believed that an official proclamation was unanimity, given the circumstances of the government.

He and the other bishops met at the Church of Fulda in September 1869 and sent a message to the Holy Father expressing their views. Their message stated that this dogma would create confusion and much misunderstanding. Ketteler wrote a pastoral letter to his people before leaving for the First Vatican Council.

The bishops gathered at St. Peter's, where, on December 8, 1869, Pius IX opened the





Vatican Council. The bishops discussed the dogma of infallibility; and although Ketteler argued against promulgating it at that time, he was defeated. Ketteler could not, in good conscience, vote for the dogma, so he departed the council the day prior to the voting. He wrote a letter to the Holy Father, telling him that he didn't want to vote against it, because he believed in it, but not at that particular time. His letter was dated July 17, 1870. Ketteler left the council and began his return trip home to his beloved Germany.

In a brochure published in 1871, Ketteler explained his position to the German people. He told them why he considered the doctrine inopportune; that he was hoping to have some additions so as to avoid misunderstanding, and that it should be announced to the world in its entirety and not only in part by the Council. The doctrine of papal infallibility caused great concern among the leaders of the Prussian government.

In 1870, Ketteler wrote to Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor, regarding the necessity of incorporating into this constitution decrees assuring freedom of religion. Von Bismarck, however, feared the intrusion of the Pope in German affairs.

Ketteler met with von Bismarck in November 1871, and of that meeting wrote, "I found the chancellor completely dominated by the thought that danger threatened his work from the side of Rome ... all attempts to convince him of his error proved fruitless."

In May 1872, von Bismarck began to launch his attack upon the Church in Germany, known as the Kulturkampf. In vain, Ketteler raised his voice as a representative of the Reichstag to protest the oppressive force of the Kulturkampf. With great sadness, he saw his seminary close, the Jesuits expelled from his diocese, and other infringements upon the liberty of the Church.

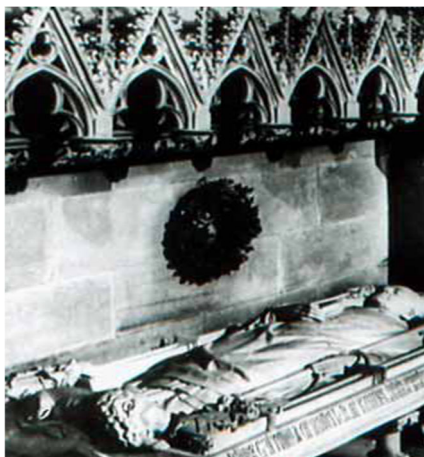
On July 25, 1875, Ketteler celebrated the 25th anniversary of his consecration and installation as Bishop of Mainz. The tremendous support that he felt from his people at the time truly lifted his spirits. Among their gifts to him were the redecoration of the Marian altar in the cathedral, and the cross that was placed on the cathedral's newly erected east tower.

On May 8, 1877, Ketteler departed for Rome, his last journey in life. He went to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Pius IX as bishop. It was at this time that the pope requested an audience with Ketteler and was heard to commend him.

In June 1877, he stopped to visit a priest friend at the Capuchin monastery in Burghausen, but the cold he had caught prior to his visit to Rome had worsened and became so severe that he was immediately confined to bed upon his arrival.

On Friday, July 13, he died in the presence of relatives and friends. His body was then taken to Mainz and waked in the bishop's residence, where thousands paid their last respects. The funeral procession wound its way through the streets, lined with thousands, some even on the rooftops, to pay their last respects.

In his Last Will, Ketteler wrote that his burial should be as simple as possible, keeping his Episcopal dignity. He wanted to be buried in the Blessed Mother Chapel of the cathedral because of his devotion to the Blessed Mother. In January 1882, the monument to Ketteler, in the Marian chapel of the cathedral, was completed. It reads: The Most Reverend Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, for 27 years, Bishop of the Church of Mainz, a man mighty in word and deed, who, just returning from the tomb of the





Prince of the Apostles, piously fell asleep in the Lord on July 13, 1877, in the Capuchin monastery, here awaits the resurrection.

The name Wilhelm Emmanuel Baron von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, now belongs to the history of the Church and will stand for all times in its annals alongside the names of the greatest bishops who ever ruled in the Church of God. Each year, on July 13, the Working Class Organization in Germany holds a service there and keeps an eternal flame lit at Ketteler's grave.

### ***Marie de la Roche***

Mother Marie, our co-foundress, was born in a castle near Heidelberg on October 28, 1812. She was christened Stephanie Fredericka Amelia de la Roche-Starkenfels.

In 1851, she completed her training, was given the name Mother Marie, and the small community of Divine Providence began.

Because of the troubles facing the Church in Germany at the time, the government deprived the Sisters of Divine Providence of their teaching positions, so Ketteler sent six members to the United States of America.

Meanwhile, in Germany, there was a priest who disliked Mother Marie, mainly because she was not German, and so he made life

miserable for her, until he got her ousted from her position. In 1856, Mother Marie was requested to go to the newly opened orphanage in Neustadt.

Mother Marie worked tirelessly during an epidemic of typhoid at the orphanage. She died there on August 1, 1857. It was naturally assumed that she died of typhus, but when they prepared her body for burial, they discovered that she had breast cancer, but had never complained of it.

Mother Marie was buried in Neustadt in the back of a house in a small garden area. Her body was moved from the parish cemetery in 1860 to a convent cemetery. In 1960, the body was exhumed once again, and the remains of Mother Marie were placed in a beautifully carved wooden chest and laid to rest in Neustadt for the last time. There is a monument standing near the grave with medallions of all the provinces in the congregation.

"Be hopeful signs of God's Providence. Witness joyfully that a living, compassionate God of Providence is with you. Indeed, God is with you as truly as God was with me and the early members of the Community back in 1851." -- *Marie de la Roche*



***The Community of Divine Providence  
began in this house in 1851.***

## ***The Sisters of Divine Providence in America***

To meet the needs of the time, six Sisters from Germany set out for the United States in 1876 to teach the German immigrants who had settled in the Pittsburgh area. Upon their arrival, the Sisters lived in the East Liberty area, first at the St. Joseph Motherhouse on Larimer Avenue, and then at the Mount Immaculate Motherhouse on Lincoln Avenue, adjacent to St. Walburga Church. The St. Joseph Motherhouse has been razed and in its place, on the busy corner of Penn Circle and Larimer Avenue in East Liberty, stands the Pentecostal Temple Church of God in Christ. Mount Immaculate, or "the Mount," as it is fondly remembered by some of the older sisters, was also razed a number of years ago.



In the mid 1920s, the Community outgrew the Mount, and the Sisters began to look for a site on which to build a new Motherhouse. They settled on a piece of farm land in Allison Park, and construction began. In 1927, the present Motherhouse, Providence Heights, was dedicated. At last, their Motherhouse was large enough to accommodate the more than 500 Sisters who gathered for Community meetings and retreats. The Jackson farm sprawled out on the north side of Providence Heights where UPMC Passavant Hospital is now located. Cows grazed on the farmland, and from Ketteler Hall down to the creek in back, there were rows of sweet and field corn. Along the Station Walk in back of the property grew black walnut trees, currant bushes, and trees filled with plump, sweet white cherries. There were also yellow and red plum trees. The barn, which is now a garage for the lawn equipment, was filled with chickens and pigs. On the present site of the La Roche College, from Wright Library to the Kerr Fitness and Sports Center and on to the ball field in back, there were apple orchards. Many Sisters remember their days as novices when they picked the fruit, filling their aprons until they overflowed.



The Sisters did much of the farm work and canned their food, storing it in the basement canning room. The landmark building with its tall spire can be seen for miles around. The beautiful grounds at Providence Heights continue to offer an oasis in the midst of the busy North Hills suburbs of Pittsburgh. The property is fronted by a lake and dotted with trees, many of which have been donated in honor or in memory of others. Wedding parties often request permission to use the property for their wedding photographs. The bell tower at Providence Heights holds three bells. The bells were blessed on May 30, 1926 and lifted to the bell tower to proclaim the Angelus three times each day. The bells were automated in 1999 as part of the building restoration. They ring at 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. daily. The bells also ring for Sisters' funerals, jubilees and other Community celebrations.

In order of size, largest to smallest, the bells were christened: Providencia, with the inscription, We exalt Thy Providence, O Lord, and we submit to all its decrees. Laudate, inscribed, Praise the Lord all ye nations, praise Him all ye peoples. Ave Maria, proclaiming, Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

At one time, the cross atop the building was painted in gold leaf. During World War II, the Sisters were asked to paint over the shiny gold leaf to prevent it from serving as a landmark to enemy aircraft. Due to increases in the cost of gold leaf, the paint was not restored. However, as part of the repairs undertaken later a devastating microburst in 1999, and because gold leaf became affordable once more, the cross was restored to its former brilliance.

In the late 1960s, La Roche College purchased a parcel of the original property to expand its campus. Today, the Sisters maintain several buildings and 16 acres of property that is meticulously groomed and nurtured in accordance with the natural beauty and regeneration of the environment. The Sisters welcome visitors and neighbors to visit, walk, rest and enjoy the beauty of their grounds whenever they need a place of respite.

Providence Heights is home to the approximately 70 retired and semi-retired Sisters. It also houses the Providence Heights Alpha School as well as administrative offices. The Provincial Leadership Team has offices in the Marie de la Roche Center at Providence Heights.

The Sisters are present to those in need through a variety of ministries. They began their active ministry as teachers and nurses. From the earliest days, the Sisters operated hospitals and schools with all of their energy. Beginning with St. Joseph's School in East Liberty, the Sisters took on one school later another, educating thousands of children. Today, the Sisters maintain an active teaching ministry, which includes the Providence Heights Alpha School and La Roche College, which was founded by the Congregation in 1963 as well as the Sacred Heart Schools in Kingston, MA. In addition, many Sisters teach in elementary schools, high schools, and colleges in Pittsburgh, across the country, and in Puerto Rico.

The Sisters were a major force in the ministry of health care in the area. In 1915, they took over administration of St. John's Hospital on the North Side of Pittsburgh, and opened a nursing school. The Sisters also administered Braddock General Hospital. The Sisters became administrators of Divine Providence Hospital on the North Side in 1955 and continued to be involved in the administration of the hospital until its sale in 1993 to the Mercy Health System.

In recent years, the Community has expanded its ministries to include pastoral care, social work, campus ministry, educational administration, foster parenting, work among those who are poor, and work on behalf of peace and justice. The Community has re-committed itself to the ideals espoused by the founders, Bishop Emmanuel von Ketteler and Mother Marie de la Roche "to advance the cause of the oppressed." Their 1985 Provincial Chapter Documents state that they are committed "as Providence women

to share in the task of co-creating a just world for the 21st Century." Today, the diverse ministries in which the Sisters are involved reelect the needs of a diverse population. From Pittsburgh, the Sisters went forth to St. Louis, MO; Puerto Rico and Kingston, MA, to carry out the mission of Providence.

### ***St. Louis, Missouri***

The Sisters of Divine Providence first came to St. Louis, Missouri in 1879, just three years later the community's arrival in the United States. They moved west in order to



teach, specifically the children of German immigrants in St. Louis. They staffed St. Francis de Sales School from 1879-1903. For the next several decades, the community staffed and operated



primary schools in the Dioceses of Belleville, Illinois; Springfield, Illinois; Shreveport, Louisiana; Springfield/Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri and the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and in parts of Kansas as well.

In 1920, the congregation paid \$50,000 to purchase St. Elizabeth Hospital in Granite City, Illinois. The Sisters of Divine Providence owned, operated and staffed the hospital until 2001, when it was sold and renamed Gateway Regional Medical Center.

In 1930, the St. Louis Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence was established, with Mother M. Rosalia Weaver

as Provincial. The congregation was formally welcomed into the Archdiocese of St. Louis by Archbishop John J. Glennon, who shared the Sisters' objective of establishing a boarding school for boys. In 1932, the community purchased an estate in Normandy, Missouri that would become Mount Providence, and serve as both the provincial Motherhouse and the boarding school for boys in kindergarten through grade 8. Mount Providence School for Boys



opened in January, 1933. It would quickly grow to a complex of three dormitories, nine-8classrooms, three cafeterias, a library, recreation area, crat room, band room, music room, guest rooms and reception rooms. More importantly, it would educate young boys-and beginning in 1988, girls as well-with a maximum enrollment of more than 300 students. At different points in its history Mount Providence would also be the home of an eldercare facility, a day care, and Catholic Charities' Villa Maria, a shelter for pregnant women and their children.

As a religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence are committed to aiding the homeless. In 1989, the Sisters of Divine Providence opened La Posada Providencia, a shelter in San Benito, Texas for people seeking legal refuge in the United States. In 1993, they began full sponsorship of Room at the Inn, a shelter for homeless women and families in St. Louis County. The congregation continues to sponsor both of these ministries today.

It was determined in the early 1990s that the St. Louis Province could no longer afford to maintain Mount Providence. The property was sold to the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1995, and Mount Providence School closed the following year. The Sisters moved out of the Motherhouse in 1997. In February 2001, the buildings were imploded to make way for the redirection of a dangerous stretch of Interstate 70.

Also in 2001, the St. Louis Province united with the Provinces in Pittsburgh and New England, the region of Puerto Rico and their mission in the Dominican Republic to become the Marie de la Roche Province.



With offices at Providence Center in Bridgeton, MO, the Sisters of Divine Providence continue to be a vital presence in the St. Louis metropolitan area and southeastern Illinois. Today, there are 39 Sisters of Divine Providence in the St. Louis area. Twelve of the Sisters live together in prayer ministry and semi-retirement at St. Clare's Villa in Alton, IL. There are also Sisters from the St. Louis area working in other parts of the country, including Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas and Tennessee. Sisters of Divine Providence

work in ministries both traditional (teaching, nursing, pastoral ministry) and non-traditional (as canon lawyers, spiritual directors, pilgrimage guides). They continue to be an important part of our church and our community, always striving to make God's Providence more visible in our world.

Today, the Divine Providence community is the corporate sponsor of two homeless shelters instituted by the former St. Louis Province. Room at the Inn is a shelter for homeless women and families and is located in St. Louis County. La Posada Providencia is a shelter for people in crisis from around the world who are seeking legal refuge in the United States. Located in San Benito, Texas, La Posada helps immigrants and asylum seekers representing more than 65 countries.

### ***Puerto Rico***

The 20th century expanded the vision of the Catholic Church, which called upon North American religious communities to become bearers of the Gospel to the peoples of Latin America. Though America in the early 1930s was in the midst of one of the greatest economic depressions the country has ever known, communities of men and women religious gave heroically of their personnel and finances in answering the appeal for missionaries on the Island of Puerto Rico.

It was the fall of 1931 when Mother Josephine (Schmit) and her council answered the Gospel summons to begin a mission in Puerto Rico. She asked for volunteers, and much to everyone's surprise, more than 100 Sisters volunteered. It was a happy day for those chosen for the missionary work.

The live Sisters selected must have felt a bit like the pioneer Sisters from Germany as they set out for Puerto Rico

on August 7, 1932. Sisters Callista (Strauss), DeChantal (Huber), Innocent (Miller), Macaria (Gaertner), Bertranda (Leininger), and Theodorret (Bretzel) embarked on a week-long journey by train and ship, docking in beautiful San Juan.

The Sisters settled in the coastal town of Arecibo in August 1932.

From an account written later by Sister Francis Gabriel Beyerl, getting there was immensely interesting to the Sisters, as they had never seen such delightful tropical lowers or swaying palm trees. Their first convent was actually a house that the Sisters shared with a local family.

It was tiny, but spotlessly clean. The Sisters unpacked, and immediately -- dictionary in hand -- set upon their mission to open a school.

For the school Sisters, the days were long, filled with class work, their own Spanish lessons, and home visits. The classrooms were small and crowded. They often taught 35 or more students in a classroom that was above a pen where chickens were cackling and cows mooing! Three days a week after school and on Saturdays, the Sisters traveled to the campos (outskirts of town) to teach religion.

The first two years they suffered the deprivations that missionaries often are called upon to bear; inadequate housing space, no good drinking water, different food, and the difficulty of learning a new culture and language. But great was the spirit of community, and their hard work was rewarded with success as school enrollment tripled by 1934.

Everything grew – school enrollment, catechism classes, and high school programs – and with the growth, more Sisters came to the missions. The Community also was blessed to welcome Puerto Rican women into vowed membership. By 1935, there were two native vocations with more expected. No doubt that in the beginning there were difficult times, but the people of Puerto Rico were warm and welcoming and Providence took root in Puerto Rico.

In the midst of the day to day, the Sisters also were actively involved in the



administration of several school systems: Colegio San Miguel in Utuado, Colegio San Felipe in Arecibo, and San Juan Bautista elementary in Orocovis (closed 1978), and in the later



years, teaching at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico School of Nursing. Their leadership and vision, coupled with their dedication and hard work, contributed to building a strong foundation and the assurance that these institutions would survive to serve the people of Puerto Rico for the future.

The ensuing years were marked with growth as the Sisters continued in the ministry of education, pastoral ministry and nursing. Their mission -- to serve the needs of the times -- has guided ministry throughout the years. The Sisters have moved from traditional education and healthcare ministries to offering support through social services. A number of Sisters minister through the Office of Human Promotion and Development in the Diocese of Arecibo, Puerto.

Motivated by the urgency to respond to the poorest of God's people and the Chapter Documents of 1990 which urged the Community to "take a corporate stand to identify with the poor," the Sisters of Divine Providence began to minister in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in February of 1993.

In Las Cañitas, one of the most deprived barrios in Santo Domingo, the pastor requested that the Sisters be a "presence" to the people. Immediately, they were involved with the youth, the sick and elderly, and the little children in a Center located near a contaminated river.

The program Infantil Emmanuel began about five years ago in response to the crisis created by the barrio of Las Cañitas in the Dominican Republic. About 125 children ages 5 to 12 participate in the program. Thirty-five counselors work with these children. Twelve of these counselors were once participants in the program. Also, a group of young women from various parishes are participating in vocational discernment.

The many Sisters of Divine Providence who accepted the call to missionary work in the early days shared common character traits. They were adventurous, welcoming challenge and opportunity. They were willing to step into the unknown and place their trust in our Provident God. They were hard working and selfless. Their hearts were filled with their love of God and their dedication to the mission of the Congregation. Their example and the legacy they have left has inspired those who have followed them into ministry in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. The pioneering spirit is alive and well in the women to whom they have passed the torch.

### ***Kingston, MA***

The Sisters of Divine Providence were welcomed to the New England shores in 1946. The wooded parcel of the Kingston land, once a dairy farm and only accessible by a dirt road, was purchased by the Congregation. In the beginning, the existing barns and buildings were remodeled for use as a summer camp for girls. During the winter, the Camp became Mishannock Alpha School, later named Sacred Heart Pre-Primary School, for nursery to second grade students (22 children). In 1949, two large homes were purchased on Court Street in Plymouth. After renovations, Sacred Heart Elementary School opened to grades K-7 with 148 students. Grades 8 and 9 were added in 1950-51.



In 1952, construction began for Sacred Heart High School on a clearing once used to



raise food for prize cattle, and the road now known as Route 80 (Bishops Highway) was built. In January 1954, grades 1-6 were continued at Court Street in Plymouth while



the kindergarten moved to the Camp Mishannock property in Kingston (1957-62). With the increasing enrollment, ground was broken in 1961 for the new Sacred Heart Elementary School.

Sacred Heart Pre-Primary School moved from Camp Mishannock to the Court Street property. The kindergarten, along with an Adult Education Center, remained in Plymouth until the 1974 when the property was sold to the town of Plymouth with the specific purpose of housing the elderly. The Pre-Primary was relocated in 1974 to its location in Kingston. In 2007, a new Early Childhood Center was built is home to Kindergarten, Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten Programs.

## Timeline of the History of the Sisters of Divine Providence

- 1851 Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche found the Sisters of Divine Providence in Finthen, Germany
- 1857 Mother Marie dies in Neustadt
- 1858 Congregation is approved as a Corporation by the German government 1861–71 Motherhouse is erected in Mainz, Germany
- 1869 –77 Eighteenth president of the United States: Ulysses S. Grant
- 1876 Six Sisters are sent to the United States to begin a new Foundation The little group of Sisters settles in Pittsburgh, PA
- 1877 Bishop Kettler dies in Burghausen, Germany, enrooted home from Vatican Council I First American postulant, Mary Barth, enters
- 1879 Sister Cecilia Schroeck becomes the first Sister to die in the Province. Staff St. Francis de Sales School in St. Louis
- 1880 The Novitiate moves to Heythuizen, Holland to escape the Kulturkampf
- 1881 Sister Michael is appointed first Novice Mistress
- 1891 Sisters begin ministry at orphanage in Wheeling, WV
- 1892 Sister Josepha Barth becomes first American to make final vows
- 1905 Divine Providence Academy is instituted in East Liberty, PA
- 1909 First United States representatives attend General Chapter in Germany 1917 Sisters become involved in Toner Institute
- 1920 Sisters make down payment on purchase of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Granite City, IL
- 1921 Four Sisters of Divine Providence take over management of St. Elizabeth's Hospital 1922 First Provincial Chapter held in the United States
- 1924 Ground broken for third motherhouse, Providence Heights, in Allison Park, PA
- 1925 The Sacred Congregation for Religious approves the Rule of the Sisters of Divine Providence for seven years, and the Community becomes a Pontifical Community The German Community is divided into three Provinces—St. Marin in Mainz, St. Paul in Aschafenburg, St. Bonifaius in Oberursel
- Mt. Immaculate Alpha School opens
- 1929 Alpha School relocates to Providence Heights
- 1930 The United States Community is divided into two Provinces: St. Peter in Pittsburgh, PA, and St. Louis in St. Louis, MO. Mother M. Rosalia is the first Provincial Superior for the St. Louis Province. Temporary headquarters are at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Granite City, IL
- 1931 Villa Mater Dei is bought in Rome, Italy
- 1932 St. Louis Province acquires property in Normandy, MO, for Mount Providence Motherhouse, and they plan the 1933 opening of Mount Providence Boarding School for Boys
- St. Peter Province opens a mission in Puerto Rico
- 1933 First students arrive at Mount Providence School for Boys 1935 The Rule receives final approval from the Vatican
- 1937 Sisters build and dedicate new building at Mount Providence
- 1941 St. Joseph's Department, living quarters for retired Sisters, opens at Providence Heights
- 1942 Sisters' salaries are raised from \$28 to \$33 a month
- 1945 Beymer property (67 acres) purchased in Allison Park, PA, Providence Villa opens 1946 Sisters establish a mission in Kingston, MA, Property is purchased for Camp Mishannock



1947 Kettler Hall classrooms open; Camp Mishannock opens

1948 La Roche Hall completed

Mishannock Alpha (kindergarten) opens in Kingston

1949 Construction begins on Motherhouse for St. Louis Province

Sacred Heart Elementary School opens in Plymouth

1951 Sisters withdraw from St. John's Hospital

Sisters in Kingston begin providing food service and secretarial support to Cardinal O'Connell Seminary

1953 Sacred Heart School is erected in Kingston, MA

Old Presbyterian Hospital purchased to become Divine Providence Hospital

1955 Divine Providence Hospital dedicated

1956 Property next to Mount Providence is purchased and becomes Villa Maria, a home for unwed mothers

1957 The Community in Kingston becomes Our Lady Province, Mother Mary Florence is named provincial

1958 Groundbreaking for Marycrest Preparatory School

Novitiate in Kingston is dedicated

1959 St. Louis Province demolishes original house on Mount Providence property

1960 Property is purchased for new Generalate in Rome

1961 Six Sisters are sent from Germany to Abancay, Peru

Property purchased on Guys Run Road for Divine Providence Academy Convent Choirs recording made

The Sisters in St. Louis complete expansion of Mount Providence, with Christ the King Chapel wing uniting the 1937 school wing & 1951 new Motherhouse wing

1962 John XXIII announces Vatican II

Sisters erect a new building for Sacred Heart Elementary School

1963 La Roche College founded

1964 Young Korean women come to Rome to enter the Community and stay in the Novitiate in the Generalate

Christmas Mosaic recorded

1965 Mother Pierre Gehenio is elected as first American General Superior

Mother Rosalia Weaver, foundress of the St. Louis Province, dies

1967 Young Korean women are accepted as Postulants in Korea

1968 Interim Directives published

1969 New General Directives are received

1970 First issue of Intracom published

1971 Transfiguration House of Prayer opens

Alpha Boarding School closes

Toner Institute closes

1972 Social Security Program made possible

1973 Mortgage for Providence Heights burned

1974 Sacred Heart Pre-Primary moves to former Novitiate building in Kingston

1975 Sisters of Divine Providence celebrate their Centennial in the United States

1976 Marycrest mortgage burned

House of Prayer moves to 22 acres of land in Butler County, PA

1977 Visitation Convent opens in Kingston as a formation house and center for spiritual renewal programs

1978 Death of Popes Paul VI and John Paul I; election of Pope Paul II

1981 Sisters of Divine Providence in the United States receive first Associates in Kingston; 10 women and men were welcomed  
 St. Joseph Annex in Pittsburgh opened for care of the Sisters  
 St. Louis Province completes multi-purpose building for Mount Providence School and Motherhouse  
 Sisters celebrate 50th anniversary at mission in Puerto Rico  
 San Rosario sold

1984 Associate Program initiated in Pittsburgh, four individuals welcomed  
 Divine Providence Academy closes  
 Providence Child Care Center South begins at St. Anne Convent

1985 Providence Fund initiated  
 St. Louis Development Office opens  
 UMSL Eldercare Center opens on the first floor of Mount Providence  
 St. Louis Province launches Associate program; 10 Associates welcomed in 1986

1988 Pittsburgh Development Office inaugurated  
 Mount Providence School goes co-ed

1989 Providence Summer Ministry Outreach initiated  
 St. Louis Province founds La Posada Providencia in the Rio Grand Valley of Texas  
 Babcock Boulevard property sold to Lincoln Club  
 Conference Center addition to Kearns Spirituality Center 1992 Room at the Inn opens in the Motherhouse in St. Louis  
 Foster care ministry begins in Pittsburgh

1993 The International Convent is established in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
 Divine Providence Hospital sold to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System  
 Divine Providence Foundation established  
 St. Louis Province assumes corporate sponsorship of Room at the Inn

1995 The region in Korea becomes a Province  
 Providence Child Care Center North and Providence Family Support Center begin  
 Amelia House established  
 Property on west side of Babcock Boulevard sold to La Roche College  
 St. Louis Province purchases property for La Posada Providencia in Texas  
 1996 Mount Providence School closes  
 Mount Providence Motherhouse and adjoining buildings sold to the University of Missouri, St. Louis

1997 St. Louis Sisters move to St. Bartholomew's Kingston  
 Development Office inaugurated

1999 Providence Center opens in St. Louis for ministry, office, and gathering space

2001 Provinces in Kingston, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, and the region of Puerto Rico and the mission of Santo Domingo unite to form the Marie de la Roche Province  
 Sisters of Divine Providence celebrate 125-year anniversary  
 Mount Providence is imploded, allowing Interstate 70 to be rerouted to eliminate dangerous curves  
 St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Granite City, IL, is sold to Gateway Community Health Systems  
 Sister Robin Nordyke professes final vows as the first permanent member of the Marie de la Roche Province

2002 Novitiate established in Kingston

2005 Building dedication: Providence Connections, Brighton Rd., Pittsburgh's North Side  
 President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush visit Providence Family Support Center as part of the Administration's Faith-Based Initiative program

2006 Provincial Chapter held in Pittsburgh

- 2007 Sacred Heart Early Childhood Center opens a new building on the grounds of Sacred Heart Elementary School  
Novitiate established in Santo Domingo
- 2008 Providence Child Care Center South closes  
Novitiate established in Granite City (Diocese of Springfield, IL)  
*Ellen Lavender selected as first lay Director of the Associate relationship*  
Pope John Paul II dies on April 2, age of 85; Pope Benedict XVI elected on April 19
- 2009 Apostolic Visitation by the Vatican was announced
- 2010 Transfiguration House of Prayer was closed after 40 years of service
- 2011 After 15 years of working with homeless women and children, Amelia House was closed.
- 2012 International Pilgrimage was held in Germany
- 2013 The province celebrated 80 years of our arrival in Puerto Rico
- 2014 An International Program was held in Pittsburgh
- 2015 Camp Mishannock ministry and convent were closed in Kingston MA.
- 2016 Our history book, The Lure of Providence, was complete. will tell us so much more about our community history
- 2017 Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico
- 2018 The Province started to explore an additional form of membership. (non-canonical membership)
- 2019 Providence Foundation Corporation was dissolved  
International Mission Experience was held in Rome  
A house was bought in Puerto Rico for our sisters in Arecibo  
Room at the In changed its status from a sponsored ministry to one which honors the legacy of the Sisters of Divine Providence.
- 2020 Sacred Heart School closed the High School at the end of the academic year.  
A global pandemic was announced and all social activities were closed  
Kearns Spirituality Center closed its operations due to pandemic  
The General Chapter and Provincial Chapter 2021 were postponed for the Global Pandemic
- 2021 The construction of the new building adjacent to Kearns was announced (The Commons)  
Bridges of Providence was announced as a new ministry venture.  
Kearns Spirituality Center was reopened after the pandemic
- 2022 The sisters in Puerto Rico celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their arrival to the Island  
The mission in the Dominican Republic was closed  
The Commons was inaugurated, and all the sisters living in Providence Highs moved to the new building.
- 2023 Ketteler Refugee House announced its services  
At the end of August Providence House in Kingston was closed, and all the sisters moved to Pittsburgh
- 2024 Dr. Christina A. Clark Named La Roche University's Eighth President  
The Rachel Carson EcoVillage started to clean the area where the Mobil houses will stay.

**Impelled to Make a Difference:  
Providence, Conversion, and Radical Hope**

*By Marie McCarthy, SP  
Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana*

The original essay on Providence entitled, "Impelled to Make a Difference: Providence, Conversion, and Christian Hope" was written more than 30 years ago. The invitation to update and revise the article offers the opportunity for us to look back over those 30 some years noticing what has changed, what has remained the same, and what has deepened in our worldview, our understanding of the cosmos, and our experience of this God we name Providence. I invite you into this exploration, not as an intellectual exercise, but as a way of tracing the lines and the allure of Providence as they have deepened and unfolded in your journey.

In the book *Field of Compassion*, Judy Cannatos writes:

We stand where the fullness of 13,7 billion years of evolution is manifest. Nothing has ever been this deeply known or revealed before. At the same time, what has emerged is incomplete. Its fullness is for today only, for tomorrow our capacity to hold truth is a little deeper and so the revelation we receive will be a bit fuller.

So how has the revelation deepened over these 30 years? For me in 1984, the world was still pretty self-contained and small. I had not yet learned to think in terms of the universe, let alone of universes and of an ever-expanding cosmos. I had not yet begun to understand the profound implications of the fact that everything is always unfolding and evolving, not just Earth and species but our ideas and our very consciousness. I had not yet grasped the reality that all things are interrelated and interconnected. Nor had I really grasped the fact that creation is still going on. It is not complete, and hence, the revelation of Holy Mystery is not yet complete. Thomas Aquinas says that any mistake in our understanding of creation necessarily leads to a mistake in our understanding of God. It follows that any incompleteness in our understanding of creation leads to incompleteness in our understanding of God. And our understanding will always be both mistaken, due to our human limitations, and incomplete, because Holy Mystery will always be just that—Holy Mystery—a gift beyond our comprehension. Today our experience of the unfolding cosmos and the ever-expanding universe has led us to a deeper experience of the God named Providence as "the deep innerness of all things," ever unfolding Holy Mystery, ever alluring us, ever calling us forward from the unknown future.

In what follows, many of the core ideas from the first article remain, though the language has shifted to incorporate this ever-deepening awareness and the profound experience of living in an evolving universe in which Providence as Holy Mystery is ever unfolding.

## **Early Images of Providence**

One of the more enduring memories of my early years as a Sister of Providence is of a banner that was hung for all important occasions. It bore a serene, Eden-like scene along with the words, "All I know of tomorrow is that Providence will rise before the sun." I remember being both warmed and stirred by the words. What more did we need to know? Providence would, indeed, rise before the sun, and we could go about our business confident that all our endeavors were protected and guided by the watchful eye of Providence.

At different times over the years, I have found myself reflecting again on the words of that banner aware that the familiar warmth and comfort are gone. I find myself more and more challenged by their bold proclamation. What does it mean to trust in and rely on Providence in a world so filled with violence, evil, destruction, and chaos, a world in which we, by our careless and wanton ways, can destroy our species and our very home, planet Earth?

## **Claiming a Renewed Image of Providence**

If we are to hear the message which those words proclaim in any meaningful way, we must begin by understanding anew what it means to name God Providence. It will not do to blithely announce "God is in heaven.

All's right with the world," nor to speak of "abandonment to Divine Providence" as passive resignation to the way things are. To view the realities of seemingly endless wars fought in the name of religion, or the threats of genocide, massive injustice, human atrocities, nuclear holocaust, and environmental degradation, as expressions of what God intends and to absolve ourselves of all responsibility for the world in which we live seems a blasphemy. We need a new understanding both of that Holy Mystery we name Providence and of what it means to claim that Holy Mystery as the foundation of our identity.

## **The Meaning of Providence**

What does it mean in this era to name God Providence? As the sciences have helped us understand the unfolding, evolving nature of the universe, we have come to understand Providence as the creative, unfolding Energy of Love calling us into being, sustaining, nourishing, challenging, and luring all creation toward its final fulfillment. To name God Providence is to proclaim God's enduring relationship to and involvement with all creation.

But the mystery of Providence is even larger and more profound than this, for the mystery of Providence is incomplete without our response. Providence is the mystery of God actively engaged with us, calling us to enter into the creative activity of co-creating the future. It is the mystery of God eagerly awaiting our human response. This is not the mystery of a distant God who makes the plans handing them down to us to carry out. Providence is, rather, a mystery of dialogue and relationship, of God interacting with us. Providence, the Energy of Love, is the mystery of the ongoing, enduring interrelationship between the God who makes all things

possible and us creatures, handiwork of the creative activity of Love creatures made in the very image and likeness of Holy Mystery, creatures who are themselves creative.

This Holy Mystery is Love itself poured out without restraint into the whole of creation. The God named Providence, the God who makes all things possible, is Holy Mystery who has made us human creatures with the real, though limited, freedom to participate in determining which possibilities will become actual, what shape the unfolding of the universe will take. It is in and through the exercise of our human freedom that the concrete realities of our world come into being. The God named Providence creates possibility not actuality and endows us humans with freedom, creativity, and a genuinely open future.

### **Providence, Human Freedom and Responsibility**

In grasping the depth of this Energy of Love we come to understand that we must take the reality of our human freedom seriously and recognize that what we do and who we are not only can, but also do, make a real difference in our world. In all of our thoughts and actions, from the simplest to the most complex, as we exercise our freedom, we shape the persons that we are becoming and participate in the ongoing act of creation. This is as true of our choice to get out of bed in the morning as it is of our choice to vote for a given candidate for political office, to care for or trash our environment, or to commit ourselves to a given individual or community. By the choices we make in the exercise of our freedom, we profoundly affect the precise way in which possibility becomes actuality, the precise shape that concrete reality and the history of the cosmos take. The profound and compelling fact is that God's providence expresses itself in and through our own creativity and freedom. Whether we recognize it or not we are involved in creating the shape of the future.

To embrace the mystery of Providence requires us to take seriously the mystery of human freedom and to live in the awareness that the future is not some fixed determined reality toward which we move. To believe in Providence is to believe that the future of our world, our history, ourselves, and our communities is an open possibility waiting to be formed by our choices and actions in this present moment. To believe in Providence is to recognize that the concrete choices we make about what we do and who we are becoming move us closer to or further away from that future for which we hope.

Time and future take on new meaning, new intensity, new possibility when they are surrounded and enveloped in this mystery of Providence. For the mystery of Providence is the mystery of God's creative, dynamic involvement with and in the moments of our lives and our history. God is at work in human history and human time bringing about, in union with human creativity and freedom, those moments of *kairos*, of the fullness of time, in which the unfolding of a new creation becomes possible and all things are drawn into greater unity and oneness. God's promise and God's purpose invite, cajole, push, allure, seduce us toward an open future, calling us as individuals and as communities to that self-transcendence and transformation by which we truly participate in re-creating the face of Earth and bringing about that future which God desires.

### **Providence and the Call to Conversion**

The more fully we claim the mystery of Providence as the foundation of our identity the more surely we experience a profound call to conversion. We come to see ourselves as we really are: humans who are free, yet limited, flawed and weighted down by sin. We head in wrong directions, and we make poor choices. More often than not it is our own self-interest that we promote not the creative designs of Providence.

As we claim the mystery of Providence as the source and foundation of our lives, we find ourselves called to recognize and accept responsibility for our own involvement in the sinful structures of our world. We come to understand that our lives, and all of creation, are so interrelated and interconnected that often, in our efforts to stand against injustice, we find ourselves participating in some form of injustice. We get up on Saturday morning and prepare to join a rally calling for concerted effort to stop global warming. In the process of arriving at the rally, we begin the day with a nice hot shower, a cup of coffee, and perhaps a banana sliced on our cereal. If we stop to reflect on these simple, taken-for-granted routines of our lives, we realize that we have just consumed some of the world's natural resources—perhaps more than our share. In the very exercise of our freedom, our creativity, our choice for a better world and a more just society we end up participating in the realities of sin and evil. We come to know with a depth of sorrow and humility that we do not belong to an aristocracy of goodness. As we acknowledge both our own brokenness and our oneness with all humanity, we experience the mystery of Providence as grace and creativity - the grace to continually begin anew, to give ourselves yet again and yet more fully to the lure of a loving Providence. Out of all the messes we make that loving Providence always creates new possibilities, continually drawing all creation toward fulfillment.

### **Called to be Providence**

What does it mean for us to genuinely respond to the call to be Providence in our world? Among other things it means turning from our own self-reliance and self-sufficiency to recognize and honor the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things. It means taking utterly seriously the gift of freedom which we have and choosing, consciously and deliberately, to make a difference. It means recognizing the brokenness and evil present in our world, our own waywardness and sinfulness, and the relentless unfailing gift of God's love and care which enfolds, invites, forgives, and makes all things possible.

The call to be Providence in our world is a call to engage actively in bringing about the transformation of the world. It is a call to take on both the possibilities and the risks involved in turning our world around, to leave behind our past securities and safeties. It is a call to let go of our own self-reliance, autonomy, independence, power, and control, and to embrace anew a firmer reliance on the providence of God as it is made manifest in the community of believers. To respond to the call to conversion in our day requires of us an active, creative participation and interdependence with a community of believers who no longer view themselves as the center of right and righteousness. Instead, they stand with the God named Providence, repenting of their misuse and abuse of world resources as a community of believers who ask forgiveness for their misplaced reliance on power, institutions, buildings, specific forms of religious expression, and set patterns of daily living and interacting. To be Providence today is to walk together with a

community of believers who support and challenge us in our endeavors to become clear-sighted and single-hearted in our commitment to bring about the future which God desires.

### **Providence and Radical Hope**

If we heed the call to be Providence in our world, we will necessarily be a people of radical hope. We will know, with utter conviction, that our actions in the world not only can, but also do, make a real, concrete difference in the unfolding of the universe. The radical hope which marks us as people of Providence is a thoroughly engaged and courageous hope which faces the overwhelming evils and possibilities for destruction which surround us and yet persistently plans for, hopes in, and builds towards that future which God desires.

To be a people of radical hope is to stand in the midst of the stark realities of our world and our history, believing that the promises we long for will be fulfilled. It is to believe that, limited though we are, as we open ourselves to the gentle prodding of Providence and join our own human creativity and freedom with the creative designs of Providence, we can transform the conditions of evil in our world. We can bring about a more human, more just world order.

### **Living the Challenge of Being Providence**

In this incredible and complex cosmos, how do we actually live the challenge of being Providence? We do so by truly living our belief that the mystery of Providence, as the gracious, creative Energy of Love, is inextricably intertwined with our limited, flawed humanity. Because of the enormous web of relationship in which we are embedded, everything we think, say and do, no matter how large or small, affects the whole. To really believe in Providence as intimately related to the whole of creation is to believe in the power and possibility of symbolic action. When we turn off a light to remind ourselves of the energy crisis, when we fast in solidarity with the hungry of the world, when we pray for peace and make ourselves a peaceful presence, when we perform the simplest gesture of care and concern, in short, when we strive concretely to be Providence in our world, our being and our doing effectively re-create the face of Earth. For while our fast may not directly put food into the stomachs of the hungry, it does change our own consciousness and way of being in the world. And it creates an energy field which in turn shifts the energies in the universe. It is these acts— often simple and unpretentious- through which we bind ourselves to one another in solidarity and love and become the Providence we are called to be.

The call to rely on Providence and to become Providence for our world requires of us a threefold disposition of care, of courage, and of abandon. We are called to be caretakers of this unfolding creation; to guard, protect, and nourish both the material and the spiritual resources of our world. We are called to lay aside all possessiveness and self-interest, to direct our energies and talents toward bringing about the future Providence desires. We are called to be caretakers of human virtue not underground arsenals, to sow and harvest the seeds of cooperation, mutuality, and the flourishing of life, not the seeds of dissension and destruction. We are called to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning forks.



We are called to be men and women of courage, leaving behind all the old guarantees and securities, to rely no longer on our own strengths and accomplishments but on the God named Providence. To be a people of Providence is to have the courage to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters against the forces of evil, injustice, and oppression. It is to be willing to risk our reputations, our status, our jobs, our comforts, even our lives in order to turn our world around. To be Providence in our world is to travel with light-hearted abandon, unencumbered, non-possessive, trusting deeply and unfalteringly in the God named Providence who never abandons us. It is to seek unfalteringly that future to which Holy Mystery allures us and to seek it with a simplicity of heart and clarity of vision. To be Providence is to trust, not in the false treasures of material possessions, better arms, and fleeting securities, but in the foolhardiness of casting aside these concerns for the sake of building a genuine human community, founded on justice and relying on Providence.

To be Providence is to live out of the awareness of our interrelation and interconnection with all things.

To be Providence is to be one who prepares herself and others for the journey, to be one who sees ahead and makes wise provision, knowing what is needed for the journey and what must be left behind. It is to be one who is sensitive to the needs of people and times and creation itself, one who is rooted in tradition and open to change. To be Providence is to find one's treasure in that community of people who give themselves to responding to the lure of Providence and bringing about the designs of Providence for all creation. To be Providence is to accept the challenge to wake up to the difference we make in the unfolding of the universe and to consciously choose a future full of hope.

### **The Future in our Hands**

Perhaps the challenge of Providence is best captured in a rabbinic tale. It seems that in a certain village there lived a wise and learned rabbi. This rabbi's wisdom was such that all the village people revered him highly and sought his guidance in all their troubles. In this same village there lived two youths who were skeptical of the wisdom of the rabbi and jealous of the attention paid to him. Wishing to discredit the rabbi, the youths spent endless hours searching for a way to trick the rabbi and prove him a fool.

Finally they came up with an idea.

"Listen," the one said, "Here is what we'll do. We'll catch a bird and carry it to the rabbi cupped in our hands. When we get to the rabbi we'll ask him to tell us what we have in our hands. If the rabbi says we have a bird in our hands, we shall honor him for his wisdom and insight. Then we'll ask him to tell us if the bird is dead or alive. If the rabbi says the bird is dead, we'll open our hands and let the bird fly away. If he says the bird is alive, we'll crush it in our hands, killing it. Either way we will have proved him wrong.

"So the youths went out to catch a bird. When they had succeeded they went into the village with the bird cupped in their hands. They approached the rabbi meekly, saying, "Tell us, O wise and excellent Rabbi, what do we have in our hands?"

So the youths went out to catch a bird. When they had succeeded they went into the village with the bird cupped in their hands. They approached the rabbi meekly, saying, "Tell us, O wise and excellent Rabbi, what do we have in our hands?"

"The rabbi responded, "Why, you have a bird in your hands."

The youths then said to the rabbi, "How wise and insightful you are, O Rabbi. And tell us, please, is the bird dead or is it alive?"

The rabbi looked intently at the youths before replying. "I don't know. It's in your hands."

The future is in our hands. Will we accept the challenge and dare to be Providence for our world?

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Creation Book 2*

(South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press) c.3.

2 Margaret Galiardi, OP, "Where the Pure Water Flows: The New Story of the Universe and Christian Faith. *Conversation: Dominican Women of Earth*, no. 5 (February 2008): 3.

3 Rilke's Book of Hours: Love poems to God, trans. Anita Burrows and Joanna Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 119.

## **Reflection Questions:**

### **Reflection Question 1**

What does it mean for us to genuinely respond to the call of Providence in our world?

### **Reflection Question 2**

Why is radical hope so very important to be Providence in our world?

## **Finding the Gift of Providence in Darkness**

*By Myra Rogers, CDP  
Allison Park, Pennsylvania*

For you, darkness itself is not dark,  
and night shines as the day.  
Darkness and light are the same.

-Psalm 139:12

### **Who Shall Find a Providence Woman (or Man)?**

In the first article, "Who Shall Find a Providence Woman?" we looked at the provident God and God's absolute graciousness to God's people. We said that reflections on Divine Providence, by their very nature, are reflections on the Divine One. These reflections come alive through human persons who by their actions, and their lives, reveal the provident God. When seen with the eyes of faith, men and women, children and events, even moments of frustration and suffering can tell us that God is present, that the Divine One is in our midst.

The Scriptures, for example, brim over with stories telling of the provident God coming to God's people through both human and divine messengers of God's passionate love. The Hebrew Creation Narratives, the Joseph and David Cycles, the love songs of the Cantic of Canticles and the poetry of the Psalms, portray in human terms the depth of God's care. The parables told by Jesus, and retold generation after generation, spoke to his hearers. They continue to speak to us. We noted that the parables do not solemnly articulate the doctrine of the Trinity, nor expound convincingly the theology of the Eucharist, but they simply tell us winningly of how a caring God behaves.

The many healings by Jesus in the Gospels are not wonder stories about a wonder God, nor tales of psychological cures by a great psychologist. These healings are incredible accounts of our God-with-us, whose heart is moved by the suffering of others. It is the Provident One who reaches out to heal and comfort others; the Provident One, whose divine goodness moves through darkness as well as light. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, Providence, God's loving care, can be perceived all around them.

In the first article, "Who Shall Find a Providence Woman?" we looked especially at Providence women and how they embody this indiscriminate graciousness which we call Providence. We described Providence women as those who reflect, not only on the written word of Scripture, but also on the word that comes to them through every event of their life. These women seek out the word, listening with eager care; the word is to their lives, the course for their ship.

We are aware, too, that Providence men, like Providence women, are those who view life through the lens of Providence and feel the embrace of Providence, whether in darkness or light, in twilight or in shadow, in confrontation or in peace. It is these men and women who have experienced the indiscriminate graciousness of the provident God in their own lives, who readily "open [their] hands to the poor and reach out with [their] lives to the needy" (Proverbs 31:20). Those men, who have Providence in their sights and in their hearts, find that opening themselves to the God of Providence leads them to don the mantle of true compassion and ultimately justice-making in every area of their lives. As with Providence women, so Providence men know the need for justice-making. Sometimes justice-making is called letting go; sometimes it is called walking shoulder-to-shoulder and relating eye-to-eye, sometimes it is to break down power over and power under. Of one thing the Providence person is sure: justice and compassion go hand-in-hand.

The first article, "Who Shall Find a Providence Woman?" does not touch upon the many journeys in the lives of people that weave in and out of darkness. In the time since that article was written, the experience of darkness sometimes has felt pervasive. Yet, wisdom and experience tell us that darkness, too, can be a gift of the provident God. This current article, then, will look at the different textures of darkness through which our journey of life passes.

### **The Textures of Darkness**

Current events impact the life of every man, woman and child, as well as all of creation. Many times these events seem to be overlaid with a darkness that is, at times, total night and, at other times, as diaphanous as fog that seems to creep in and overspread a landscape. In that instance, everything we do seems to be covered with a blanket of gloom or despair.

Some darkness bears the patterns of terror and brutality, of loss and fear. Even after many years have passed since that fateful September 11, the day in this country when we came face to face, both literally and figuratively, with darkness, the mention of that tragic day still grips our hearts with terror. The sinister opaqueness, in its initial horror, bespoke sheer evil. Night seemed to shroud our land, entering into our very being and striking dread into our hearts, weaving a pattern of anxiety and trepidation into the minds and souls of countless people. This is a prime example of a time when God seemed to be absent and darkness prevailed.

All experiences of darkness as evil challenge us to look into our hearts as Providence people and ask what we can bring to a world where so many areas are mired in the darkness of malevolence. In these times when the light of grace seems to be smothered by the night of evil, can we enter into the experience of our people and out of compassionate care for them become the presence of light between the people and their God?

But, the darkness of evil in the world is only one manifestation of darkness. Other times, darkness can cover the tessellations that lie stone-cold in our own souls. Unknown to us they are awaiting the pattern of grace that is yearning to emerge. The master crafts person sees these

tessellations and anticipates, with eager longing, the eventual openness and pliability of the soul's mystical clay into which the stones have descended. It is our work to wait in silence and calm for the hard and brittle stones to become a beautiful mosaic of grace for those who long for God's loving care and see with their hearts. The mystery of our lives and our world eventually brightens with the "one bright Light" proceeding before us and leading us ever onward in our journey of life.

The shadows of night can also veil the God waiting in silence for frail human beings who have suffered at the hands of others. In their hearts they long for the provident God to wrap them in the mantle of love. They live their lives aware, only in their heart of hearts, that their suffering could ultimately be a bearer of God's providence for themselves and others. It is for these persons that Providence men and women, with lives of openness and trust continually deepening, might strengthen the textures of this love-mantle for those who suffer. The paradox is that only by God's loving care will the shadows begin to disappear, little by little, and darkness and night merge into one, becoming light.

Darkness is a mystery that is not often associated with Providence. But, it is not new to men and women who embrace the charism of Providence.

Undoubtedly, darkness can and does impact the persons committed to live their lives as the face of God's providence. For these men and women, darkness becomes a stitching of many shadows and outlines. The tapestry of their lives is often threaded in lights and darks, imaging an aura of mystery and hope to the one living through it. Sometimes, after many years the pattern of darkness as mystery that seemed too obscure to be comprehended, becomes visible through the lens of Providence as gift. The pattern of the gift is clearly seen as the indiscriminate graciousness of the Divine One. God is met in the place of darkness because God was present all along the way.

Relationships, too, are hemmed together with light and dark patterns of acceptance and vulnerability, joy, and sorrow. Even in sorrow and darkness, relationships can be a profound expression of Providence. While not aware at the time of the gift in the darkness, in looking back one can discern the God of Providence.

As the darkness of sickness, or world events, or personal tragedy invades their lives or the lives of those around them, Providence women and men, because of their ultimate awareness of the presence of God, are able to respond to the provident God's call to develop a life of passionate caring.

The awareness that darkness can encircle everyone and everything — creatures, nations, and people, especially ourselves - brings us to the realization that passionate caring is the only true response to everything that encompasses our lives. This care, born out of an understanding of Providence as God's loving care, is the gift of the women and men of Providence. The Providence person speaks this word of loving care as the word of compassion and from an attitude of deep respect and prayer. This must be let loose in the days and nights of our own lives, in order that it may be felt in the lives of those whom we touch. We are born out of darkness with a presence stirring within us that brings our night into day. Can we allow this presence of Providence to

wrap around all the relationships in our world? Perhaps then the night of our world may one day be transformed into the light of day.

### **The Gift of Darkness**

The Providence person knows well the gift of darkness. It is this person's openness to the mystery of darkness, and the trust that one places in darkness as ultimately gift, that enables the Providence person to seek deeper meaning in events and situations. This ability to discern the hidden patterns of darkness is the gift of the God of Providence to the one who seeks that God. It is this same God whose heart beats in unison with the heart of the Providence person. It is the God of Providence, the shadowy presence, half felt, half guessed at, whom the Providence person struggles to discern in every moment. It is the God of Providence, daily attended to in prayer, who prepares the heart of the Providence person to find each moment charged with a new vitality, and to see new textures of beauty in daily life.

For that person every manifestation of life possesses a sacramental meaning. It is also the God of Providence who is sought when the warp and woof of the inner life is disrupted and the Divine Presence is no longer felt. It is then that the Providence person takes seriously the sentence uttered long ago and usually ascribed to Karl Rahner: the Christian of the future will be a mystic or ... will not exist at all.

One challenge of darkness for the person bearing the name of Providence is to be able to stand firm as God's providence in the middle of events, no matter how searing. This is the task: to be actively involved in the events shaping our world and affecting our brothers and sisters, while allowing that action to flow from a deep contemplative spirit, from that unfathomable place within us where our God of Providence often dwells in darkness. The gift of the Providence person in disruptive situations is to always seek unity in diversity and stillness in strife. As Providence persons are we willing to stand in the middle of situations, which are often places of abysmal darkness, and hold each side close to the heart in order to bring hope? Can we allow ourselves to be given as Providence to those around us who are experiencing darkness and help them to find the gift of darkness and ultimately hope?

Often one is not aware that the mystery of the provident God can be found in the darkness even in the midst of strife and discord at the deepest level of the human heart. There the Indiscriminately Gracious One, who loves beyond all imagining, is waiting quietly in the silence of darkness. The profound belief that God is the absolute mystery of our being, forms the undertow of daily life. This belief engenders confidence that the silent encounter in the deepest recesses of the heart with the God of darkness, the God of absolute mystery, sustains Providence women and men. It enables them to stand in the middle of polarities and hold the middle ground, to balance the tension between light and darkness, between alienation and closeness, between starlight and sunlight.

As men and women of Providence, we know that the God of Providence does not change, but that God's providence is present and is transformative in the lives of people who live into the

providence of God. It is then that night becomes day and darkness becomes light. This is the gift of Providence.

**Reflection Questions:**

**Reflection Question 1**

Difficult as it is, can we respond to the darkness that enters our lives or our world?

**Reflection Question 2**

How does the Providence person live with darkness?

**A Fire to Warm-and Ignite-the World:  
The Providence Prophetic Call**

*By Mary Kay Nealen, SP  
Montreal, Canada*

**A CALL**

"Free The Children began with a story that one boy couldn't ignore."

That boy was 12-year-old Craig Kielburger. The story was that of Iqbal Masih, also 12, who had been sold into slave labor in South Asia and then died as a result of speaking out against child labor. After reading Iqbal's story in a local paper, Craig gathered several of his seventh-grade school friends and together they started Free The Children. As of mid-2014, the organization draws upon the U.S. and the U.K. for Adopt a Village programs in eight countries. The organization is convinced that a village working together—not a single school—is a holistic key to solving poverty. Vivid example of a call, this item in the newspaper ignited a fire in one pre-teen that has set a vast expanse of the world afire! As Christian believers we claim a story, confirmed in Pentecost flames, that calls us "to cast fire on the earth" (Luke 12:49). Is it blazing?

**A PROPHETIC Call**

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* states (n. 31) that "the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ... in their own way share the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. ...Our call as Christians through baptism is to exercise Christ's prophecy, to let our minds and hearts be shaped by Christ so that we can see what does and does not further God's reign."

What constitutes God's reign? Marcus Borg (Jesus, c. 7) says that prophecy witnesses centrally "to God as compassion and to justice as God's dream for humanity." Compassion and justice how much these qualities speak of God and of our world's needs today. Jesus himself, prophet par excellence, witnesses to them in every encounter. Likewise he calls us, wherever we are, to enact God's dream of compassion and justice.

Walter Brueggemann examines the prophetic call in the Scriptures. He, too, focuses on justice and places gripped by pain. "I believe the cross is the entry point for an interpretive practice of pain because the cross disclosed the profound pain of God." Pain keeps us in touch with people's experiences of injustice. But it also keeps us honest about God's unexpected and innovative ways. God never runs out of new ways to show saving love. "God's imagination, as given to us in Scripture, is bent toward healing and transformation and newness, but it is not without conflict."<sup>3</sup>



The myriad places of pain in world and church that make our hearts ache call out for God's transformation. The evangelist Luke reminds us that Jesus adopts the Prophet Isaiah's vision of bringing glad tidings to the poor and liberty to captives (Luke 4:17-21). In Jesus' name we were baptized into this same vision with flaming candle in hand.

### **A PROVIDENCE Prophetic Call**

What makes a prophetic call specifically a **Providence** summons? How is Providence linked with prophecy in our faith tradition?

**Our provident God is a creative God who made all things with a loving purpose, who involves those created in the process of creation, and who is always on the move.**

From his study of Scripture, Father John Wright says succinctly that "Divine Providence is radically God's universal love guided by his wisdom and implemented by his power."<sup>4</sup>

From his study of Scripture, Father John Wright says succinctly that "Divine Providence is radically God's universal love guided by his wisdom and implemented by his power."<sup>4</sup>

The 250-year (and longer) history of Father Jean Martin Möye's daughters in Congregations of Divine Providence illustrate the creative power of Providence. Sister Christine Morkovsky from San Antonio summarizes: "To have 'stayed the same' would have indicated a belief that God is static and is to be found only in certain familiar people and places. This has never been the sisters' belief. A provident God invites rather than rejects creativity and risk-taking. The sisters believe in and witness to a God who is present in the great and small ... in the settled and in the fermenting." The Scriptures and contemporary theology make clear that this total response of loving trust does not mean just sitting back waiting for God's work to burst into flame on its own. Providence makes people partners and co-creators in an empowering mutuality. The Gospels insist, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). "Go, teach all nations.. baptize" (Matthew 28:19). Consistent with the embodied, incarnate action of Jesus, a providential human partnership lays the firewood and ignites the fire.

**Our provident God is a God of care and compassion, particularly for the most in need.**

For evidence, we could simply plumb the histories of Providence communities. We might also consider Elizabeth Johnson's comment that "God's maternal will for the good of the whole world motivates a preferential option for the last, lowest and least, espied in human acts that attempt to address imbalance and bring about right order."<sup>6</sup>

Providence compassionate care literally engendered life in Congo Brazzaville, Africa. Midwife Sister Angeline Roseline Goma learned that a baby girl had been thrown away in desperation three times. The third time, a passer-by who heard her crying drew her out of a latrine and took her once more to the hospital. Then Sister Angeline Roseline received a call from a nurse friend:

the baby was very, very sick, and restoration to the family was impossible. "Sister, could you possibly take her? She will die otherwise." So Sister Angeline Roseline literally became the mother to this abandoned little girl, who has now grown into a beautiful, intelligent young woman!

**Our provident God is most clearly evident in the person of Jesus. In his total self-giving to the point of death and in his resurrection we see God's amazing "new creation."**

Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) came from the heart of God to show us what God is really like. "He introduces the initiative of God into history. He proclaims and inaugurates the kingdom, and he exercises the healing, redeeming, forgiving power of God." In Jesus, the coming kingdom, the realm of Providence, shines out. When the leper pleads with him "if you want to, you can make me clean," Jesus replies, "I do want to; be cured" (Mark 1:40-41). He not only heals the woman with a hemorrhage and raises Jairus' daughter but also says to the parents, "Give her something to eat" (Mark 5:21 ff.). In the story of the Good Samaritan, we can see Jesus both as the traveler with a broken body, hinting at his passion, and as the Samaritan who crosses all religious and cultural boundaries to aid the injured man (Luke 10:30-35). And how can we doubt God's compassionate care when we visualize the "prodigal father" (Luke 15:11-24)?

Even the psalms of deep lament, such as Psalm 22 that Jesus prayed on the cross, end with expressions of trust and praise. In ways the psalmist intuitively, God's faithful love stands firm. "The most important activity of God concerning Jesus was raising him from the dead." In the risen Christ the radiance of a "new creation" through the Pascal Mystery glimmers on the horizon.

Yet God's triumph in Christ is often hidden. How could the early Sisters of Divine Providence exiled in Germany during the French Revolution possibly be a proclamation of the Good News? Father Möye and the sister did what was necessary, and they trusted. And in those difficult years, fresh Providence growth sprang up in Germany as well as in France. As the proverb from Madagascar assures, "Love is like young rice: transplanted still it grows."<sup>39</sup>

How does the fire of a prophetic Providence burn in hearts passionate to make a difference in our world and church? Each characteristic of Providence named above points to a counter-cultural way of being and doing. First, Providence makes us co-creators: the capacity to create and nurture life is a power that serves rather than dominates. Second, Jesus Christ shows us who Providence is by his teaching and healing, but especially by his total self-gift in death and resurrection. He enters into our earthly condition, acting through those we would likely never read about in print or social media. Third, Providence takes our very weakness and sin, forgiving and transforming them like shards of glass fashioned into brilliant stained glass through which the light of God's work glows.

### **A COMMUNAL Prophetic Call**

The Providence Prophetic Call is a communal, not solo, gift and responsibility for the reign of God. Particularly because we share in Christ's prophetic identity through baptism, we receive this call

in the Spirit who animates the risen Christ. When Jesus issued the "great commission" to "go into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to every creature (Mark 16:15), he addressed a community of disciples. Still only beginners as a faith community, they heard Jesus' words and received his Spirit together. As the Acts of the Apostles describes it, "[a]ll these devoted the selves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (1:14). Even when the Spirit-empowered apostles spread to the edges of the known world, they depended on their fellow Christians' prayers and support.

In working to increase voter registrations so that the large underserved Hispanic population can be represented fairly in city and state policies, the Spanish- and English-speaking Providence Associates in Yakima, Washington, find their strength in collaborating to make concrete God's penchant for the voiceless in their valley.

### **A CONTEMPORARY Prophetic Call**

What does it mean to proclaim God's Good News prophetically to church and world when the ecclesial and cosmic environments in which we find ourselves are themselves evolving? Compare the upset of medieval worldviews held by those who, as Ptolemy did, thought that the sun circled Earth, while the followers of Copernicus and Galileo insisted that Earth revolves around the sun. Our ecclesial and global universes whirl with change, even chaos, but Jesus' mandate to "cast out into the deep and lower your nets" (Luke 5:4) is just as urgent as before.

Luisa Saffiotti offers a perspective on the phenomenon of chaos and "paradigm collapse." For new life and meaning to emerge, what is not helpful from the past must be purified. So whether she realized it or not, the University of Great Falls student in Montana who undertook a house-building service trip to El Salvador opened herself to a significant letting go. Her decision upon return to give away half her clothes reflected her surrender of a previous worldview, an openness to the power of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection in her life. Saffiotti draws from Carmelite Constance Fitzgerald and St. John of the Cross to point us toward the "purification of memory." Individually and communally, what are we holding onto from the past that blocks us from "[hope in a theological sense, as radical openness to God's future?]"<sup>1</sup>

Chaos and its creative possibilities lie in hope and profound openness to God's drawing us beyond the present. Inherent in our understanding of Providence are foresight, purpose, and new creation. How can we as Providence people recognize the live embers and tend our fire for God's reign? Against a backdrop of chaos, creativity, and emergence, come calls for a providential and prophetic way of seeing, both in the church and wider society.

Like any prophet who first must attend carefully to the Living God in order to speak God's word, we receive a continuing invitation to grow in contemplation and dialogue. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in the United States has demonstrated this vividly. Through the members' deepening contemplative approach to ecclesial and social challenges, they remind us of the humble listening and seeking that all prophets need. <sup>2</sup> In that attitude congregational leaders and members must identify the truth they see, even if it is "through a

glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12), and speak it with the integrity and respect that marks true dialogue. Sometimes that perspective on the truth will not be heard, but it must be offered nonetheless.

Another call within churches themselves, whether to leaders or to people "in the pews," is the recognition that justice issues are Gospel imperatives as Christian works of mercy (Matthew 25). This may mean beckoning reluctant parishioners into participating generously in Lenten "Operation Rice Bowl or Development and Peace soup suppers. Or it may take the form of thoughtful conversations with pastors and church members about justice issues that face state/province or federal elections.

Two urgent needs in society that need to be addressed for God's reign are care of Earth and the interrelated effort to eliminate the slavery of human trafficking and violence against women.

"Ecology," from the Greek word for "household" or "home," connecting care of Earth to God's own welcoming hearth, spotlights needed Providence attention. First, the climate change already in progress affects the poor most seriously. Migrant farm laborers who pick fruit and vegetables and cannot work because of heavy rains from a hurricane, lose essential pay for their families, perhaps for the rest of the season. Rising ocean levels that demolish fishing grounds and dwellings destroy first and foremost the fragile structures of poor workers. Climate change raises profound questions about the place of Earth in the universe, the abode of humanity within the entire creation, and the relationship of this whole with the God who made it.

God's glory in the work of creation is also at issue. Treating the natural world as a commodity for profit is a failure to appreciate it as a divine gift and to praise God for it. One writer calls this distortion a "money-theism"<sup>13</sup> form of idolatry. When care of Earth becomes an act of homage, it also engages in active love for one's neighbor, particularly the poorest among us. Love requires justice, the virtue of right relationships. The interweaving of all just relationships underlies the Earth Charter: caring for the environment, eliminating poverty, providing education, developing a just economy, honoring human rights, and promoting democracy and peace are "interdependent and indivisible."<sup>4</sup> More recently, "Rio + 20," the June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, underlined the urgency to care for Earth through a "green economy" with the institutions that support balanced development.<sup>15</sup>

These international endeavors concretize important aspects of the Providence mission to be co-creators. In partnership with people across nationalities and cultures they bring about God's glory, which is God's realm of love and right relationships. Many Providence women and men live out this vocation through such initiatives as the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice in Indiana and the Genesis Spirituality Center in Massachusetts with its ecological sensitivity.

In terms of the elimination of human trafficking and violence against women, many Providence people, religious and associates, already see results of their prophetic action to eliminate human trafficking. Their efforts span, among others, the monthly vigils in downtown Seattle, prayer services, the Stop Trafficking! newsletter, and the UNANIMA International coalition advocating as

an NGO at the United Nations. Providence people also join others to publicize and urge cooperation with the "Code of Conduct to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism," signed by growing numbers of travel, tourism, and hospitality companies. Providence people also advocated for the new version of the U.S. Violence Against Women Act. It includes the provision that indigenous women whose assailants are outside the jurisdiction of reservations are better protected.<sup>16</sup> These actions attest to the dignity that God's Providence instills in every person, especially the most vulnerable. This truth ignites the fire of action for God's reign.

## **Conclusion**

Grounded in the Paschal Mystery, we have pondered the Providence prophetic call that expands our conscious partnership with God's transforming action in the world. May this reflection, *A Fire to Warm and Ignite-the World: The Providence Prophetic Call*, fuel our gratitude for the great vocation to which we are summoned. As CA participation in the PROPHETIC mission of Christ, as COMMUN CONTEMPORARY, may Providence life and service continue to the Pentecost fire that warms and ignites the world.

## **Reflection Questions:**

### **Reflective Question 1**

This article gives so many ways of responding to the Providence Prophetic Call in small ways and larger ways. Can you choose one of the many ways mentioned, that particularly appealed to you?

### **Reflective Question 2**

Can you add another issue or example not included in the article that especially appeals to you?

## Providence Reflections

"Providence begins small and within, but it cannot stop there; it vibrates in ripples that once set into motion, transform the world one person at a time."

*-Leslie Keener, CDP*

"We need to understand God's Providence at work in the cosmos. That will mean shifting our understanding of where and how we locate the mystery of Providence in our lives."

*-Ruth McGoldrick, SP*

"Providence is the mystery of God who is actively engaged with us, calling us to enter into the creative activity of recreating the face of the Earth, and it is the mystery of God who eagerly awaits our human response."

*-Marie McCarthy, SP*

"As we continue to search for this 'something more' – to respond to this 'hunger in our hearts,' we are drawn deeper and deeper into ourselves and find ourselves in touch with a 'presence' which is always there, permeating our experience...We discover a presence that was there all along... ."A **presence we name as Providence.**

*- J. Norman King, Experiencing God all Ways and Every Day*

“Providence is the mystery of the on-going, enduring relationship between the God who makes all things possible and us creatures, handiwork of the creative activity of God – creatures made in God’s image and likeness, creatures who are themselves creative.”

*-Marie McCarthy, SP*

“You have planted the Divine Seed in every heart, a Treasure beyond word. Teach us to nurture that Seed so it might blossom into fullness and maturity... May we know that who we are is a reflection of You, the Divine Seed we bear.”

*-Nan C. Merrill, Psalms for Praying*

“The visible unveiling here. Invisible mystery Sacredness enfolding us here now.”

*- Monica Brown, “Invisible Mystery Mantra”*

**Has your understanding of Providence changed over time? Could you write:**

**What is Providence for you now?**

# **AMICI CORDIS WAY OF LIFE**

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Amici Cordis are individuals who profess a commitment to the mission and vision of the Sisters of Divine Providence. They share a uniquely close relationship to the Community, with two significant distinctions between them and vowed members:

- 1) Canonical Sisters take vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. Amici Cordis are non-canonical members who take a single, non-canonical Vow of Fidelity to the Community.
- 2) Amici Cordis retain full responsibility for their own personal health and finances.

## PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Blessed be the God and Father  
of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us  
with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.

Before the world was made,  
we were chosen in Christ to be holy and spotless  
and to live through love in God's presence,  
predestined to become adopted sons and daughters  
through Jesus Christ  
for God's own kind purposes,  
to make us praise the glory of the grace,  
freely given to us in the Beloved,  
in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom,  
the forgiveness of our sins.  
Such is the richness of the grace showered on us  
in all wisdom and insight.

The mystery of God's purpose was made known to us,  
the hidden plan so kindly made in Christ from the beginning,  
to act upon when the times had run their course to the end;  
that everything should be brought together

under Christ as head,  
everything in the heavens and everything on earth.

And it is in him that we were claimed as God's own,  
chosen from the beginning,  
under the predetermined plan of the one  
who freely decides all things and guides them,  
chosen to be, for the greater glory of the divinity,  
the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he came.

Now you, too, in him,  
have heard the message of the truth  
and the Good News of your salvation  
and have believed it;  
and you, too, have been stamped  
with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the promise,  
the pledge of our inheritance,  
which brings freedom for those who are God's own,  
so that the glory of God may be praised.

Ephesians: 1:3-14

## PROVIDENCE PRAYER

WE EXALT YOUR PROVIDENCE, O LORD,  
AND WE ENTRUST OURSELVES TO YOUR LOVING CARE,

with praise and gratitude for the good  
and beautiful things we have received,

with confidence when confronted  
with our human limitations,

with humble submission to the mystery  
of God's purpose when we experience  
suffering and frustration.

AND WE COMMIT OURSELVES  
TO MAKING YOUR PROVIDENCE MORE VISIBLE IN OUR WORLD,

with fidelity,  
living as responsible stewards of the earth  
and our personal gifts,

with courage,  
confronting the evils and injustices  
of our times,

with compassion,  
entering into the joys  
and sufferings of your people,

with hope,  
collaborating with people of good will  
in fostering your reign on earth.

## SPIRIT AND MISSION

The Congregation of Divine Providence is the legacy of William Emmanuel von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz and pioneer of social justice, and of Mother Marie de la Roche. Founded in Finthen, Germany, in 1851, the Community responded to the needs of the time through education and service to the sick and the poor.

The Community is part of an international Congregation of pontifical right, an apostolic Community of women religious, who, in response to God's call, live the common life and publicly profess simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence are "Friends of the Heart" who share a covenant relationship based on dedication to Providence and "putting on the mind of Christ." As friends they carry a common destiny that comes from a deep connection to the values that emanate from the heart and source of all wisdom. They are ***non-canonical members***. Joyfully witnessing to the faith vision of Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie, they join in serving God's people in a ministry characterized by response to God's providential love, a charism of trust in and openness to the Providence of God.

"The spirit of the institute is, above all, the spirit of Jesus Christ himself." (Constitutions, 1852) Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive always for "that mind which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5); we seek to live as Jesus did, striving always to do God's will.

With thoroughness and perseverance we seek to extend the Reign of God, reflecting the loyalty to the Church, the social concern and involvement, and the fearless defense of what is true and just, which characterized the life of Bishop Ketteler.

Mother Marie exemplifies for us a spirit of contemplation combined with a life of action. We are inspired by her example of humility, gentleness, and simplicity in the midst of demanding duties. We strive to imitate the deep faith and total openness with which she accepted the will of God in the face of great suffering and in her early death.

Trust in Divine Providence is for us, as for Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie, our way of life.

## LIFE OF CONSECRATION

Through Baptism Amici Cordis were incorporated into the Body of Christ, a living community, and through their Vow of Fidelity they are integrated into that same mission of Christ and respond in a new way to God's continuing call to love and service.

Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence consecrate themselves to God and to the Community through a Vow of Fidelity. Fidelity is a word which is derived from the Latin meaning “faithfulness.” Through this vow the individual promises to abide in, to belong to, and to keep faith and trust with the Community.

Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit’s guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ’s fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community.

The Amici Cordis freely obligate themselves to be a tangible expression of God’s fidelity. The Vow of Fidelity assists them in sustaining the belonging they have chosen, and in ordering life around them in countless practical ways especially when times are challenging.

## **CHASTITY**

Chastity is a virtue to which all Christians are called and can be defined as a properly ordered living out of one’s sexuality according to one’s state of life. Love of God is central to their life and is expressed in their loving of others. Through the practice of this virtue the Amici Cordis open their hearts to use their gifts, talents, education and experience in service to others. The Amici Cordis live out their chastity in a manner appropriate to their state of life.

## **POVERTY**

All Christians are called to live in the spirit of poverty, recognizing that all of creation is from God and the good things of this earth are to be celebrated and enjoyed. God desires that we as Christians live simply, living from needs rather than wants.

Matthew 10: 37-39 invites all who would follow Christ to be detached from possessions according to their vocation. In Luke 16: 13-14 personal possessions may be kept and enjoyed, so long as they are properly used and do not become “god.”

Like all Christians the Amici Cordis share in the poverty of Christ who became poor to enrich us (2 Cor. 8:9). His example calls us to give what we have and what we are to promote the Reign of God and to treasure above all else union with God. In the spirit of Bishop Ketteler, we strive to be aware of, and responsive to, those in need. We give corporate witness to Christ's poverty and merciful love when, content with what is necessary, we enter effectively into solidarity with the poor by sharing with them our friendship, our time, and our resources.

Each individual entering and becoming an Amici Cordis continues with independent living arrangements and has the option to live in community. The Amici Cordis maintain personal responsibility for finances, health care, retirement, funeral expenses, and indebtedness.

#### **Scripture References:**

- Matthew 10:37-39 – “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
- Luke 16: 13-14 – “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things and sneered at him.”
- 2 Cor. 8:9 – “For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich.”

#### **OBEDIENCE**

The meaning of obedience comes from the Latin word *obediere* “to pay attention,” “to give ear,” and to “listen to.” Obedience is expected of all baptized Christians seeking to follow the divine call. It gives voice to our yearnings to recognize and respond to God's desire for a relationship with us. Obedience only makes sense in the context of intimacy with the Divine and the love expressed through prayer.

Obedience is made manifest by paying attention to the inner voice of the Divine and to all the “signs of the times,” and in sharpening our powers of discernment to know, to recognize, and to respond to God, and God's people. As a part of their practice of obedience, discernment becomes a way of living in God and turning to prayer and dialogue with the community and others when making decisions. Rendered in faith and love, obedience gives us both the power to recognize the will of God and the readiness to do it.



## LIFE OF WORSHIP

Our lives are founded on our relationship with God. We must of necessity be people of prayer. Our firm adherence to God in mind and heart enters into all we do, enabling us to “pray always”.

As we share Christ’s life, we also share his prayer, allowing his spirit to pray in us (Rom. 8:26). As we grow in the awareness of God’s presence in our lives, we grow also in the love Jesus had for his Father. Graced with the name of “Divine Providence,” we allow this charism to permeate our prayer so that we may enter more fully into the mystery of our Provident God.

The liturgy, the summit and fountain of the Church’s life is a corporate experience of the risen Jesus in our world and a source of nourishment for the spiritual life. In the breaking of the Bread, we seek strength and manifest the unity existing among ourselves and with God’s people. We participate in the liturgical life of the Church, especially through the celebration of the Eucharist.

We, Amici Cordis, join the canonical Sisters, when possible, for the recitation of Morning Prayer and Evening Praise. Through these we join our prayer and petition with the official prayer of the Church.

We, Amici Cordis, realize the importance of communal prayer for expressing and strengthening one’s dedication to the mission and worship of the Church, takes seriously the obligation to participate in Community prayer when possible.

Because we desire to keep our lives centered in God, we devote ourselves daily to the practice of personal prayer. We strive to cultivate the inner silence, the contemplative attitude and the disciplined spirit that, in the midst of activity, make us sensitive and responsive to God’s action in our lives.

In order to renew our lives in the light of the Gospel, we make an annual retreat of at least five days and use other opportunities for prayer and reflection.

- The annual retreat is a special time to deepen our relationship with God. During those days of retreat, our Community bonds are strengthened through prayer and communion with one another.
- To deepen our relationship with God and strengthen our covenant with one another, regular times of communal spiritual renewal are vital for us.
- To promote continued spiritual growth, we are encouraged to seek spiritual direction.
- Realizing that every person is unique and that there are many different ways to find God, we each seek earnestly to discover a response to God that is authentic and fruitful. This inner freedom allows each of us to respect the choices others make in their own ways of praying.

Bishop Ketteler found inspiration for his life and work in his devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the refuge of those in suffering and in need. We, too, seek to cherish and to imitate the goodness and love that characterized the person of Jesus.

Jesus, who comes among us in the Eucharist, remains with us in the Sacrament of the Altar. We often come to him there in faith and gratitude.

We honor Mary, the first and most perfect disciple of Christ, who through her openness to God became our model in faith.

As a Congregation, we celebrate our common heritage in a special way on the following days:

- Feast of Divine Providence — Feast of the Most Holy Trinity
- Foundation Day of the Congregation — September 29
- Feast of the Immaculate Conception — December 8
- Bishop Ketteler Day — July 13
- Mother Marie Day — August 1

On the common feasts of the Congregation, we make a devotional renewal of vows. Provinces/Regions also celebrate the feasts that are particular to them.

- In the Marie de la Roche Province we also celebrate:
- Foundation Day of the Province — August 1 (2001)
- Birthday of Mother Marie — October 28 (1812)
- Arrival of our Sisters in the U.S. — June 25 (1876)

### ***Amici Cordis devotional renewal of vows.***

Holy Scripture is the revelation of who God is and who we are in relationship to God. We often reflect prayerfully on this message, seeking a personal encounter with the Word of God which reveals and illumines, challenges and transforms us.

Penance is necessary in order that we may enter more deeply into the Paschal Mystery. As members of a pilgrim Church, we recognize our need, personally and communally, for a constantly renewed conversion of mind and heart. Our striving for conversion finds expression in prayer and acts of penance, in the Eucharistic liturgy, and, in a special way, in the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this encounter with the merciful Christ, we experience healing and the strengthening of our bonds with one another.

We assess our response to God's love in the events of each day and seek to be reconciled when we have failed in love for God or our neighbor.

Attentive to Providence in our midst, we discover God in Word and Sacrament, in creation, in the events of our lives, and in the people with whom we live and work. Thus, prayer becomes for us a way of life.

## **LIFE IN COMMUNITY**

We who are gathered together in the name of Christ rejoice in his presence among us and form a community of faith and love (PC 15). Because we are one in him we strive for genuine communion with each other.

“The word community derives from Latin, *commun*, meaning common. The same root informs the word communicate (to share our understanding, to have understanding in common) and communion (to share our experience, to have experience in common). It’s not by chance that the word community contains unity. Possibility is rooted in the very word. For community is an ever-potent seed waiting for our efforts and care to animate what we have in common, so we can share our understanding and experience in our time on Earth.” (More Together Than Alone by Mark Nepo, 2018)

Through mutual support of prayer and concern, we deepen our understanding of, and love for, one another. Endeavoring to recognize the enrichment that comes to our common life and work from the variety of opinions and personalities among us, we grow in our appreciation of communal life. In God’s love we find strength for the daily task of building community. This task requires an attitude of respect for the dignity of each person, of trust and sincerity, and the practice of open communication, mutual encouragement, and the willingness to “carry one another’s burdens.”

Community holds a space where we can make our own discernment, in our own way and time, with the encouraging and challenging presence of others who share a common lot.

The kind of community that knows how to welcome soul, our inner life, enables us to hear its voice. This community makes it safe for soul to show up. We all need to welcome, amplify and discern the inner voice of God. We have the freedom to follow our souls for the common good.

We enter into dialogue with each other. “Dialogue is a communal meditation conducted in a kindly, compassionate manner, listening intensely and sympathetically and allowing the other’s ideas to unsettle one’s own convictions, permits one’s mind to be informed and changed by the contributions of the other.” (Karen Armstrong)

In the spirit of redemptive love, we freely admit our mistakes, show compassion for the weakness of others, and, as soon as possible, resolve misunderstandings and conflict.

Community life contributes both to our personal growth and to the effectiveness of our apostolate. The love of each other in community is the reassuring sign of God’s love for us; it

encourages us to risk ourselves in the works of the apostolate and to live according to Gospel values.

The bonds of love extend beyond the Provincial and the Regional boundaries to all the members of the Congregation. We share their joys and sorrows and do not hesitate to offer assistance when there is need.

Each member is responsible for maintaining their physical and mental health. They take sufficient time for rest, vacation, and relaxation to sustain their spiritual strength and vitality.

Our sick and elderly Sisters have a special claim on our loving care. We show particular solicitude for their spiritual and physical welfare. We look to their example for inspiration and depend upon the support of their prayer. As Amici Cordis, we are encouraged to befriend elderly Sisters, especially those in assisted care.

We cherish the memory of our deceased Sisters, our Amici Cordis, and our Associates, giving thanks for their lives of service and praying to and for them frequently, especially during the Eucharistic liturgy.

At the Generalate and in the central house of each Province and Region, a Mass is offered during the month of November for all the deceased members of the Congregation.

A list of the feast days, birthdays, and death anniversaries of every member in the Congregation is maintained and updated at the Generalate. The updated list is sent to the Provincial/Regional Director at the beginning of each new year for distribution to the local houses of the Provinces/Region.

The local communities include the names of the members of the Congregation celebrating a feast day, birthday or death anniversary in the prayer of the Community for that day.

The Generalate and all the other Provinces are notified of the deaths of Sisters, Associates and Amici Cordis. Members of the Province are notified immediately when a Sister of the Province dies.

The bonds of love are retained when a member leaves the Community.

Within the Province, we embrace various types of formal relationships which extend the life of our Community, the mission of Jesus, and the charism and spirituality of Providence. Each type of relationship has its own leadership, structures, programs and policies, organized and planned under the authority of the Provincial Director and her Council.

- Associates are those individuals who commit themselves, for a period of time, to share the spiritual, communal, and/or apostolic life of the Congregation.

- Amici Cordis are non-canonical members; they take a single, non-canonical Vow of Fidelity to the Congregation. Amici Cordis retain full responsibility for their own personal health and finances.
- Other forms of relationship may also continue to be envisioned and implemented in order to establish new bonds, develop Christian leadership, and share understandings of our life, spirituality and ministry with those who desire these ties. After discussion throughout the Province, new groups are organized as it seems appropriate and/or necessary.

We have a special role in creating among God's people that community of love which has its origin in the Trinity. We try to understand the people of our time and their way of life and to enter into their hopes and anxieties. In all our dealings with them, we are disposed to serve and not to be served (Mt. 20:28).

## **MINISTRY**

The mission of the Church is the Mission of Jesus Christ, who was sent to reconcile humanity with the Creator and to establish the Reign of God in a new order of love. Incorporated into the life of the Church, we share in Christ's mission and dedicate ourselves to a life of prayer and action in the spirit of Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie.

Although our love finds expression in various forms of service, a genuine concern for others is the heart of our ministry.

- As an Apostolic Congregation, we serve especially through our participation in Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing. As Sisters and Amici Cordis of Divine Providence we have a particular call to discover God's Providence and to help others discover it in all the events of life.
- We serve the people of God without discrimination and with special concern for the poor. We try to make our service of others an expression of God's love for them, so that they may come to a greater appreciation of their personal dignity and worth.
- In the spirit of our Founders, we seek to deepen and live our charism by a commitment to promote a consistent ethic of life. We hold all life sacred: creating communities of joy and love, promoting justice, seeking to advance the cause of all people, especially those in need, and practicing responsible stewardship.
- Today we are called to alleviate the effects of poverty and also to dedicate ourselves to changing structures and liberating people from the dehumanizing situations in which they are forced to live. Each of us can be a part of the change process for a more just world by our choices, our lifestyle and our life-stance.

We rely on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to assist us in our ministries. At the same time we accept the responsibility to keep abreast of contemporary developments in the Church's teachings and

in our professional fields, in order to maintain a high level of competence in fulfilling our commitments.

The example of Christ gives light and direction to our ministries. In fulfilling his redemptive mission, he frequently sought occasions to pray, both alone and with others. We too are concerned to support and enrich our apostolic activities through personal and communal prayer.

We look to the Community for the support and inspiration that enable us to give more fully of ourselves in the exercise of our ministries.

In our efforts to create Christian community with our co-workers, we try to keep in mind that we effect more by what we are than by what we do.

- We commit ourselves to witness the primacy of Gospel values to a broken world as we share with others Christ's vision of hope, love, and faith. We strive to use generously our diverse and complementary gifts as we serve the needs of our times.
- Through our daily living and the support of the Community, we seek to deepen our charism of making visible the presence and Providence of God.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

All Christians, by their baptismal commitment, are called to witness to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and, in Him, with His Father through the Spirit. Vatican II emphasized a portrait of the Church as being the People of God, as it was at its origins. This contrasts remarkably with the hierarchical model of the Church with its accent on clericalism and legalism that it has become over the years. Surely this vision of the People of God, filled with the Holy Spirit and equal in divine grace beckons Amici Cordis to the Sisters of Divine Providence.

We, Amici Cordis, are called to live our vocation through the profession of a Vow of Fidelity to the Community, attracted by its unique way of living out the Providence charism. We choose to participate in a Community that embraces a diversity of cultures and personalities where opportunities to dialogue, pray, and share faith abound.

## **ADMISSION**

Any person who is properly motivated may be welcomed as an Amici Cordis candidate if they have the necessary health; the spiritual, psychological and emotional maturity; the education and life experience; and the character that will enable participation in the life of the Community.

We, Amici Cordis, remain financially independent from the Congregation, **retaining full responsibility** for our own living expenses, health care and retirement.

## INTEGRATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

The purpose of the integration program is to help each candidate continue to surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to deepen their ongoing commitment as a mature, generous individual. Each person is encouraged to assume responsibility for their integration as they journey with the guidance of the Community.

The integration program should provide for experiences that will enable the Community and the candidate to discern the genuineness of their vocation and their aptitude for life in the Community.

The integration program is flexible in order to provide for the individual candidate what is necessary for personal growth in accord with the spirit of the Gospel and our particular spirituality.

The integration program provides for a deepening of the spiritual life and an introduction into the life of the Community. A person who experiences prayer, community, and ministry comes to know and is better able to assess readiness for life as an Amici Cordis.

The program is designed to direct the individual toward these goals:

- a deeper response to God's call;
- basic knowledge of the truths contained in a faith life;
- development and integration of their person;
- appreciation of the importance of prayer in their life through instruction and experience in various methods of prayer;
- continued discernment of their call;
- acceptance of personal responsibility for living out their faith and call;
- growth in intimacy with God through prayer;
- experience in living out the Christian virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience;
- integration of a contemplative spirit into her active life; and
- strengthening a bond with the Community through the study of its history, charism, and Constitutions.

The candidate is free to leave the Community at any time. If there is a serious reason for doing so, the Provincial Director with the consent of her Council may dismiss a candidate after consultation with the appropriate individuals.

When, after discernment, the candidate and the Community determine readiness for the life as Amici Cordis, the individual writes a request to the Provincial Director for admission. After consultation with the appropriate Community members and with the consent of the Provincial Council, the candidate may admit the individual to take the Vow of Fidelity to the Province.

## **ONGOING FORMATION**

Each Amici Cordis is responsible for developing their potential. Each will, therefore, take advantage of the opportunities — spiritual, apostolic, professional, and cultural — that contribute to growth and enrichment.

As non-canonical members, the Amici Cordis are encouraged to participate in all programs offered to the Congregation to support their efforts toward personal growth.

## **OBLIGATIONS TO THE AMICI CORDIS WAY OF LIFE**

The document reflects our special vision of the Amici Cordis of Divine Providence. We freely choose to observe faithfully and entirely the Vow of Fidelity we have made and we oblige ourselves to live in accord with the Amici Cordis Way of Life.

We commit ourselves to the personal study of and prayerful reflection on the Amici Cordis Way of Life, so that in Community we may experience that peace and unity which is a sign of the Provident God.



**Hermanas de la Divina Providencia**  
**Provincia María de la Roche**  
**Estilo de vida Amici Cordis**  
**(Amigas del corazón)**

Amici Cordis son personas que profesan un compromiso con la misión y la visión de las Hermanas de la Divina Providencia. Comparten una relación singularmente estrecha con la Comunidad, con dos distinciones significativas entre ellas y los miembros con votos:

- 1) Las Hermanas Canónicas hacen votos de Pobreza, Castidad y Obediencia. Las Amici Cordis son miembros no canónicos que hacen un Voto de Fidelidad a la Comunidad único y no canónico.
- 2) Las Amici Cordis retienen la responsabilidad total de su propia salud y finanzas personales.

**HERMANAS DE LA DIVINA PROVIDENCIA**  
**PROVINCIA MARIA DE LA ROCHE**  
**AMIGAS DEL CORAZON CAMINO DE VIDA**

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## CARTA DE PABLO A LOS EFESIOS

Bendito sea el Dios y Padre  
de nuestro Señor Jesucristo,  
quien nos ha bendecido  
con toda clase de bendiciones espirituales, en los cielos, en Cristo;

por cuanto nos ha elegido en el  
antes de la fundación del mundo,  
para ser santos e inmaculados en su  
presencia en el amor;  
eligiéndonos de ante mano para ser sus hijos e hijas  
adoptivos por medio de Jesucristo,  
según el beneplácito de su voluntad,  
para alabanza de la gloria de su gracia,  
con la que nos agració en el Amado.  
En él, tenemos por medio de su sangre la redención,  
el perdón de los delitos, según la riqueza de su gracia  
que ha prodigado sobre nosotros en toda sabiduría e inteligencia,

Dándonos a conocer el Misterio de su voluntad,  
según el benévolo designio que en él se propuso de antemano,  
para realizarlo en la plenitud de los tiempos:  
hacer que todo tenga a Cristo por Cabeza,  
lo que está en los cielos y lo que está en la tierra.

A él, por quien entramos en herencia,  
elegidos de antemano según el previo designio  
del que realiza todo conforme a la decisión de su voluntad,  
para ser nosotros alabanza de su gloria,  
los que ya antes esperábamos en Cristo.

En el también ustedes, tras haber oído la Palabra de la verdad,  
el Evangelio de su salvación, y creído también en él,  
fueron sellados con el Espíritu Santo de la Promesa,  
Que es prenda de nuestra herencia,  
para redención del Pueblo de su posesión,  
para alabanza de su gloria.

Efesios: 1:3-14

## ORACIÓN DE LA PROVIDENCIA

EXALTAMOS TU PROVIDENCIA, OH SEÑOR,  
Y NOS ENCOMENDAMOS A TU AMOROSO CUIDADO,

con alabanza y gratitud por el bien  
y las cosas hermosas que hemos recibido,

con confianza cuando nos enfrentamos  
con nuestras limitaciones humanas,

con humilde sumisión al misterio  
del propósito de Dios cuando experimentamos  
sufrimiento y frustración.

Y NOS COMPROMETEMOS  
PARA HACER TU PROVIDENCIA MÁS VISIBLE EN NUESTRO MUNDO,

con fidelidad,  
viviendo como administradoras responsables de la tierra  
y de nuestros regalos personales,

con valentía,  
enfrentando los males y las injusticias  
de nuestros tiempos,

con compasión,  
entrando en las alegrías  
y sufrimientos de tu pueblo,

con esperanza,  
colaborando con gente de buena voluntad  
en fomentar tu reinado en la tierra.

## ESPÍRITU Y MISIÓN

La Congregación de la Divina Providencia es el legado de William Emmanuel von Ketteler, Obispo de Maguncia y pionero de la justicia social, y de la Madre María de la Roche. Fundada en Finthen, Alemania, en el 1851, la Comunidad respondió a las necesidades de la época a través de la educación y el servicio a los enfermos y pobres.

La Comunidad forma parte de una Congregación internacional de derecho pontificio, una Comunidad apostólica de religiosas que, en respuesta a la llamada de Dios, viven la vida en común y profesan públicamente los votos simples de pobreza, castidad y obediencia.

Las Amici Cordis de la Provincia María de la Roche de las Hermanas de la Divina Providencia son "Amigas del Corazón" que comparten una relación de alianza basada en la dedicación a la Providencia y "revestirse de la mente de Cristo". Como amigas llevan un destino común que nace de una profunda conexión con los valores que emanan del corazón y fuente de toda sabiduría. ***Son miembros no canónicos.*** Dando testimonio con alegría de la visión de fe del Obispo Ketteler y de Madre María, se unen para servir al pueblo de Dios en un ministerio caracterizado por la respuesta al amor providencial de Dios, un carisma de confianza y apertura a la Providencia de Dios.

“El espíritu del instituto es, ante todo, el espíritu del mismo Jesucristo”. (Constituciones, 1852)  
Bajo la guía del Espíritu Santo, nos esforzamos siempre por “esa mente que hubo en Cristo Jesús” (Fil. 2:5); buscamos vivir como lo hizo Jesús, esforzándonos siempre por hacer la voluntad de Dios.

Con minuciosidad y perseverancia buscamos extender el Reino de Dios, reflejando la fidelidad a la Iglesia, la preocupación y el compromiso social, y la valerosa defensa de lo verdadero y lo justo, que caracterizaron la vida del Obispo Ketteler.

Madre María ejemplifica para nosotras un espíritu de contemplación, combinado con una vida de acción. Nos inspira su ejemplo de humildad, mansedumbre y sencillez en medio de exigentes demandas. Nos esforzamos por imitar la fe profunda y la total apertura con la que ella acogió la voluntad de Dios frente a los grandes sufrimientos y a su temprana muerte.

La confianza en la Divina Providencia es para nosotras, como para el Obispo Ketteler y Madre María, nuestro modo de vida.

## VIDA DE CONSAGRACIÓN

Por el Bautismo las Amici Cordis fueron incorporadas al Cuerpo de Cristo, comunidad viva, y por su Voto de Fidelidad ellas son integradas a esa misma misión de Cristo y responden de una manera nueva al llamado continuo de Dios a amar y a servir.

Las Amici Cordis de la Provincia María de la Roche de las Hermanas de la Divina Providencia, se consagran a Dios y a la Comunidad mediante un Voto de Fidelidad. Fidelidad es una palabra que se deriva del latín “fidelitas” y significa “cualidad relativa a la lealtad o la fe”. Mediante este voto el individuo promete acatar, pertenecer y mantener la fe y la confianza con la Comunidad.

La fidelidad se refleja en su voluntad de desarrollar su relación con lo Divino. La fidelidad solo es posible buscando la guía, el aliento y la sabiduría del Espíritu. Es precisamente esta disponibilidad, este pedir, buscar, amar, contemplar e inquirir lo que recuerda a las Amici Cordis la fidelidad de Cristo y les permite reflejar este espíritu de Comunidad.

Las Amici Cordis se obligan libremente a ser expresión tangible de la fidelidad de Dios. El Voto de Fidelidad les ayuda a mantener la pertenencia que han elegido y a ordenar la vida a su alrededor de innumerables formas prácticas, especialmente en tiempos difíciles.

## **CASTIDAD**

La castidad es una virtud a la que todos los cristianos están llamados; y puede definirse como una vivencia correctamente ordenada de la propia sexualidad según el propio estado de vida. El amor de Dios es central en su vida y se expresa en su amor por los demás. A través de la práctica de esta virtud, las Amici Cordis abren sus corazones para usar sus dones, talentos, educación y experiencia al servicio de los demás. Las Amici Cordis viven su castidad de manera adecuada a su estado de vida.

## **POBREZA**

Todos los cristianos están llamados a vivir en el espíritu de pobreza, reconociendo que toda la creación es de Dios y las cosas buenas de esta tierra deben ser celebradas y disfrutadas. Dios desea que nosotras, como cristianas, vivamos con sencillez, viviendo de las necesidades en lugar de los deseos.

Mateo 10: 37-39 invita a quienes quieren seguir a Cristo a que se desapeguen de las posesiones según su vocación. En Lucas 16: 13-14, las posesiones personales pueden conservarse y disfrutarse, siempre que se usen correctamente y no se conviertan en "dios".

Como todos los cristianos, las Amici Cordis comparten la pobreza de Cristo que se hizo pobre para enriquecernos (2 Co 8, 9). Su ejemplo nos llama a dar lo que tenemos y lo que somos para promover el Reino de Dios y atesorar por encima de todo la unión con Dios. En el espíritu del Obispo Ketteler, nos esforzamos por ser conscientes y responder a los necesitados. Damos testimonio colectivo de la pobreza y del amor misericordioso de Cristo cuando, contentas con lo necesario, nos solidarizamos eficazmente con los pobres compartiendo con ellos nuestra amistad, nuestro tiempo y nuestros recursos.

Cada individuo que ingresa y se convierte en Amici Cordis continúa con arreglos de vida independiente y tiene la opción de vivir en comunidad. Las Amici Cordis mantienen la

responsabilidad personal de las finanzas, la atención médica, la jubilación, los gastos fúnebres y el endeudamiento.

### **Referencias bíblicas:**

- Mateo 10:37-39 – “El que ama a su padre o a su madre más que a mí, no es digno de mí; el que ama a su hijo o a su hija más que a mí, no es digno de mí. El que no toma su cruz y me sigue detrás, no es digno de mí. El que encuentre su vida, la perderá; y el que pierda su vida por causa de mí, la encontrará”.
- Lucas 16: 13-14 – “Ningún criado puede servir a dos señores, porque aborrecerá a uno y amará al otro; o bien se apegará a uno y despreciará al otro. No pueden servir a Dios y al dinero. Estaban oyendo todas estas cosas los fariseos, que eran amigos del dinero, y se burlaban de él”.
- 2 Co. 8:9 – “Pues conocen la generosidad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo, el cual, siendo rico, por ustedes se hizo pobre a fin de que se enriquecieran con su pobreza.”

## **OBEDIENCIA**

El significado de la palabra obediencia proviene del latín oboedientia, "prestar atención", "dar oído" y "escuchar". Se espera obediencia de todos los cristianos bautizados que buscan seguir el llamado divino. Da voz a nuestros anhelos de reconocer y responder al deseo de Dios de tener una relación con nosotras. La obediencia sólo tiene sentido en el contexto de la intimidad con lo Divino y el amor expresado a través de la oración.

La obediencia se manifiesta al prestar atención a la voz interior de lo Divino y a todos los "signos de los tiempos", y a agudizar nuestros poderes de discernimiento para conocer, reconocer y responder a Dios y al pueblo de Dios. Como parte de su práctica de obediencia, el discernimiento se convierte en una forma de vivir en Dios y volverse a la oración y al diálogo con la comunidad y con los demás en la toma de decisiones. Rendida en fe y amor, la obediencia nos da tanto el poder de reconocer la voluntad de Dios como la disposición para hacerla.

## **VIDA DE ADORACIÓN**

Nuestras vidas se basan en nuestra relación con Dios. Necesariamente debemos ser personas de oración. Nuestra firme adhesión a Dios en mente y corazón entra en todo lo que hacemos, permitiéndonos “orar siempre”.

Al compartir la vida de Cristo, también compartimos su oración, permitiendo que su espíritu ore en nosotras (Rom. 8:26). A medida que crecemos en la conciencia de la presencia de Dios en nuestras vidas, crecemos también en el amor que Jesús tenía por su Padre. Agraciadas con el nombre de

“Divina Providencia”, dejamos que este carisma impregne nuestra oración para que podamos entrar más plenamente en el misterio de nuestro Dios Providente.

La liturgia, cumbre y fuente de la vida de la Iglesia, es la experiencia colectiva de Jesús resucitado en nuestro mundo y fuente de alimento para la vida espiritual. En la fracción del Pan buscamos la fuerza y manifestamos la unidad que existe entre nosotras y con el pueblo de Dios. Participamos en la vida litúrgica de la Iglesia, especialmente a través de la celebración de la Eucaristía.

Nosotras, Amici Cordis, nos unimos a las Hermanas canónicas, cuando sea posible, para la recitación de la Oración Matutina y la Alabanza Vespertina. A través de estos, unimos nuestra oración y petición con la oración oficial de la Iglesia.

Nosotras, Amici Cordis, nos damos cuenta de la importancia de la oración comunitaria para expresar y fortalecer la dedicación a la misión y el culto de la Iglesia, tomamos en serio la obligación de participar en la oración comunitaria cuando sea posible.

Porque deseamos mantener nuestra vida centrada en Dios, nos dedicamos diariamente a la práctica de la oración personal. Nos esforzamos por cultivar el silencio interior, la actitud contemplativa y el espíritu disciplinado que, en medio de la actividad, nos hacen sensibles y receptivas a la acción de Dios en nuestra vida.

Para renovar nuestra vida a la luz del Evangelio, hacemos un retiro anual de al menos cinco días y aprovechamos otros momentos de oración y reflexión.

- El retiro anual es un tiempo especial para profundizar nuestra relación con Dios. Durante esos días de retiro, nuestros lazos comunitarios se fortalecen a través de la oración y la comunión de unas con otras.
- Para profundizar nuestra relación con Dios y fortalecer nuestro pacto las unas con las otras, los tiempos regulares de renovación espiritual comunitaria son vitales para nosotras.
- Para promover el crecimiento espiritual continuo, se nos anima a buscar dirección espiritual.
- Al darnos cuenta de que cada persona es única y que hay muchas maneras diferentes de encontrar a Dios, cada una de nosotras busca fervientemente descubrir una respuesta a Dios que sea auténtica y fructífera. Esta libertad interior nos permite a cada una de nosotras respetar las elecciones que otras hacen en sus propias formas de orar.

El Obispo Ketteler encontró inspiración para su vida y obra en su devoción al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, el refugio de los que sufren y los necesitados. Nosotras también buscamos apreciar e imitar la bondad y el amor que caracterizaron a la persona de Jesús.

Jesús, que viene en medio de nosotras en la Eucaristía, permanece con nosotras en el Sacramento del Altar. A menudo acudimos a él allí con fe y gratitud.



Honramos a María, la primera y más perfecta discípula de Cristo, quien por su apertura a Dios se convirtió en nuestro modelo de fe.

Como Congregación, celebramos nuestro patrimonio común de manera especial en los siguientes días:

- Fiesta de la Divina Providencia — Fiesta de la Santísima Trinidad
- Día de la Fundación de la Congregación — 29 de septiembre
- Fiesta de la Inmaculada Concepción — 8 de diciembre
- Día del Obispo Ketteler — 13 de julio
- Día de la Madre María — 1 de agosto

En las fiestas comunes de la Congregación, hacemos una devoción de renovación de votos. Las Provincias/Regiones también celebran las fiestas que son propias de ellas.

- En la Provincia María de la Roche también celebramos:
- Día de la Fundación de la Provincia — 1 de agosto (2001)
- Cumpleaños de la Madre María — 28 de octubre (1812)
- Llegada de nuestras Hermanas a los EE. UU. — 25 de junio (1876)

## ***Amici Cordis devocional para renovación de votos.***

La Sagrada Escritura es la revelación de quién es Dios y quiénes somos en relación con Dios. A menudo reflexionamos en oración sobre este mensaje, buscando un encuentro personal con la Palabra de Dios que nos revela e ilumina, interpela y transforma.

La penitencia es necesaria para que podamos entrar más profundamente en el Misterio Pascual. Como miembros de una Iglesia peregrina, reconocemos nuestra necesidad personal y comunitaria, de una conversión de mente y corazón constantemente renovada. Nuestro esfuerzo por la conversión encuentra expresión en la oración y los actos de penitencia, en la liturgia eucarística y de manera especial, en la recepción frecuente del sacramento de la Reconciliación. En este encuentro con Cristo misericordioso, experimentamos la sanación y el fortalecimiento de nuestros vínculos mutuos.

Evaluamos nuestra respuesta al amor de Dios en los acontecimientos de cada día y buscamos reconciliarnos cuando hemos fallado en el amor a Dios o al prójimo.

Atentas a la Providencia en medio de nosotras, descubrimos a Dios en la Palabra y el Sacramento, en la creación, en los acontecimientos de nuestra vida y en las personas con las que vivimos y trabajamos. Así, la oración se convierte para nosotras en un camino de vida.

### **VIDA EN COMUNIDAD**

Las que estamos reunidas en el nombre de Cristo nos alegramos de su presencia entre nosotras y formamos una comunidad de fe y de amor (PC 15). Porque somos una en él, nos esforzamos por tener una comunión genuina entre nosotras.

“La palabra comunidad deriva del latín *communitas*, que significa cualidad de común. La misma raíz informa la palabra comunicar (compartir nuestro entendimiento, tener entendimiento en común) y comunión (compartir nuestra experiencia, tener experiencia en común). No es casualidad que la palabra comunidad contenga unidad. Posibilidad está enraizada en la misma palabra. Porque la comunidad es una semilla siempre potente, que espera nuestros esfuerzos y cuidados para animar lo que tenemos en común, para que podamos compartir nuestra comprensión y experiencia en nuestro tiempo en la Tierra”. (Más juntos que solos de Mark Nepo, 2018)

A través del apoyo mutuo de la oración y la preocupación, profundizamos nuestra comprensión y amor mutuo. Al esforzarnos por reconocer el enriquecimiento que proviene de la variedad de opiniones y personalidades entre nosotras, nuestra vida y nuestro trabajo en común, crecemos en nuestra apreciación de la vida comunitaria. En el amor de Dios encontramos fuerza para la tarea diaria de construir comunidad. Esta tarea requiere una actitud de respeto por la dignidad de cada

persona, de confianza y sinceridad, y la práctica de la comunicación abierta, el estímulo mutuo y la disponibilidad de “llevar las cargas de las unas con las otras”.

La comunidad alberga un espacio donde podemos hacer nuestro propio discernimiento, a nuestra manera y tiempo, con la presencia alentadora y desafiante de otras que comparten una suerte común.

El tipo de comunidad que sabe acoger el alma, nuestra vida interior, nos permite escuchar su voz. Esta comunidad hace que sea seguro que el alma aparezca. Todas necesitamos acoger, amplificar y discernir la voz interior de Dios. Tenemos la libertad de seguir nuestras almas por el bien común.

Entramos en diálogo unas con otras. “El diálogo es una meditación comunitaria conducida de una manera amable y compasiva, escuchando intensa y comprensivamente y permitiendo que las ideas de las demás perturben las propias convicciones, permite que la mente de una sea informada y cambiada por las contribuciones de las demás”. (Karen Armstrong)

En el espíritu del amor redentor, admitimos libremente nuestros errores, mostramos compasión por la debilidad de las demás y, tan pronto como sea posible, resolvemos malentendidos y conflictos.

La vida comunitaria contribuye tanto a nuestro crecimiento personal como a la eficacia de nuestro apostolado. El amor mutuo en comunidad es el signo tranquilizador del amor de Dios por nosotras; nos anima a arriesgarnos en las obras del apostolado y a vivir según los valores evangélicos.

Los lazos de amor se extienden más allá de los límites provinciales y regionales a todos los miembros de la Congregación. Compartimos sus alegrías y tristezas y no dudamos en ofrecer asistencia cuando sea necesario.

Cada miembro es responsable de mantener su salud física y mental. Se toman el tiempo suficiente para descansar, vacacionar y relajarse para mantener su fuerza espiritual y vitalidad.

Nuestras Hermanas enfermas y ancianas tienen un trato especial a nuestro cuidado amoroso. Mostramos particular solicitud por su bienestar espiritual y físico. Miramos su ejemplo en busca de inspiración y dependemos del apoyo de su oración. Como Amici Cordis, se nos anima a entablar amistad con las hermanas mayores, especialmente con aquellas que reciben atención asistida.

Atesoramos la memoria de nuestras hermanas fallecidas, nuestras Amici Cordis y nuestros Asociados/as, dando gracias por sus vidas de servicio y orando por y para ellos con frecuencia, especialmente durante la liturgia eucarística.

En la Casa General y en la casa central de cada Provincia y Región, se ofrece una Misa durante el mes de noviembre por todos los miembros difuntos de la Congregación.

En la Casa General se mantiene y se actualiza una lista de los días festivos, cumpleaños y aniversarios de fallecimiento de cada miembro de la Congregación. La lista actualizada se envía a la Directora Provincial/Regional al comienzo de cada año nuevo para su distribución a las casas locales de las Provincias/Región.

Las comunidades locales incluyen los nombres de los miembros de la Congregación que celebran una fiesta, un cumpleaños o un aniversario de muerte en la oración de la Comunidad para ese día.

La Casa General y todas las demás Provincias son notificadas de las muertes de las Hermanas, Asociados/as y Amici Cordis. Los miembros de la Provincia son notificados inmediatamente cuando muere una Hermana de la Provincia.

Los lazos de amor se mantienen cuando un miembro deja la Comunidad.

Dentro de la Provincia, abrazamos varios tipos de relaciones formales que prolongan la vida de nuestra Comunidad, la misión de Jesús y el carisma y la espiritualidad de la Providencia. Cada tipo de relación tiene sus propios liderazgos, estructuras, programas y políticas, organizados y planificados bajo la autoridad de la Directora Provincial y su Consejo.

- Los asociados/as son aquellas personas que se comprometen, por un tiempo, a compartir la vida espiritual, comunitaria y/o apostólica de la Congregación.
- Las Amici Cordis son miembros no canónicos; hacen un Voto único, no canónico, de Fidelidad a la Congregación. Las Amici Cordis conservan la plena responsabilidad de su propia salud y finanzas personales.
- También se pueden seguir imaginando e implementando otras formas de relación para establecer nuevos lazos, desarrollar liderazgo cristiano y compartir entendimientos de nuestra vida, espiritualidad y ministerio con quienes desean estos lazos. Después de un debate en toda la Provincia, se organizan nuevos grupos según parece apropiado y/o necesario.

Tenemos un papel especial en la creación entre el pueblo de Dios de esa comunidad de amor que tiene su origen en la Trinidad. Intentamos comprender a la gente de nuestro tiempo y su forma de vida y entrar en sus esperanzas y angustias. En todo nuestro trato con ellas estamos dispuestas a servir y a no ser servidas (Mt 20,28).

## **MINISTERIO**

La misión de la Iglesia es la Misión de Jesucristo, que fue enviado a reconciliar a la humanidad con el Creador y a establecer el Reino de Dios en un nuevo orden de amor. Incorporadas a la vida de la Iglesia, compartimos la misión de Cristo y nos dedicamos a una vida de oración y acción en el espíritu del Obispo Ketteler y de la Madre María.

Aunque nuestro amor encuentra su expresión en varias formas de servicio, una preocupación genuina por los demás es el corazón de nuestro ministerio.

- Como Congregación Apostólica, servimos especialmente a través de nuestra participación en el ministerio de Jesús de enseñanza y sanación. Como Hermanas y Amici Cordis de la Divina Providencia, tenemos un llamado particular a descubrir la Providencia de Dios y ayudar a otros a descubrirla en todos los acontecimientos de la vida.
- Servimos al pueblo de Dios sin discriminación y con especial preocupación por los pobres. Tratamos de hacer de nuestro servicio a los demás una expresión del amor de Dios por ellos, para que puedan llegar a una mayor apreciación de su dignidad y valor personal.
- En el espíritu de nuestros Fundadores, buscamos profundizar y vivir nuestro carisma mediante el compromiso de promover una ética de vida coherente. Consideramos sagrada toda vida: creando comunidades de alegría y de amor, promoviendo la justicia, buscando avanzar en la causa de todas las personas, especialmente las necesitadas, y practicando la administración responsable.
- Hoy estamos llamadas a mitigar los efectos de la pobreza y también a dedicarnos a cambiar las estructuras y a liberar a las personas de las situaciones deshumanizantes en las que se ven obligadas a vivir. Cada una de nosotras puede ser parte del proceso de cambio para un mundo más justo por nuestras elecciones, nuestro estilo de vida y nuestra postura de vida.

Confiamos en los dones del Espíritu Santo para asistirnos en nuestros ministerios. Al mismo tiempo, aceptamos la responsabilidad de mantenernos al tanto de los desarrollos contemporáneos en las enseñanzas de la Iglesia y en nuestros campos profesionales, a fin de mantener un alto nivel de competencia en el cumplimiento de nuestros compromisos.

El ejemplo de Cristo da luz y dirección a nuestros ministerios. En el cumplimiento de su misión redentora, buscaba con frecuencia ocasiones para orar, tanto solo como con los demás. También nosotras nos ocupamos de sostener y enriquecer nuestras actividades apostólicas a través de la oración personal y comunitaria.

Buscamos a la Comunidad por el apoyo y la inspiración que nos permiten darnos más plenamente en el ejercicio de nuestros ministerios.

En nuestros esfuerzos por crear una comunidad cristiana con nuestros compañeros de trabajo, tratamos de tener en cuenta que afectamos más por lo que somos que por lo que hacemos.

- Nos comprometemos a dar testimonio de la primacía de los valores del Evangelio en un mundo quebrantado al compartir con otros la visión de esperanza, amor y fe de Cristo. Nos esforzamos por usar generosamente nuestros dones diversos y complementarios para satisfacer las necesidades de nuestro tiempo.

- A través de nuestro diario vivir y el apoyo de la Comunidad, buscamos profundizar nuestro carisma de hacer visible la presencia y Providencia de Dios.

## AFILIACIÓN

Todos los cristianos, por su compromiso bautismal, están llamados a dar testimonio de una relación personal con Jesucristo y, en Él, con su Padre a través del Espíritu. El Vaticano II enfatizó un retrato de la Iglesia como Pueblo de Dios, tal como lo fue en sus orígenes. Esto contrasta notablemente con el modelo jerárquico de la Iglesia con su acento clericalista y legalista en el que se ha convertido a lo largo de los años. Seguramente esta visión del Pueblo de Dios, lleno del Espíritu Santo e igual en la gracia divina llama a las Amici Cordis a las Hermanas de la Divina Providencia.

Nosotras, las Amici Cordis, estamos llamadas a vivir nuestra vocación a través de la profesión del Voto de Fidelidad a la Comunidad, atraídas por su manera única de vivir el carisma de la Providencia. Elegimos participar en una comunidad que abarca una diversidad de culturas y personalidades donde abundan las oportunidades para dialogar, orar y compartir la fe.

## ADMISIÓN

Cualquier persona debidamente motivada, puede ser bienvenida como una candidata de Amici Cordis si tiene la salud necesaria; la madurez espiritual, psicológica y emocional; la educación y experiencia de vida; y el carácter que posibilitará la participación en la vida de la Comunidad.

Nosotras, las Amici Cordis, seguimos siendo financieramente independientes de la Congregación, **conservando la plena responsabilidad** de nuestros propios gastos de manutención, atención médica y jubilación.

## INTEGRACIÓN EN LA COMUNIDAD

El propósito del programa de integración es ayudar a cada candidata a continuar rindiéndose a la guía del Espíritu Santo para profundizar su compromiso continuo como individuo maduro y generoso. Se alienta a cada persona a asumir la responsabilidad de su integración en su camino con la guía de la Comunidad.

El programa de integración debe prever experiencias que permitan a la Comunidad y a la candidata, discernir la autenticidad de su vocación y su aptitud para la vida en la Comunidad.

El programa de integración es flexible para proporcionar a cada candidata lo necesario para su crecimiento personal de acuerdo con el espíritu del Evangelio y nuestra espiritualidad particular.

El programa de integración prevé una profundización de la vida espiritual y una introducción a la vida de la Comunidad. Una persona que experimenta la oración, la comunidad y el ministerio, llega a conocer y puede evaluar mejor la preparación para la vida como una Amici Cordis.

El programa está diseñado para dirigir a la individuo hacia estos objetivos:

- una respuesta más profunda al llamado de Dios;
- conocimiento básico de las verdades contenidas en una vida de fe;
- desarrollo e integración de su persona;
- apreciación de la importancia de la oración en su vida a través de la instrucción y la experiencia en varios métodos de oración;
- discernimiento continuo de su llamado;
- aceptación de la responsabilidad personal de vivir su fe y su llamado;
- crecimiento en la intimidad con Dios a través de la oración;
- experiencia en la vivencia de las virtudes cristianas de pobreza, castidad y obediencia;
- integración de un espíritu contemplativo en su vida activa; y
- fortalecer un vínculo con la Comunidad a través del estudio de su historia, carisma y Constituciones.

La candidata es libre de abandonar la Comunidad en cualquier momento. Si hay una razón seria para hacerlo, la Directora Provincial con el consentimiento de su Consejo puede destituir a una candidata después de consultar con las personas apropiadas.

Cuando después del discernimiento, la candidata y la Comunidad determinan la disponibilidad para la vida como Amici Cordis, la persona escribe una solicitud de admisión a la Directora Provincial. Después de consultar con los miembros de la Comunidad apropiados y con el consentimiento del Consejo Provincial, la candidata puede admitir a la persona para hacer el Voto de Fidelidad a la Provincia.

## **FORMACIÓN CONTINUA**

Cada Amici Cordis es responsable de desarrollar su potencial. Cada una, por lo tanto, aprovechará las oportunidades —espirituales, apostólicas, profesionales y culturales— que contribuyan al crecimiento y al enriquecimiento.

Como miembros no canónicos, se anima a las Amici Cordis a participar en todos los programas ofrecidos por la Congregación para apoyar sus esfuerzos hacia el crecimiento personal.

## **OBLIGACIONES PARA EL ESTILO DE VIDA AMICI CORDIS**

El documento refleja nuestra especial visión de las Amici Cordis de la Divina Providencia. Elegimos libremente observar fiel y enteramente el Voto de Fidelidad que hemos hecho y nos obligamos a vivir de acuerdo con el Estilo de Vida de las Amici Cordis.

Nos comprometemos al estudio personal y la reflexión orante sobre el Estilo de Vida de las Amici Cordis, para que en Comunidad podamos experimentar esa paz y unidad que es un signo del Dios Provedente.

## Living the Virtues of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience

### The Virtue of Obedience

***The meaning of obedience comes from the Latin word obediere “to pay attention,” “to give ear,” and to “listen to.” Obedience is expected of all baptized Christians seeking to follow the divine call. It gives voice to our yearnings to recognize and respond to God’s desire for a relationship with us. Obedience only makes sense in the context of intimacy with the Divine and the love expressed through prayer.***

***Obedience is made manifest by paying attention to the inner voice of the Divine and to all the “signs of the times,” and in sharpening our powers of discernment to know, to recognize, and to respond to God, and God’s people. As a part of their practice of obedience, discernment becomes a way of living in God and turning to prayer and dialogue with the Community and others when making decisions. Rendered in faith and love, obedience gives us both the power to recognize the will of God and the readiness to do it.***

In our culture we are experiencing a sea change in human affairs. As Phyllis Tickle points out, this occurs every 500 years. Anxiety and confusion seems to infect so much of the world. The bulwarks of the culture are called into question and those questions demand answers before anyone commits themselves to anyone or anything. This poses a conundrum for thinking human beings. We prize our individual freedom. Lack of trust in our institutions serves to reinforce modern notions of radical autonomy. The self is all we have. It is the raw material of our spiritual life. It is not so much the world we wrestle with; the antagonist in our lives is ourselves. We form an ego and grow into autonomy and we are not so quick to turn our wills over to another. But the practice of virtue is not a respecter of persons. It applies to all because of our common human nature.

The virtue of obedience presumes a rightful authority exists. It leads us to respect and comply with those who properly exercise it. Obedience is gifting one’s will to another or in the case of the Amici Cordis to a specific way of life.

The very word obedience comes from the Latin obediere “to hearken to,” “to listen intently,” “to open one’s ears,” and “to comply with a command or precept.” It is clear that our will is intimately personal and cherished. No one knows what lies ahead when we say yes to God. For the Amici Cordis this is a commitment to “give voice to our yearning to recognize and respond to God’s desire for a relationship with us.” The purpose is to transform into the “mind of Christ.”

Obedience is never about a form of unthinking servility. We will always be on the lookout to revoke our obedience whenever we believe this most precious gift is being misused. We have brains for a reason. Obedience is an act of love. It is a free gift of self, and when it becomes mechanical and excessive, it crushes the spirit. All real love in order to be healthy must conform to truth. If we mean what we say, we commit to imitating the “mind of Christ”, we are also



committing ourselves love each other as Christ loved us. Is what we are choosing in concert with that love?

There is a common will to discern the will of God in one's life. If we are to incorporate God's reign in the world, intimacy with God borne and strengthened through prayer must be deeply rooted in us. Our world is saturated with noise and distraction. It becomes necessary in this context to withdraw to quiet space. Silence brings many things into focus and leads to the possibility of deep recollection. We often find the silence deafening because our inner thoughts are often masked by the outer world's intrusions. Our inner thoughts are important and we will find them more honest. When silence acts to close out modern life, it disposes each of us to hear the voice of the divine. During these times the Holy Spirit has the opportunity of breaking through the din to speak to our hearts.

Through these times of withdrawing to the quiet spaces "discernment becomes a way of living in God and turning to prayer and dialogue with the community and others when making decisions." Reading the "signs of the time" and contemplative listening are critical. Contemplative listening allows individuals and community to discern what God is saying from the individualism of the culture, which can at times make community decisions challenging.

Following the promptings of Spirit means not everyone, individuals, community members and the culture wants to hear what they in obedience to God's word requires people to do and say. Phillip Berrigan in one of his reflections reminds us; "The poor tell us who we are. The prophets tell us who we can be. So we hide the poor and kill the prophets." Fidelity to God's dream and fidelity to one's conscience has consequences. It means risk!! Discernment points to the fact that the Holy Spirit is the arbiter as to what the Holy Spirit is, or is not calling us. The duty of the virtue of obedience is to discern accurately.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

### **Virtue of Obedience**

When you hear the word obedience, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? After reading the definition of obedience, how does it or doesn't it change your response?

What is the connection between obedience and faith? What would be the challenge for you in living this virtue?

Have you had an experience when you believed God spoke clearly to you? How did you know? What happened as a result?

How do you interpret the Garden of Gethsemane and the mindset of Christ toward obedience?

How do you take time to listen each day to what Spirit may be inviting you to?

## **The Virtue of Poverty**

*All Christians are called to live in the spirit of poverty, recognizing that all of creation is from God and the good things of this earth are to be celebrated and enjoyed. God desires that we as Christians live simply, living from needs rather than wants.*

*Matthew 10: 37-39 invites all who would follow Christ to be detached from possessions according to their vocation. In Luke 16: 13-14 personal possessions may be kept and enjoyed, so long as they are properly used and do not become “god.”*

*Like all Christians the Amici Cordis share in the poverty of Christ who became poor to enrich us (2 Cor. 8:9). His example calls us to give what we have and what we are to promote the Reign of God and to treasure above all else union with God. In the spirit of Bishop Ketteler, we strive to be aware of, and responsive to, those in need. We give corporate witness to Christ’s poverty and merciful love when, content with what is necessary, we enter effectively into solidarity with the poor by sharing with them our friendship, our time, and our resources.*

*Each individual entering and becoming an Amici Cordis continues with independent living arrangements and has the option to live in community. The Amici Cordis maintain personal responsibility for finances, health care, retirement, funeral expenses, and indebtedness.*

### **Scripture References:**

- *Matthew 10:37-39 – “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*
- *Luke 16: 13-14 – “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things and sneered at him.”*
- *2 Cor. 8:9 – “For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich.”*

The desire to possess things is part of our nature. We want to be safe and secure in our persons. This desire is in response to our survival instinct. It is what motivates our behaviors. Food, water, clothing, sleep and shelter are necessities for human life. We spend energy leveraging these needs. Neglecting these needs can lead to psychological and stress related issues. Maslow was one of the first to diagram the physiological need to provide the ground level of well-being that supports growth.

Without these survival needs our autonomic nervous system will activate the amygdala, our built in fire alarm system to trigger fight, flight or collapse response. To be healthy we need to exist in a stable

environment that supports our ability to live in a calm, grounded, and centered state. If these needs aren't met then basic survival needs will dominate our interests and concerns.

The virtue of poverty lies in how different goods are received, possessed and used. Since wanting is built into our nature, the virtue helps us focus on how we want and how we express our wants. All Christians, as well as, other traditions, call their adherents to live the spirit of poverty, recognizing that these goods were made by the Creator to assist our survival.

Our understanding of Incarnation tells us that from the beginning, that creation is an expression of God's handiwork, lovely in itself. The world should be treated with reverence because it is imbued with the presence of God. The universe is God's creation, not ours, to be used and enjoyed with an attitude of love and reverence. The beauty found in creation is a reflection of the creator.

The path of the virtue of poverty leads to detachment. In our Catholic tradition detachment is life-affirming; it means we love and appreciate the good gifts of God, but we keep all things in balance and in proper perspective. We reassess our acquisition instincts, learn true generosity and develop a proper love for things. When we respond negatively when goods are taken away, it requires a deep dive to ask honest questions about our attachments.

In a world where greed and materialism threaten to possess the whole world, a balanced appreciation of all things in true simplicity of life is a desperately needed antidote. Fr. Dwight Longnecker in an article: **Why is Pope Francis Praising Poverty, Which He Condemns? Reintroducing the Christian Virtue of Detachment** says: "If the virtue of poverty remains only an ideal and we never learn to live it, it becomes simply an ideal which nobody puts into practice." (9/24/15) Detachment is about what prevents us from following God. It is practicing "holy indifference" preferring neither wealth nor poverty.

According to St. Ignatius Loyola detachment is about what we hold onto that prevents us from following the examples found in our scriptures. It expresses faith in God and a sign that the heart is not satisfied with created things. This attitude of heart is not simply renunciation for renunciation sake. It says no good is preferable to God. It requires an interior life to access what God is asking of us. It is God's voice which tells us we are being led by selfishness and greed. We empty ourselves so that God can fill us with his life and love.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

### Virtue of Poverty

It was Ignatius of Loyola who spoke about detachment and helped future generations define what it meant to be "poor in spirit." He believed our attachment to things inhibited the practice of charity. How do you strike a balance between living simply and the obligation to learn true generosity?

Pope Francis reminds us that poverty in the world is a scandal. How can you sow hope to those who do not benefit from the fruits of the earth and how to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being?

Poverty and inequality are human-made historical experiences as a result of caste systems, slavery and colonization as examples. These historical experiences subjugated people and led to a lack of opportunity, a social sin depriving people of essential good service. How do we move from as a church from wealth distribution to wealth creation? This is a shift from giver-receiver mentality to a truly dignified approach to walk alongside people as they work themselves out of poverty.

In the document *Laudato Si*, the perspective of the poor is integral. It is incumbent on others to protect those most vulnerable to climate change and ecological injustice. How do we call ourselves and others to responsibility for our common home?

The approach to the world has been domination and the use of technologies to give power over nature and the lives of others and has not been matched with responsibility. How has this alienated us from creation and the destruction of social bonds?

Artificial intelligence concentrated in multinational corporations can lead to life gradually becoming a surrender situation conditioned by technology. It threatens to destroy job creation all together. 42% of CEO's believe AI could destroy humanity in 5 to 10 years. What happens to human dignity, human development and personal fulfillment? How do we respond?

## The Virtue of Chastity

***“Chastity is a virtue to which all Christians are called and can be defined as a properly ordered living out of one’s sexuality according to the person’s state of life. Love of God is central to their life and is expressed in their loving of others. Through the practice of this virtue the Amici Cordis open their hearts to use their gifts, talents, education and experience in service to others. The Amici Cordis live out their chastity in a manner appropriate to their state of life.”***

*This document is taken from the work, “How We Love” by Bro. John Mark Falkenhain*

Thomas Aquinas reminds us that “Grace builds on nature.” Our sexuality is a deeply human experience designed to draw us into relationship with God and one another. God’s will and providence is at work within and through our humanity. It is necessary to have a clear, accurate and healthy understanding of ourselves as sexual beings in order to have a chaste life. Our sexuality impacts all aspects of ourselves and our capacity to love and our aptitude for forming healthy bonds of communion with others. The communities we live in are schools for our continuing education in the affairs of the heart and in our capacity to love. Communities are the crucible in which transformation most often takes place.

### ***Reflection and Discussion:***

*The practice of chastity should not leave one miserable, irritable, distant and emotionally chilly. Poor emotional, social and psychosexual development results in problematic behavior that affects community life.*

*How do you foresee this playing out in a relational communal setting?*

### ***Possible answers:***

- *Social isolation*
- *Inability to relate healthily to the opposite sex*
- *Denial of self as a sexual being*
- *Discomfort with self*
- *Boundary issues*
- *Addictions*
- *Attention-seeking behaviors*
- *Selfishness*
- *Poor temper control*
- *Failure to empathize*

*What will be the impact on community life?*

## **Sexual Identity**

Bro. Falkenhain lists five primary dimensions of our sexual identity:

**Sex** – Biological sex is determined usually during the second trimester of pregnancy. Rare anomalies do occur and one's internal experience is at odds with one's actual sex. Understanding of one's sex is not a confusion for most individuals.

***Reflection and Discussion:***

*How does confusion about one's sex lead to reluctance for acceptance into the Amici Cordis?*

**Gender** – Gender refers to the more subjective internal and psychological experiences of one as male or female. Gender is both a cultural and personal phenomena. Attitudes, feelings and behaviors are given cultural associations with a person's biological sex as to what is considered masculine and feminine. Gender stereotypes establish and reinforce gender expectation.

The capacity to incorporate personality characteristics typically associated with the opposite sex into one's primary gender ideally is associated with positive social, relational and personal outcomes. It leads to success in establishing intimate relationships, capacity for shared leadership and overall psychological adjustment.

***Reflection and Discussion:***

*The development of one's gender identity is the result of both biological factors and environmental factors.*

*What characteristics of the opposite sex do you see as beneficial to incorporate and why?*

**Sexual Orientation** – Sexual orientation describes our sexual attraction that involves a primary and persistent pattern of sexual arousal. Primary is the pattern of arousal an individual experiences most, if not all, of the time. A persistent pattern is one that endures and is not based on temporary experimentation, curiosity or other structural factors. Orientation does not appear to be a malleable or changeable trait.

***Reflection and Discussion:***

*Sexual orientation is a much debated and often controversial topic, especially in the context of religion and morality. Strong feelings coupled with limited or inaccurate knowledge tend to result in defensiveness and a breakdown in healthy discourse.*

*How does this hinder self-knowledge and self-acceptance within an individual?*

**History of Sexual Experiences** – Identities are shaped by our life experiences those that happen to us and those we seek out. This can include a wide range of behaviors and events. Practices and mores change in regard to what is acceptable and what differs for males and females. It is important for an individual to understand the meaning and motivations associated with sexual experiences. It is important to examine what these experiences might have to say about one's personal capacity for intimacy and other aspects of life that will be the most challenging and rewarding.

***Reflection and Discussion:***

*How do we get our emotional needs met?*

*What experiences could have a negative affect/positive affect?*

*Why do these answers matter?*

*What boundaries are important to consider when entering into a relationship with a religious community?*

**Attitudes and Values Regarding Sexuality** - Attitudes and values have a variety of influences and may change over the course of development. For example, is sexuality seen as something beautiful, engaging and life-giving; or is one fearful, or even disgusted by sexuality?

***Reflection and Discussion:***

*What is one's attitude and value related to specific topics with the realm of sexuality; homosexuality; birth control; and attitudes toward the opposite sex, including the role of women within society or in the church?*

Integration of our sexuality requires that we are honest about one's identity, sex, gender, orientation, history of one's attitudes and values. Possessing appropriate self-knowledge and acceptance of self as a sexual being is a key component that allows for developing freedom of choice. Everyone has a need for intimacy. When we are ignorant of desires or refuse to accept truth, it increases the risk of desires and impulses being expressed in unhealthy and inappropriate ways. A person is less capable of relating in meaningful way with others and it impacts the health of the community.

Additionally, knowledge and self-acceptance allows one to be more tolerant, a necessary component of communal life. The experience of being loved and accepted by others, who sees and know our vulnerabilities, helps us to accept ourselves as we are and keeps our personal strengths and limitations in perspective.



Integrity of our sexual identity is based on what an individual does that is consistent with what they say. Their behaviors are consistent with their professed attitudes and values. Growth in the virtue of chastity is characterized by a willingness to look honestly at ourselves, to recognize inconsistencies and challenges, and to move quickly to the appropriate decisions and adjustments that bring who we are and what we do as sexual people into alignment with our attitudes, values, and God's vision for us as sexual people.

**AMICI CORDIS WAY OF LIFE**  
**(Friends of the Heart)**

**DISCERNMENT**

**“Obedience is made manifest by paying attention to the inner voice of the Divine and to all the “signs of the times,” and in sharpening our powers of discernment to know, to recognize, and to respond to God, and God’s people. As a part of their practice of obedience, discernment becomes a way of living in God and turning to prayer and dialogue with the Community and others when making decisions. Rendered in faith and love, obedience gives us both the power to recognize the will of God and the readiness to do it. “**

***“Community holds a space where we can make our own discernment, in our own way and time, in the encouraging and challenging presence of others who share a common lot. This is often of most appeal to Amici Cordis since many of them are of an age in life where they live alone, lacking the companionship that being in a selected community offers.”***

***“continued discernment of their call;”***

***“When, after discernment, the candidate and the director determine readiness for the life as Amici Cordis, the individual makes a written request to the Provincial/Regional Superior for admission. After consultation with the Director and with the consent of the Council, the Provincial/Regional Superior may admit the individual to take the vow of fidelity to the Congregation.”***

**WHAT IS DISCERNMENT AND WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION OF OUR DISCERNMENT?**

We choose life or death every time we make an important decision. Whether we are dealing with everyday decisions or life-changing decisions, we are choosing to live consistent with our values and commitments. The ability to discern allows a person to see, without confusion and ambiguity what differentiates things. Discernment is a process by which we honestly confront ourselves and the spiritual movements within us.

- A method of decision-making reduces the hazards of being mistaken and puts the odds in our favor
- Keeps us from putting too much trust in what we sometimes call instinct, spontaneity, or even inspiration.
- We forget that inspiration often comes after a long period of systematic searching, reflecting, and pondering...takes time for thing to mature.

## **A WAY OF LIFE: ALWAYS DISCERNING**

As I see it there are two ways to look at discernment. The first is what I imagine most of us would describe as discernment. It is a process that can be used to help make a decision. The second describes a way of life. We are always discerning the will of God at every moment of our lives.

We believe as Christians that we have been given a pattern of living through Jesus Christ. We live God's life itself by the Spirit: Love. Hear the word Agape – loving as doing and working for the good and growth of others. May or may not include a warm, fuzzy feeling or even liking. We are taught by our faith to choose life and to include Agape in our decisions.

Ilia Delio opens one of the chapters in her book *Ten Evenings with God* with this statement: "Life in God is a daring adventure through the uncharted depths of love. God breathes life into us through the Spirit of love, and this Spirit of love is the daily breath of our lives."

We cannot find the will of God as a perfectly rational process, nor follow it as an outline for life because the will of God is found in a relationship of love. Jesus was a teacher of discernment. Look at your life, what are the possessions that weigh you down, intruding themselves between God and the human soul. What direction are you called to go?

The purpose of the discernment is to decide which movements are of the spirit of God and which are not of God, that is, what brings us closer to God and what separates us from the embrace of divine love, therefore, choosing the voice to follow. (Delio)

Discernment is striving for clarity of decisions when choices are presented or there are many options to choose from. We will never be able to choose the way of God, if we are not in some way familiar with God's presence, God's voice and God's touch. (Delio) The better our discernment is, the clearer our choices. We are presented each day with unending choice. How do we decide what choice is in accordance with God's will?

After prayer and reflection one is sure to act in this way here and now, convinced that such action is the only honest, loving thing to do. It may not be the most reasonable thing to do, but if it brings an inner peace and joy, then it is probably the most honest and attuned to the will of God. (Delio)

What decision seems most logical and reasonable and gives feelings of peace in heart and mind? Has the decision come from deep prayer and honesty with self and God? (Delio)

There is nothing mysterious or magical in the structure of any human discernment. For believers, the notion of discernment also implies God. What happens when, through religious beliefs, and faith, we introduce God into the process of discernment?

We usually weigh my option with respect to what is important to us. The goal is to make a decision in the light of either one of several values. Influenced by our values, we work with our intellect and our affectivity in order to determine, in time, our decision .p17 Wolff

What does Jesus Christ life demonstrates about what love really means? 4 Criteria need to be present in our decisions

- **Incarnation** -God's word, Jesus, was made flesh through the Incarnation. He emptied himself and accepted our human condition. We have a picture of the man of Nazareth living God's life.
- **Agape** -Jesus, God's Agape) spent his life loving and giving and being given up to people until death. Giving the initiative and control of the giver. Giving up- abandonment of self into the hands of others.
- **Universality** – far beyond the Jewish notion of God's chosen people- to humankind- never rejects anyone.
- **Reconciliation and Communion** – seeks relationship- integrating people back into society- reconciliation, communion, forgiveness.

Using these criteria in decision-making, our intellect, enlightened by faith, understands through the behavior of Jesus what a human life impregnated by the Spirit of Agape is like. The life we are called to choose in our decisions. (P. 26 Guide and example Wolff)

## IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT

When we think of discernment the name that immediately comes to many people's minds is Ignatius of Loyola. One could say he is the spiritual father of the discernment process. (Delio) Ignatius speaks of 3 ways we can discern God's will.

**1. Revelation Time** – One can't doubt that God is speaking because it is clear that the soul has been spoken to. This is a grace-filled moment and is the clearest type of discernment since there is little doubt about God's will. God implants in the soul a certain and firm direction in the heart that can't be ignored. (Delio) (Words or wordless-subject to a process of discernment – genuine or self-created)

**2. Light and Knowledge** – A person receives the experiences of consolation and desolation. Discernment here is a combination of both reason and prayer. The individual waits for clarity around God's direction and confirmation of the choice. Frustratingly nothing. God doesn't seem to be saying anything to the soul sincerely seeking his will...the soul is not acted on by various spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly...using reasoning and imagination to weigh the pros and cons to a reasonable decision concerning God's will. (Delio) (Preparation

time and laying the foundation for what may come –seen in retrospect) Consolation and Desolation handouts

**3. Tranquility** – is a time of peacefulness. The person uses their powers of reason and imagination to weigh the pros and cons of the situation and comes to a reasonable decision concerning the will of God.

There are steps in this process as describe by Ignatius. When we have 2 alternatives placed before us, our intellect helps decide the solution that best meets the 4 criteria of discernment that offers the greatest possibility to follow Spirit and live in Agape.

Our heads and hearts are gifts of our Creator. The method provides a framework and tools to appeal to our intellect and affectivity. Faith doesn't change the structure, just describes it.

Before beginning a discernment process it is important to have a concise statement of what is being discerned. A spiritual directors can assist in formulating a clear idea of the exact nature of the object of choice.

Discernment, therefore, is keeping eyes fixed on the Lord and not waiting for others to provide answers to our questions. In this process it is important that the individual be willing to:

- **Listen:** by opening the heart to God, to learn to be inwardly still and receptive to what God is showing them.
- **Disclose:** they will reveal themselves in prayer, just as they are.
- **Share:** they will allow the life of the Lord to become deeply connected to their own by absorbing God's word and by sharing in the events of Christ's living, dying and rising.
- **Reflect:** they will deepen their experience of God by becoming more and more aware of the ways in which God meets us in their daily life.
- **Give:** Freely giving to others the gifts you have received; sharing God's love and spreading God's message of love.

Recognize that God's will---and desire for each of us—and our own desire are one and the same thing. We have to be indifferent to the outcome if we are truly being open to where God is leading.

- *Indifference – absence of compulsion toward one thing or another; no special liking for or dislike of something, marked by no special preference for one thing or another....best way to express in modern terms "inner freedom"*
  - no longer enslaved or led by a strong interior impulse or attraction toward any of the alternatives presented by our mind in the decision process.

-ruled by passion not able to reach a free choice

- *Balance - It is only fully accepting and attending to the ups and downs, the wavering, that a directee will eventually be able to recognize the still point of their internal mechanisms, the point at which the two scales rest motionless.*

If perfect indifference is impossible, the individual can reach a certain level of inner liberty compatible with freedom and responsibility.

When the process has worked well and the inner struggle of oscillation is over, the person is inhabited by the quiet and peaceful feeling of no longer being fascinated or hypnotized by one of the alternatives “time and tranquility.”

First you use your head. Reflect on the situation. Look for information. Weigh advantageous and disadvantages. Try to foresee the consequences.

- Sometimes consult people whom you see as experts
- Collect and file away data on the problem you want to solve
- Analyze and synthesizing-come to see, more objectively a way to proceed.
- Objectively – at the end of our consideration identify what seems like a reasonable choice.

You usually weigh options with respect to what is important to you. The goal is to make a decision in the light of either one of several values. Influenced by your values, you work with your intellect and your affectivity in order to determine, in time, your decision. p17 Wolff

Gift of religious belief:

- Faith brings a set of values that are not always self-evident to a non-believer
- Values we accept from our tradition about being faithful to God.
- Values have the weight of being connected with God’s revelation itself.
- Rejection of those values affects your relationship with God...impacts God’s design
- Actions are consistent with belief, we feel impelled to deepen our relationship with God.
- For the Amici Cordis it also includes the value in the Amici Cordis Way of Life.

Faith and Intellect

- Use our intellect, that is enlightened by divine teaching
- Believe that God’s work within us helps us to think more accurately because God’s word rescues our intellect from many narrow traps (pride, rationalization, vanity etc.)

Faith and Affectivity

- If God gave us a heart, we aren’t asked to put it aside

- Revelation teaches our affectivity what love really is
- Love is service
- Love is God's life itself within us
- Faith purifies our affectivity – discover more clearly the traps, the disguises, and the deceits of our selfishness...the snares of the false self.
- Once you have found your way, we make up your mind. The work of the intellect gives you a somewhat objective solution, but only partially objective,...never claim to encompass the whole truth.
- Your reasoning is never purely intellectual. The process is never finished, as long as you have not presented the conclusions of your intellect to your affectivity in order to hear the answer to the real and definitive question, "What is possible, here and now, for me?"
- Heart is often the last word. Screen with your heart what you've discovered with your head. It confirms your choice subjectively. The decision is yours alone. The screen allows you to see if the solution that resulted can be a solution for you, and so the object of your decision.
- No responsible choice exists without inner freedom...no one else makes the decision. What might not be so obvious is the need to stay free from any subconscious motivations that may direct. Only when the heart is free can one then choose a path in life, trusting that the goodness of God will enlighten this journey. (Delio)

Take the solution that the intellect has proposed. Take time and let it sink in. Meditate and contemplate, ruminate and pray about with it and about it.

- The longer you stay with the solution, the more sensitive you may become to how you feel about it...hear the echo of its impact at the very bottom of your heart.
- The longer you weigh it the better or worse you feel about it.
- Your inner being is pleased with what pleases the Lord.

Within yourself, by the process of discernment you offer the results of your intellectual search to the Spirit. If Spirit indicates agreement, you are in tune with one another, and that you are deciding together your will, what you want at this depth is what God wants for you; God's will for you is what you decide. Through the process of discernment you verify with the spirit what you have discovered with your intellect and affectivity.

Ilia Delio describes certain conditions in order to discern God's will (desire, prayer, humility, charity and courage).

## **AFFECTIVITY**

Emotions are always moving like waves within us. Feelings do not take place at the same level...important to distinguish between the different levels of affectivity.

First Circle – most immediate and fleeting emotions-spontaneous

- appear and disappear quickly
- may move very strongly for a moment
- do not express the deepest parts of the personality
- defense system, they may even hide what's really going on.
- discerning cannot take place within this layer
- need to do a deep dive within themselves.

They need to get in touch with the emotions present at their “gut feelings” so they can decode the messages they send. This requires a receptive silence found in contemplation. Quiet and calm, solitude and silence have to be learned and practiced. (p. 41 Wolfe)

As human beings we rarely feel the deepest level of our affectivity. At certain moments, we may get in touch with a feeling of clarity about who we are that has no equivalent in previous experience. Clarity is accompanied by an extremely deep happiness – sometimes difficult to put into words.

Somewhere between the outer and inner layer we have experiences that make us aware of its presence. Here the emotions are not as numerous and changing. It feels like “home” where happiness or unhappiness can stay and deepen as long as there is nothing strong enough to change this.

Our being reacts to everything that happens to us...amygdala. Something happens and it touches something...get a feeling...feeling is connected with love...enlivening or connected with death...stifling. Sometimes a feeling response may be entirely unexpected. What was stuck resounds within us, there at the media layer of emotions.

### **CONSOLATION (ENLIVENING FEELINGS) AND DESOLATION (STIFFLING FEELINGS)**

There are two words that masters of the spiritual life, including Ignatius, use to distinguish emotions we experience in discernment: consolation (enlivening) and desolation (stifling). (Silf)

These words have a specific meaning when we speak about orientation and the direction our life is taking us...going toward or away from God.

Turning toward (meaning of Metanoia) is experienced in every moment of our lives, in every choice we make, no matter how trivial, we are either moving toward consolation or drifting into desolation. (Silf)

When you hear yourself sensing the above, you know they are heading in the direction of God's lure.



Verifying the analysis of the intellect by the responses of your affectivity will allow you to see if the solution that resulted can be a solution for you, and so the object of your own decision.

Conclusion clear: Intellectual solution brings desolation, not for you. Creates Consolation: one for you.

Once the decision has been made and you throw yourself into acting upon it, and you become a witness of the word of Jesus. “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” Luke 6: 43-45

According to Margaret Silf, you need first to get in touch with Ignatius’ understanding of how our moods will reflect a different underlying pattern depending on whether the general direction of our lives is toward God or away from God.

Sometimes it happens that, while dealing with the product of our intellect, we feel some “apparently” stifling emotions. Is this desolation? She suggests to go on living with the problem, checking it out to see what time reveals. Sometimes when the fog lifts they discover not a end but a Passover experience, the beginning of an Exodus toward life. Sometimes need to confront very harsh circumstances, experience difficult feelings – appropriate because what we are facing is a temporary death in order to enter into new life. P. 48

Apparent generosity, gentleness, dedication, or zeal can mask other motivations that are less noble.

- generous to a call attention to self
- gentle to seduce and manipulate
- dedicated to winning admiration
- zeal insurance against insecurity (convince to feel certain, superior, powerful)

When we stop fooling ourselves, we know that our best desires and projects might be servants of our deepest selfishness, and, then, through our apparent generosity and noble ambitions, we are caught in what we might call the traps of dedication.

When we have difficult feelings, our first tendency might be to draw back to flee or to rush into things. It would be better to discern carefully in order to avoid delusional escapes or painful awakenings.

- with practice we create reflexes and management skills (muscles)
- training ourselves to be more sensitive.

The process of refining discernment helps us to grow in realistic understanding that everything in our human existence—including love—is colored by ambiguity. Most of our important decisions are rarely crystal clear. We don't like ambiguity. Even our noblest desires probably have selfish roots. Accepting ambiguity is a struggle. Sometimes discernment is truly acceptance of our selfish motivations.

Poor choice, desolation will occur with "stifling" feelings, and we must repeat the process to see where we have made a mistake. Desolation can be a time of growth when we trust God by letting go of our fears, expectations, or sense of failure and allowing God's grace to enter in. The depth of our love may be tested in the desolation of the desert so that we might truly belong to God.

When the process has worked well and the inner struggle of oscillation is over, the person is inhabited by the quiet and peaceful feeling of no longer being fascinated or hypnotized by one of the alternatives "time and tranquility."

Identifying the right path we experience consolation within us that is usually marked by a greater love of God or a feeling of peace or joy. We also experience consolation when one sheds tears out of love of God because of sorrow for sins because of the suffering of Christ...increases faith, hope and love...deep sense of gratitude and peace.

Desolation brings lack of peace, confusion, and darkness...accompanied by feelings of abandonment, emptiness or failure...serve a positive function in our lives by alerting us to the need for change or for new decisions...period of grace.

## **ROLE OF A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR**

First step in discernment is perception.

- Director is deeply attentive to the person sitting across the holy space, open and permeable to all that is said and unsaid, revealed and hidden
- Helps the directee toward equal openness and attentiveness
- Together look, listen and wait
- The directee may be quick to reject the homely, the ordinary, and the new at hand. The director serves as a guide and teacher, gently pointing out the signs that are at once hidden and obvious

- A major teaching the director can offer is the value of the present moment. The fruit of discernment may be enjoyed far into the future, but the material of perception and the attendant judgment are to be found in the here and now, the everydayness of the directee's life.
- 2 fold task of director: must themselves be capable of discernment, be able to put self out of the way in order to be fully present to the person sitting opposite them and second,
- By encouragement and example, help the directee to develop and trust her/his own powers of discernment. It means the directee must be able to look at herself, abandon her defenses and face into the hard questions.

### **THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND**

- It may be more comfortable and considerably easier to be ignorant of what the Holy Spirit is up to.
- Epektasis (movement of perpetual growth in the soul) expresses the soul's constant choice for God's life...the soul's security is in change...change the mark of spiritual growth. Discernment is the way we live in God.
- "...The Divine will always submit itself to detours, even to revolts of human will to bring it to free consent...God is a beggar of love waiting at the soul's door without ever daring to force it." Lossky
- The discovery of one's finiteness is the recognition of one's poverty....calls us to be vulnerable, open and receptive to others, to allow others into our lives and to be free enough to enter into the lives of others.
- ...our surrender to God is based on God's surrender to us-> incarnation.
- God does not hold back and wait until we get things right; rather, God loves us where we are and as we are. In the incarnation, divine love has found us and has surrendered to us.
- We, control our lives and thus we control how much we are willing to give over to God (and thus to our neighbor).
- To surrender is to hand over ourselves over to another in love...radical trust in God and in the human person who is the image of God.
- Gratitude is the language of surrender because it is spoken from the heart of one who realizes that everything in life bears its own beauty; everything has its own goodness.

- To live in the will of God as the freedom of love means there is no right or wrong way to live in God's love. God's will is not primarily a matter of entering religious life or getting married. God's will is that you become the person that from eternity you were meant to be.
- When we love God and set God as a seal on our hearts, then whatever we choose will be God's will for us. If we choose a particular direction, we must trust that God will lead us; if we find ourselves afraid and in darkness, we must turn and choose again, trusting in God's faithful love.
- Spiritual freedom does not show itself in autonomy or independence but in commitment. Love is relational and the deeper one loves, the more one is committed to the beloved.
- As long as the spirit of love dwells within us, we remain on the path to life. When we extinguish the spirit of love by the power of anger and resentment, we choose against the will of God.
- ...we have killed the spirit of life within us by refusing the path of Christ, the path of mercy and compassion and forgiveness.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

Define discernment and how it is a part of your spiritual journey.

How is discernment different from simple decision-making?

If we truly believed this, how would life be different? Do we think of the will of God as an invitation to love, an intimate encounter that take place in contemplation?

What are you passionate about? What gifts has the divine given to you?

How will you know where you have been given the greatest opportunity to love others?

Ignatius of Loyola assumes that God communicates directly through various interior movements. How will you know the Amici Cordis is an option for you?

Are there identifying patterns in your discernment process of thought or behavior that needs to be addressed before application to the Amici Cordis?

**Resources used for this document. This document is not for distribution and only for internal use. Individual attributions are not always noted.**

- Ten Evenings with God by Ilia Delio
- Inner Compass by Margaret Silf

- Making Choice by Margaret Silf
- At Sea with God by Margaret Silf
- Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well by Pierre Wolfe
- Discernment by Henri Nouwen

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### **Reflection and Discussion**

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**AMICI CORDIS WAY OF LIFE**  
**(Friends of the Heart)**

**SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

***“To promote continued spiritual growth, we are encouraged to seek spiritual direction.”***

**The Role of Spiritual Direction**

**What is Spiritual Direction?**

God wants a personal relationship with us and spiritual direction helps people to meet God’s and their own deepest desire for such a friendship.

- Providing assistance to grow in a disciplined life of prayer.
- Helping to be attentive to God’s personal communication.
- Being with an individual as they deepen their relationship with the divine.
- Trying to discern and understand what the Holy Spirit tells them.
- Helping the directee tell their sacred story.



In this session we will talk about the key components to spiritual direction and whether one is a candidate for spiritual direction. We will discuss what you should expect from a director and what you should expect of yourself.

Story taken for the Sacred Journey of a Peaceful Warrior – conversation with Dan and his teacher.

**Dan:** “I feel so grateful to you.”

**Teacher:** “Grateful to me?” She laughed, apparently thinking this humorous, or even absurd. “I’m happy for you; your gratitude is a good, wholesome feeling. But when you are thirsty and someone gives you water, are you grateful to the glass, or to the person who gave the water?”

**Dan:** “Well to the person,” I answered.

**Teacher:** “I am only the glass,” she said. “Send your gratitude to the Source.”

In spiritual direction there are three chairs present in the room: the director, the seeker and in the third chair, God. Aelred of Rievaulx “Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, in our midst.” Begin with silence or prayer...helps define the borders and makes it clear what we are about. We acknowledge that the real teacher is Spirit, God, the Divine...whatever name we use to identify the Source.

- Every individual has a unique spiritual journey, and is in a certain place on that journey in the present moment
- Everyone has a desire to grow into a deeper relationship with God and to be more open to the Spirit moving in their lives

- Moving from the intention to deepen their relationship to the Divine requires both individual work and support from others

This is the work of spiritual direction.

Margaret Guenther, an Episcopal priest, says this about spiritual direction;

“In this covenanted relationship the director has agreed to put him or herself aside so that the total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair,” the Rev. Margaret Guenther wrote in *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. “What distinguishes this listening profession from many other listening practices is its explicit acknowledgment of God.”

Spiritual director, Susan Phillips, writes in *Candlelight*, Spiritual directors are “servants of the holy, listeners with the job of being attentive to God, with and for the sake of another.”

Henri Nouwen says; “The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation. A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice, and accountability.”

But, Nouwen, preferred the term spiritual friendship, or soul friend, which conveyed the necessary give-and-take in the process of spiritual accountability and faith formation. A spiritual direction commitment affords the opportunity for spiritual friendship, and provides the time and structure, wisdom and discipline, to create sacred space in your life in which God can act.

Having a spiritual director keeps use honest, makes us aware of the corners of neglect, and helps us keep the house reasonably tidy. We all need spiritual friends with whom we can speak our deepest concerns, and who do not fear to speak the truth to us.

**What are the questions stirring in your heart that could give birth to new aspects of God’s life within you and your directees?**

- How can I become aware of God’s presence in my life?
- How can I have some assurance that my decisions about money, work, and relationships are made in a spiritual way?
- How do I know that my life is lived in obedience to God and not just in response to my own impulses and desires?
- Should I live a simpler life?
- Should I take a more prophetic stand on issues such as war and poverty?
- Should I give a few years of my life to work with the poor?

We are very susceptible to self-deception and are not always able to detect our own personal resources and insights. However, spiritual direction is not psychotherapy nor is it an inexpensive substitute, although the disciplines are compatible and frequently share raw material. This is a covenanted relationship; the director has agreed to put him/herself aside so that the total attention can be focused on the person sitting in the other chair.

“Spiritual direction or companionship inspires people to experience authenticity in their lives as they connect with and explore the ground of all being, that deepest of truths which is beyond life and death and goes by many names, including God, and no name at all.” Spiritual Directors International

“At its core, spiritual direction is about paying attention to where the presence of God (however you understand God) is most deeply felt. Spiritual directors, then, pursue the art of walking with you as you become more attentive to God in your life.” Rev. Teresa Blythe

“Spiritual direction has always aimed ultimately at fostering union with God and has, therefore, had to do with the individual’s relationship with God.” Barry & Connelly

There are many definitions for spiritual direction but they all have common elements.

- Providing assistance to a seeker who is committed to growing in a disciplined life of prayer.
- Helping the seeker to be attentive to the Lord’s personal communication.
- Being with the seeker as they attempt to deepen their relationship with the divine.
- Asking question by the director to assist the seeker in the process of reflection and spiritual growth.
- Trying to discern, understand what the Holy Spirit, through the situations of life, spiritual insights, fruits of prayer, reading and meditation, tells the seeker.
- Helping the seeker tell their sacred story.

The story must reach into the future. Spiritual direction is about hope, and there is always a next step. Spiritual direction means to help others discover that their questions are human questions, their search is a human search, and their restlessness is part of the restlessness of the human heart...

Seeking guidance and direction will not necessarily yield an easy solution or an answer to the inner quest for meaning. Any teacher or director can only be a mirror reflecting a view, or sometimes an arrow pointing beyond itself.

We invite someone into a space that offers safety and shelter and put our own needs aside, as everything is focused on the comfort and refreshment of the guest.

People come to direction burdened with a sense of their own unworthiness and unloveliness, crushing shame, and their own sins. The director’s task is to gently pick apart the strands, never to minimize the directee’s pain or responsibility for their own actions.

Directee is safe because anything may be said without fear of criticism or exposure. People’s secrets of their souls are precious.

There is great variety in the garbage. It may contain hidden treasures and nearly always a fertile medium for growth, even when it is unlovely and smells bad. As spiritual directors, we have the authority to assure our directees of God's love and forgiveness.

The director's task is to help connect the individuals' story to God's story and thereby help the directee to recognize and claim identity in Christ, discern the action of the Holy Spirit.

The contemplative core of prayer and of all Christian life is conscious relationship with God. The tasks are: First, helping directees pay attention to our self-revealing God; second, helping directees recognize their reactions and decide on their responses to this God. The focus of the direction is on God and the way God seems to relate to each person, never on ideas.

The director does the following: 1. Empathetic listening, 2. Paying attention, 3. Affirming, 4. Assisting in clarification, 4. Raising questions when the directee wants them and needs them, 5. Helping the directee to recognize the affective attitudes that influence his or her attitude toward God.

Relationships develop only when the persons involved pay attention to one another. God is taking part in the relationship, is paying attention to the directee, is looking at and listening. There is the difficulty we human beings have in paying attention to anyone else. Then there is the difficulty of paying attention to the invisible, mysterious, and all-powerful God.

### **How Did the Practice of Spiritual Direction Begin?**

During the reign of Constantine (312-337), hundreds of seekers fled to the deserts of Egypt and Syria and other remote places such as Nitria, Scete, and Gaza. They sought a way to live in fidelity to their own baptism and in the fellowship of Christ modeled in the breaking of the bread.

Above all, they wanted to pursue an inner life of prayer, resulting in loving service to their neighbor. And they turned to the teachings of the desert Fathers and Mothers to show them the way.

Solitude was meant to foster solidarity. One went to the desert not out of hatred for the world but, to seek words of truth by which to live their lives in service to the Lord and love and harmony with others. Susan Muto

The Desert Mothers and Fathers, the Ammas and Abbas, were early Christian hermits living mainly in the desert of Egypt in about the 3rd century. Although hermits, they were regularly sought out for their teaching and wisdom. There may have been hundreds of such hermits in the 3rd Century and their spiritual influence is still seen in the Church today.

The writings of the desert Fathers and Mothers remain in the words of Thomas Merton "as an eloquent witness to the simplicity and depth of spiritual guidance.' The impact of these words

resided not so much in their simple content as in the inward action of the Holy Spirit which accompanied them in the souls of the hearers.

Spiritual direction was God's answer to a need created in the soul, according to Merton. They sought a way to God that was freely chosen and uncharted, not inherited from others who had mapped it out beforehand. They sought a God when they alone could find, not one given a set, stereotyped by someone else.

The desert Fathers and Mothers were not running away from anything. They were not shirking responsibility. They were not withdrawing from society. On the contrary, they were drawn inexorably into solitude. They were impelled by the Gospel and by God to get in touch more directly with the soul, searching questions of life, death and eternity.

Abandoning themselves to God they allowed their lives to be directed in every respect by the Spirit. They lived freely, simply and spontaneously from the depths of their hearts. The direction they gave was truly spiritual direction. They gave what they had first received. We are called, like them, to be spiritual persons.

The early Ammas and Abbas did not put the human being on a pedestal, nor did they damn humanity for its inability to avoid doing evil. Rather, they accepted and took seriously without prejudgment everyday realities and daily problems.

In contrast, the goal of spiritual direction was, by working through everyday realities, to find the next step on the path to becoming a real and true person, an authentic person. This next step the spiritual director and his disciple were meant to find together.

The early monks, both men and women, believed that it was the task of the spiritual director to guide, further, and sustain the process of becoming a person according to God's image of that person.

They believed it was the task of a person to exercise self-control over one's actions, as well as thoughts, desires, feelings, and emotions, so as to become a fully developed, mature, and functioning person.

They believed that a person needs not only to be free from his or her dependency on thoughts and desires but also to differentiate good thoughts from evil ones. This is what is meant by discernment of spirits.

Although they did not pass judgment on someone for having emotions and desires, they felt nonetheless that it was necessary for emotions and their consequences to be allowed to run their course.

Thus the disciple was given the opportunity to reach his or her ultimate goal of discerning the message embedded in them which was, in the monks' view, an important step forward on the

spiritual journey. The definition of perfection for these early monks was to grow in maturity, to act like an adult.

A brother came to see Abba Poemen and said to him: "Abba, I have many thoughts and they put me in danger." The old man led him outside and said to him, "Expand your chest and do not breathe in." He said, "I cannot do that." Then the old man said to him, "If you cannot do that, no more can you prevent thoughts from arising, but you can resist them."

Amma Theodora said, "let us strive to enter the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before the winter's storms, cannot bear fruit, so it is with us; this recent age is a storm and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of God."

Because they were convinced that everyone has the capacity to follow a spiritual path and at the same time be guided by God's mercy and the Holy Spirit, they were not thrown into self-doubt if a disciple or another monk committed a wrong. They trusted in God's ability to use darkness and sin to open a person's soul.

They understood that mysteriously, God in his providence must make use of our tragedies to remind us of our human nature of God's abiding presence, love, and the constancy of God's concern and care for us.

Ilia Delio in her book *Ten Evenings with God* states; "When we make life choices for reasons that are not oriented toward the fullness of life, the hole of unhappiness in life deepens..." because God only wants our good, God can bring good out of situations that seem completely destructive. Something the Abbots and Ammas knew well.

The Spiritual Fathers and Mothers strongly believed that human beings do not always move directly toward their desired goal, and that they are easily tempted to stray from the right path. Their role, they felt, was to accompany the directee on his or her path, wherever it led.

Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky wrote, "the Divine will always submits itself to detours, even to revolts of the human will to bring it (the soul) to free consent."

The desert was the ammas' and abbots' teacher. The desert left no room for dishonesty. Hardship is part of this limited life, yet it is also a stepping-stone to complete acceptance of our finitude. The divine asks us a question in the desert we cannot ignore: Do we want to live the life of the Spirit in the abstract, as if it were reducible to an impersonal outline of rules and regulations, or do we want to abide in communion with the divine in the desert of everydayness where God lives?

The path that the spiritual fathers and mothers led their disciples down was a mystical path. The most important concern for the monks was not whether the path was the path of morality and righteousness. While one is on this path to contemplation, one is nonetheless obligated to live

one's life in the real world, to become an authentic person and to come to an understanding with one's emotions and desires.

The following questions therefore arise:

- What is the spiritual dimension of my deepest emotions?
- What is the experience of my relationship to God in daily life?
- What is God trying to communicate to me?
- What spiritual counsel from God is striving to reveal itself in my daily life?
- What is the purpose and meaning of my life?

### **Are you a Candidate for Spiritual Direction?**

Not everyone is a candidate for Spiritual direction, at least not at every stage of life. There are those who are religiously observant and content with their spiritual lives as part of a worshipping community...then there are those whose spirituality is directed outward. They encounter God in service, in action, in outreach. Frequently, but not always, those who are turning outward—exhaling, as it were—are not in the right place for spiritual direction.

But there are those who feel that something is happening to and within them. Their tastes are changing, and their balance has shifted. Sometimes they are brought up short by a crisis: an experience of conversion, a tragic loss, a period of great pain, a sharp awareness of being on a threshold.

Men and women of all ages and life experience may sense a call, a simple awareness that God expects them to do something with their lives. What? Sometimes they merely experience a pervasive but definable spiritual dis-ease which has nothing to do with pathology, but aches and itches until help is sought. They just know they are experiencing inner changes, sometimes profoundly disturbing.

Not surprisingly, transitions are a time when people whose religious observance has been tepid and perfunctory are impelled to seek spiritual direction. For others, during transitions may decide to leave a well established spiritual director because they feel it isn't working, or they may surmise that they are poised on the brink of something new, and they are reluctant to take the next step.

Most commonly the resistance to change is unconscious and unarticulated....director be aware of the pain and promise of transition.

Even when there are no outward triggering events, an apparent loss of faith may signal a time of transition. ...old ways no longer serve The director can help by naming the transition for what it is: a time of movement from one stage to another, a time of change and transformation...reminding them that our images of God are just that—images—and as we see their limitations, we outgrow them.

The ground no longer feels firm beneath one's feet in transitions....the time of transition has a beginning and an end; and that the directee will emerge from it into a new level of clarity. This is a time to share his insights with the directee, who may be skeptical but should have sufficient trust to know that these words are not of cheap consolation.

One of the unwelcome surprises of transition is the sense of loss that inevitably accompanies self-transcendence and new growth. Directees, too, shed skins and identities if they persevere through the pain of transition, giving up the safety of an outworn images and habits to embrace the new...simply not useful anymore.

What we have seen cannot be unseen; what is known cannot be unknown. The inevitable changes may be more than the directee has bargained for.

Holy listening is a work of mutual obedience

### **What Can I Expect from a Spiritual Director?**

Spiritual direction means to help others discover that their questions are human questions, their search is a human search, and their restlessness is part of the restlessness of the human heart...

I remind you : Seeking guidance and direction will not necessarily yield an easy solution or an answer to the inner quest for meaning. Any teacher or director can only be a mirror reflecting a view, or sometimes an arrow pointing beyond itself.

The story must reach into the future. Spiritual direction is about hope, and there is always a next step.

The spiritual director is simultaneously a learner and a teacher of discernment. What is happening? Where is God in this person's life? What is the story? Where does this person's story fit in our common Christian story? How is the Holy Spirit at work in this person's life? What is missing?

The object is self-knowledge. True learning came from looking inward, facing oneself (and God) in solitude. Abba Pambo "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."

If I did not name her spiritual grandiosity (masking an abysmal absence of self-worth) I was guilty of complicity. So I spoke some hard truths, then said: "You're probably really angry at me, and that's all right. It won't hurt me, and I won't get angry with you."

Learn to speak the truth in love. We may spare the very fragile, those who already have more reality than they can bear and are not yet ready to hear the truth. It is sometimes hard to sit with an insight, yet we may say nothing. Or we may measure out manageable bits of truth.



What are the possessions that weigh down our directees, intruding themselves between the seeker and God? Encourages directees to discover and embrace their own questions.

Director will encourage the directee to set aside times to be consciously with God and to pay attention to what happens when they take such time. The experiences they have in these prayer times will be the main focus of the direction sessions. These periods need to occur with some frequency and be of some length, but individuals have to discover the best rhythm for themselves.

Much of spiritual direction is in the company of those who are waiting, who cannot be fixed, repaired or made right, and the spiritual director does well to emulate restraint. Waiting can be the most intense and poignant of all human experiences—the experiences which, above all others, strips us of affectation and self-deception and reveals to us the reality of our needs, our values, and ourselves.

### **What Should you Expect of Yourself?**

Spiritual directors can only direct when there are seekers coming with questions. In spiritual listening, we encounter a God who cannot be fully understood, we discover realities that cannot be controlled, and we realize that our hope is hidden not in the possession of power but in the confession of weakness.

The first task of seeking guidance is to touch your own struggles, doubts, and insecurities—in short, to affirm your life as a quest. Spiritual direction's resources are intended to help people find a friendly distance from their own lives so that what they are experiencing can be brought into the light in the form of a question to be lived.

The motivation for spiritual direction has to become the desire to grow in relationship with God....working alliance

Spiritual direction can't be a substitute for something else like counseling. Working relationship requires the directee have inner motivation for prayer and spiritual direction...not because someone advised it.

When God enters into the center of our lives to unmask our illusions of possessing final solutions and to disarm us with always deeper questions, we will not necessarily have an easier or simple life, but certainly a life that is honest, courageous, and marked with the on-going search for truth. Sometimes, living in the questions, answers are found. More often, as our questions and issues are tested and mature in solitude, the questions simply dissolve.

Spiritual direction is to open the door to the opportunities for spiritual growth and sometimes to provide a glimpse of the great mysterious light behind the curtain of life and of the Lord who is the source of all knowing and the giver of life.

Spiritual disciplines are the skills and techniques by which we begin to see the image of God in our hearts. Spiritual formation is the careful attentiveness to the work of God as we submit to the gradual chipping away of all that is not God.

Developing ears to hear God takes time. We have a strong resistance to listening. We are so concerned with being useful, effective, and in control that a useless, ineffective, and uncontrollable moment scares us and drives us right back to the security of having something valuable to do.

- What draws you to spiritual direction?
- What kind of qualities in a person put you at ease to share your spiritual life?
- Be prepared to tell about your spiritual journey; and how you got to where you are today.
- How often are you able to set aside the time for spiritual direction?
- Be ready to discuss the quality, quantity and substance of prayer.

### **Finding a Spiritual Director**

Finding a spiritual director begins with prayer. Invite God to do the leading. Look to spirituality centers, pastors, religious communities, Spiritual Directors International. Question you may want to ask the possible director:

- The director's training, experience, and areas of interest
- The director's understanding or vision of the direction process.
- Whether there is a fee and how much that will be
- Other issues that may be important, such as the director's denominational affiliation, gender, whether s/he is lay or ordained, and convenience of location.
- You and the director will need to establish: Frequency of direction; time, place and length of meetings Contact information

### **What Does A Session Look Like by Teresa Blythe**

"Two people sitting in a quiet, private space perhaps with a lighted candle on a table nearby, discussing whatever life experience the directee shares. That's spiritual direction.

At the first visit, the two of you will likely spend some time getting to know one another. After the initial "meet and greet," the spiritual director will begin the session in his or her own way. I like to invite a time of silence, asking the directee to "take as much or as little silence as you need and begin when you are ready."

When ready, you—the directee—will start talking about the reason you are seeking spiritual direction. It can be as simple as wanting to have someone you can check in with each month as you live out your spiritual practice. Or it could be a life situation you want to explore. If you don't know where to start, it's not a problem. The director may ask you what prompted your desire for

spiritual direction or what your spiritual path has been like. Once you share your concern, story or expectations, the director will begin to sense what is at the “heart of the matter” for you.

The “heart of the matter” is what you will explore with the director.

While it is impossible to diagram a typical session, there is a flow that occurs in spiritual direction.

- Initial story unfolds. “I’m here to explore \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Director listens for places in the story that have deep emotion or significance for you. She may ask you to say more about those places or may ask an open-ended question.
- Director will be silently praying for you as you talk and may invite pauses of silence along the way.
- Director will be listening for your language for the holy and noticing your image of God. He may ask you about those, for clarification and to get a feel for your deep beliefs and values.
- Director will be noticing where she feels God’s presence most acutely in your story. She may ask you to reflect more on that piece of the story.
- Director will assist you in clarifying how you feel the Spirit is leading you to take the next step on your spiritual path.

All of this may not happen in one session, but may occur over many sessions. Spiritual directors are trained to be patient and not attached to a particular outcome for you. We want you to set the pace and make your own choices.

It is for that reason that a great many spiritual directors do not like the term “direction.” As spiritual directors, we are not in charge. God is. The mystery we call God is the true director and we recognize that you and God have more to say about your spiritual path than we do. Directors are always at the service of God and you (in that order).”

### **What is Spiritual Direction?**

- How can I become aware of God’s presence in my life?
- How can I have some assurance that my decisions about money, work, and relationships are made in a spiritual way?
- How do I know that my life is lived in obedience to God and not just in response to my own impulses and desires?
- Should I live a simpler life?
- Should I take a more prophetic stand on issues such as war and poverty?

- Should I give a few years of my life to work with the poor?

### **Common to all Definitions**

- Providing assistance to a seeker who is committed to growing in a disciplined life of prayer.
- Helping the seeker to be attentive to the Lord's personal communication.
- Being with the seeker as they attempt to deepen their relationship with the divine.
- Asking question by the director to assist the seeker in the process of reflection and spiritual growth.
- Trying to discern, understand what the Holy Spirit, through the situations of life, spiritual insights, fruits of prayer, reading and meditation, tells the seeker.
- Helping the seeker tell their sacred story.

### **Questions that Arise**

- What is the spiritual dimension of my deepest emotions?
- What is the experience of my relationship to God in daily life?
- What is God trying to communicate to me?
- What spiritual counsel from God is striving to reveal itself in my daily life?
- What is the purpose and meaning of my life?

### **Questions a Director May Ask**

- What draws you to spiritual direction?
- What kind of qualities in a person put you at ease to share your spiritual life?
- Be prepared to tell about your spiritual journey; and how you got to where you are today.
- How often are you able to set aside the time for spiritual direction?
- Be ready to discuss the quality, quantity and substance of prayer.

### **Typical Session**

- Initial story unfolds. "I'm here to explore \_\_\_\_\_."
- Director listens for places in the story that have deep emotion or significance for you. She may ask you to say more about those places or may ask an open-ended question.
- Director will be silently praying for you as you talk and may invite pauses of silence along the way.
- Director will be listening for your language for the holy and noticing your image of God. He may ask you about those, for clarification and to get a feel for your deep beliefs and values.
- Director will be noticing where she feels God's presence most acutely in your story. She may ask you to reflect more on that piece of the story.

- Director will assist you in clarifying how you feel the Spirit is leading you to take the next step on your spiritual path.

## THE AMMAS AND ABBAS

### Introduction to Activity

When the desert mothers (Ammas) and fathers (Abbas) were asked for a word by their disciples, it was a word to be pondered for a whole lifetime. The word was often a short phrase to nourish and challenge the receiver. It was meant to be wrestled with and slowly grown into. Often the word was a plain answer to a plain question, but the disciple had to unravel it. Eventually these words became known as the Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Thomas Merton compares this tradition to the Beginner's Mind in Buddhism. Merton tells us that there are only 3 stages to this work: to be a beginner, to be more of a beginner, and to be only a beginner. Abba Poemen speaking about the Abba Pior tells us that "Every single day he made a fresh beginning." Take the next 20 minutes with one of the sayings and see what comes to you.

### After the Sharing Activity

When reading the desert Mothers and Fathers keep in mind the time period that was the context for some of the things they said and thought and not judge them by today's understandings. For example, they were influenced by Greek thought and dualism, where the body was perceived as bad and the spirit good.

They also were living at a time when the policies of Constantine and the ensuing cooperation between the clergy and the state were seen by the Ammas and Abbas as a corrupting influence. In reading them, we need to be able to distill the wisdom contained in their writings while sorting out the influences that surrounded them.

These desert fathers and mothers are a part of our heritage and history. As part of the early Christian community, they were closer to the time when the Christian texts were written. In terms of their spirituality they valued hospitality, generous forgiveness and the practice of the presence of God. It is from this tradition that we have the Jesus Prayer.

The most widely accepted form of the Jesus Prayer is "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.**" It reflects the biblical idea that the name of God is sacred and that its invocation implies a direct meeting with the divine. The tradition of the Jesus Prayer goes back to the "prayer of the mind," recommended by the ancient monks of the Egyptian desert, particularly [Evagrius Ponticus](#) (died 339). It was continued as the "prayer of the heart" in [Byzantine Hesychasm](#), a monastic system that seeks to achieve divine quietness.

Abba Cronius says, "If the soul is vigilant and withdraws from all distractions and abandons its own will, then the spirit of God invades and it can conceive because it is free to do so." These methods produce interior silence and unceasing prayer.

It is also helpful to keep in mind that the desert tradition emerged before the development of systematic theology and the formation of doctrine. The spiritual life for them was seen as a “way of life” and not a belief system. It was a relationship. St. Paul, after his conversion, spent three years in solitude in the desert meditating on God’s word before beginning his ministry. From Paul’s writings we hear that the spiritual way of life is “putting on the mind of Christ.” He learned as did the Ammas and Abbas that the desert is a place hostile to the ego as well as one’s physical well-being. It is the perfect place to open to transformation. The desert is the doorway. Abba Poeman write, “Do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart.” The heart for them was the source of words and actions. It was the center of spiritual life and the place to encounter God most intimately.

Here in the desert they learned about themselves as flawed human beings, not perfect people. They were just like the rest of us. They learned humility (standing in the truth) and had a sense of humor about themselves, a sly irony and a childlike playfulness, according to Richard Rohr.

A story about Abba Moses captures that. A brother from Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited and he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, “Come, for everyone is waiting for you.” So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water and carried it with him. The others came about to meet him, seeing the trail of water behind him, and said, “What is this father?” The old man said to them, “My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.”

When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him. Forgiveness was central to humility and the willingness to suspend judgement.

**Tell me three things you are taking with you from this session.**

“In imitation of Christ, the Desert Fathers and Mothers asserted in their timeless sayings, narratives and counsels that life in a dissipated, disbelieving world is like a shipwreck from which we must swim away to save our own lives. Only in the desert, guided by grace, might we seekers find the true self by rejecting the false self fabricated by the obtuse ego.” Susan Muto

**Directions:** “Give me a word” is a key phrase repeated often by the desert elders. This tradition of asking for a word was a way of seeking something on which to ponder for many days, weeks, months, or sometimes a whole lifetime. The “word” was often a short phrase to nourish and challenge the receiver. It was meant to be wrestled with and slowly grown into. Choose one saying and spend time pondering and distilling the wisdom it provides for this day.



**Abba Poeman:** A brother came to see Abba Poemen and said to him: "Abba, I have many thoughts and they put me in danger." The old man led him outside and said to him, "Expand your chest and do not breathe in." He said, "I cannot do that." Then the old man said to him, "If you cannot do that, no more can you prevent thoughts from arising, but you can resist them."

**Amma Theodora:** Amma Theodora said, "Let us strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before the winter's storms, cannot bear fruit, so it is with us; this present age is a storm and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven."

**Abba Basil:** *A monk once came to Basil of Caesarea and said, "Speak a word, Father"; and Basil replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart"; and the monk went away at once. Twenty years later he came back, and said, "Father, I have struggled to keep your word; now speak another word to me"; and he said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"; and the monk returned in obedience to his cell to keep that also.*

**Amma Sarah:** Amma Sarah said, "If I prayed God that all people should approve of my conduct, I should find myself a penitent at the door of each one, but I shall rather pray that my heart may be pure toward all."

**Abba Moses:** *"Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."*

**Amma Syncletica:** Amma Syncletica said, "In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek ... so we must also kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work."

**Abba Daniel:** **Abba Daniel** said, 'The body prospers in the measure in which the soul is weakened, and the soul prospers in the measure in which the body is weakened.'

**Amma Syncletica:** Amma Syncletica said, "There are many who live in the mountains and behave as if they were in the town; they are wasting their time. It is possible to be a solitary in one's mind while living in a crowd; and it is possible for those who are solitaires to live in the crowd of their own thoughts."



**Abba Poemen** said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: 'I find myself in peace, without an enemy,' he said. The old man said to him, 'Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress.' So he besought God and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, 'Lord, give me strength for the fight.'

**Abba Theodore:** Amma Theodora said that neither asceticism, nor vigils, nor any kind of suffering are able to save. Only true humility can do that. There was a hermit who was able to banish the demons. And he asked them: "What makes you go away? Is it fasting?" They replied: "We do not eat or drink." "Is it vigils?" They said: "We do not sleep." "Then what power sends you away?" They replied: "Nothing can overcome us except humility alone." Amma Theodora said: "Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?"

**Abba Theodore:** A brother lived in the cells and in his solitude he was troubled. He went to tell **Abba Theodore of Pherme** about it. The old man said to him, 'Go, be more humble in your aspirations, place yourself under obedience and live with others.' Later, he came back to the old man and said, 'I do not find any peace with others.' The old man said to him, 'If you are not at peace either alone or with others, why have you become a monk? Is it not to suffer trials? Tell me how many years you have worn the habit?' He replied, 'For eight years.' Then the old man said to him, 'I have worn the habit seventy years and on no day have I found peace. Do you expect to obtain peace in eight years?' At these words the brother went away strengthened.

**Abba Pambo:** **Abba Theophilus**, the archbishop, came to Scetis one day. The brethren who were assembled said to Abba Pambo, 'Say something to the archbishop, so that he may be edified.' The old man said to them, 'If he is not edified by my silence, he will not be edified by my speech.'

## **A VOW OF FIDELITY**

***“Amici Cordis are individuals who profess a commitment to the mission and vision of the Sisters of Divine Providence. They share a uniquely close relationship to the Community with two significant distinctions between them and vowed members:***

***Canonical sisters take vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Amici Cordis are non-canonical members; who take a single, non-canonical Vow of Fidelity to the Community.***

***Amici Cordis of the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence are "Friends of the Heart" who share a covenant relationship based on dedication to Providence and "putting on the mind of Christ." As friends they carry a common destiny that comes from a deep connection to the values that emanate from the heart and source of all wisdom. They are non-canonical members. Joyfully witnessing to the faith vision of Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie, they join in serving God's people in a ministry characterized by response to God's providential love, a charism of trust in, and openness to the Providence of God."***

***“The spirit of the institute is, above all, the spirit of Jesus Christ himself.” (Constitutions, 1852) Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive always for “that mind which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5); we seek to live as Jesus did, striving always to do God’s will.”***

***“Through Baptism Amici Cordis were incorporated into the Body of Christ, a living community, and through their Vow of Fidelity they are integrated into that same mission of Christ and respond in a new way to God’s continuing call to love and service.***

***Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence consecrate themselves to God and to the community through a Vow of Fidelity. Fidelity is a word which is derived from the Latin meaning “faithfulness.” Through this vow the individual promises to abide in, to belong to, and to keep faith and trust with the Community.***

***Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit’s guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ’s fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community.***

***The Amici Cordis freely obligate themselves to be a tangible expression of God’s fidelity. The Vow of Fidelity assists them in sustaining the belonging they have chosen, and in ordering life around them in countless practical ways especially when times are challenging.”***

***“We, Amici Cordis, are Christians called to live our vocation through the profession of a Vow of Fidelity to the congregation, attracted by its unique way of living out the Providence***

***charism. We choose to participate in a community that embraces a diversity of cultures and personalities where opportunities to dialogue, pray, and share faith abound."***

***"The document reflects our special vision of the Amici Cordis of Divine Providence. We freely choose to observe faithfully and entirely the Vow of Fidelity we have made and we oblige ourselves to live in accord with the Amici Cordis Way of Life."***

***We commit ourselves to the personal study of and prayerful reflection on the Amici Cordis Way of Life, so that in Community we may experience that peace and unity which is a sign of the provident God."***

## **MAKING A VOW OF FIDELITY**

The Amici Cordis take a vow of fidelity to the community and to a way of life. The Latin word *fides* translates in English to "faithfulness," or "good faith" which carries a basic meaning of trustworthiness. Part of the vow, then, is to be trustworthy—literally, worthy of God's trust. Faithfulness is important in a relationship because it establishes trust, security and emotional safety. When an individual is committed to fidelity, it creates a foundation for mutual respect and loyalty.

Fidelity to a way of life described in the document that the spirit of the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence is, above all, the spirit of Jesus Christ himself. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive always for "that mind which was in Christ Jesus"; we seek to live as Jesus did, striving always to do God's will." In putting on the "mind of Christ", fidelity calls each individual to faithfully reproduce the thoughts, attitudes, steps and path Christ walked. Actions are aligned with the words and there is a congruence between what is believed and what is done. The love of Christ and the following of his ways are marked by gentleness, mutuality, respect and dignity. A vow helps an individual to stay true to the values and beliefs professed and to maintain integrity in all aspects of the life that the individual has committed to follow.

"Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit's guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ's fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community." Fidelity calls each individual to listen to the Spirit in the communal decision-making process. It requires openness to others, those in leadership and to one's own inner voice which speaks in times of quiet prayer. This is done in order to know what to speak, to share and to respond.

"The Amici Cordis freely obligate themselves to be a tangible expression of God's fidelity. The Vow of Fidelity assists them in sustaining the belonging they have chosen, and in ordering life around them in countless practical ways especially when times are challenging." Fidelity is not a

cheap word and it is not an easy word. This vow of fidelity allows the members of the community to rub the rough edges from ourselves and each other. We support each other's weaknesses, but we also help each other to conversion. Fidelity to this way of life means building community and being with each other in bad times and good times. Individuals are imbued with connection and a deeply abiding sense of belonging. Our failure to be faithful results not only in disconnection but also fragmentation.

The most important thing that fidelity teaches an individual is what it means to be in relationship. It reminds each individual that relationships will cost, even as they enrich. Individual autonomy stands starved at the gates of fidelity.

There is dignity and liberty in exercising one's faculties of mind and heart to choose, to decide these people, things, and habits to which one chooses to belong. "The Amici Cordis freely obligate themselves to be a tangible expression of God's fidelity. The Vow of Fidelity assists them in sustaining the belonging they have chosen, and in ordering life around them in countless practical ways especially when times are challenging." Fidelity is the measure of how well one remains faithful knowing full well it may not be all blissful. One of the deepest truths about fidelity is that sticking it out through the messiness and pain is the only means of love.

Before making a vow of fidelity, one must be certain whether the God is leading and accompanying you on this journey. "Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit's guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ's fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community." For this reason someone seeking to enter the Amici Cordis enters into a process of individual and communal discernment. "When, after discernment, the candidate and the Community determine readiness for the life as Amici Cordis, the individual writes a request to the Provincial Director for admission. After consultation with the appropriate Community members and with the consent of the Provincial Council, the candidate may admit the individual to take the vow of fidelity to the Province."

## AMICI CORDIS

### WAY OF LIFE

#### COMMUNITY

*There is much written in the Amici Cordis Way of Life about expectations around community life to which we are all accountable.*

**“Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence consecrate themselves to God and to the congregation through a Vow of Fidelity. Fidelity is a word which is derived from the Latin meaning “faithfulness.” Through this vow the individual promises to abide in, to belong to, and to keep faith and trust with the Community.”**

**“Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit’s guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ’s fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community.”**

**“We who are gathered together in the name of Christ rejoice in his presence among us and form a community of faith and love (PC 15). Because we are one in him we strive for genuine communion with each other.”**

**“The word community derives from Latin, commun, meaning common. The same root informs the word communicate (to share our understanding, to have understanding in common) and communion (to share our experience, to have experience in common). It’s not by chance that the word community contains unity. Possibility is rooted in the very word. For community is an ever-potent seed waiting for our efforts and care to animate what we have in common, so we can share our understanding and experience in our time on Earth.” (More Together Than Alone by Mark Nepo, 2018)**

**“Through mutual support of prayer and concern, we deepen our understanding of, and love for, one another. Endeavoring to recognize the enrichment that comes to our common life and work from the variety of opinions and personalities among us, we grow in our appreciation of communal life. In God’s love we find strength for the daily task of building community. This task requires an attitude of respect for the dignity of each person, of trust and sincerity, and the practice of open communication, mutual encouragement, and the willingness to “carry one another’s burdens.”**

**“Community holds a space where we can make our own discernment, in our own way and time, with the encouraging and challenging presence of others who share a common lot.”**

**“The kind of community that knows how to welcome soul, our inner life, enables us to hear its voice. This community makes it safe for soul to show up. We all need to welcome, amplify and discern the inner voice of God. We have the freedom to follow our souls for the common good.”**

**“We enter into dialogue with each other. “Dialogue is a communal meditation conducted in a kindly, compassionate manner, listening intensely and sympathetically and allowing the other’s ideas to**

unsettle one's own convictions, permits one's mind to be informed and changed by the contributions of the other." (Karen Armstrong)

"In the spirit of redemptive love, we freely admit our mistakes, show compassion for the weakness of others, and, as soon as possible, resolve misunderstandings and conflict.

Community life contributes both to our personal growth and to the effectiveness of our apostolate. The love of each other in community is the reassuring sign of God's love for us; it encourages us to risk ourselves in the works of the apostolate and to live according to Gospel values."

"The bonds of love extend beyond the Provincial and the Regional boundaries to all the Members of the Congregation. We share their joys and sorrows and do not hesitate to offer assistance when there is need."

"We have a special role in creating among God's people that community of love which has its origin in the Trinity. We try to understand the people of our time and their way of life and to enter into their hopes and anxieties. In all our dealings with them, we are disposed to serve and not to be served (Mt. 20:28)."

"In the spirit of our Founders, we seek to deepen and live our charism by a commitment to promote a consistent ethic of life. We hold all life sacred: creating communities of joy and love, promoting justice, seeking to advance the cause of all people, especially those in need, and practicing responsible stewardship."

"We look to community for the support and inspiration that enable us to give more fully of ourselves in the exercise of our ministries.

"In our efforts to create Christian community with our co-workers, we try to keep in mind that we affect more by what we are than by what we do."

"We commit ourselves to witness the primacy of Gospel values to a broken world as we share with others Christ's vision of hope, love, and faith. We strive to use generously our diverse and complementary gifts as we serve the needs of our times."

"Through our daily living and the support of the Community, we seek to deepen our charism of making visible the presence and Providence of God."

"We, Amici Cordis, are Christians called to live our vocation through the profession of a Vow of Fidelity to the congregation, attracted by its unique way of living out the Providence charism. We choose to participate in a community that embraces a diversity of cultures and personalities where opportunities to dialogue, pray, and share faith abound."

"Any person who is properly motivated may be welcomed as an Amici Cordis candidate if they have the necessary health; the spiritual, psychological and emotional maturity; the education and life experience; and the character that will enable participation in the life of the Community."

**“The purpose of the integration program is to help each candidate continue to surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to deepen their on-going commitment as a mature, generous individual. Each person is encouraged to assume responsibility for their integration as they journey with the guidance of the community.”**

**“The integration program provides for a deepening of the spiritual life and an introduction into the life of the Community. A person who experiences prayer, community, and ministry comes to know and is better able to assess readiness for life as an Amici Cordis.”**

**“The program is designed to direct the individual toward these goals:**

- a deeper response to God’s call;**
- basic knowledge of the truths contained in a faith life;**
- development and integration of their person;**
- appreciation of the importance of prayer in their life through instruction and experience in various methods of prayer;**
- continued discernment of their call;**
- acceptance of personal responsibility for living out their faith and call;**
- growth in intimacy with God through prayer;**
- experience in living out the Christian virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience;**
- integration of a contemplative spirit into her active life; and**
- strengthening a bond with the Community through the study of its history, charism, and Constitutions.”.**

**“We commit ourselves to the personal study of and prayerful reflection on the Amici Cordis Way of Life, so that in Community we may experience that peace and unity which is a sign of the provident God.”**

## COMMUNITY

*There is much written in the Amici Cordis Way of Life about expectations around community life to which we are all accountable.*

“Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence consecrate themselves to God and to the congregation through a Vow of Fidelity. Fidelity is a word which is derived from the Latin meaning “faithfulness.” Through this vow the individual promises to abide in, to belong to, and to keep faith and trust with the Community.”

“Faithfulness is reflected in their willingness to develop their relationship with the Divine. Fidelity is only possible by seeking the Spirit’s guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. It is precisely this willingness, this asking, seeking, loving, beholding, and inquiring that remind the Amici Cordis of Christ’s fidelity and allow them to reflect this spirit of the Community.”

“We who are gathered together in the name of Christ rejoice in his presence among us and form a community of faith and love (PC 15). Because we are one in him we strive for genuine communion with each other.”

“The word community derives from Latin, *commun*, meaning common. The same root informs the word communicate (to share our understanding, to have understanding in common) and communion (to share our experience, to have experience in common). It’s not by chance that the word community contains unity. Possibility is rooted in the very word. For community is an ever-potent seed waiting for our efforts and care to animate what we have in common, so we can share our understanding and experience in our time on Earth.” (More Together Than Alone by Mark Nepo, 2018)

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## THE “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”

Phyllis Tickle in her book *The Great Emergence* outlines the state of the churches and the culture in our present day. She, through historical analysis says, Christianity is currently undergoing a massive upheaval as part of a regular pattern that occurs every 500 years, in which old ideas are rejected and new ones emerge. It is a time when every part of the Church is reconfigured. Each 500 years the empowered structures of the institutionalized Christianity become intolerable carapace (hard shell of a turtle) that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur. One of the chief characteristics of these upheavals is the disestablishment of whatever source or definition of authority has been operative. The often unspoken questions emerge that the culture struggles to answer are: Where is the authority now? How shall we live? By whose rules? Under what definitions of good and worthy do we operate?

The name given to this particular era is *The Great Emergence*. *The Great Emergence* describes a shift away from the view that the world is a machine capable of being understood by dissecting it into pieces. It is a world that finds its power not in irreducible parts but in complex cohesion. It impacts the way we view theology, church and religion in general. These shifts were first observed in the secular world but the institutional churches were not attuned enough to tie the shifts in religion.

Science has been the principal agent of successful challenge to the story and our imagination from post-reformation until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There has been a growing fissure between science and religion. Darwin work was seen by many as the tipping point for a new cultural, social, political and theological territory. Michael Faraday 's field theory captured popular imagination. With his work electricity became the base for almost every part of technology. At the theological level Faraday contended that there was ether (a medium that in the wave theory of light permeates all space and transmits transverse waves) or matter as physical substances but fields of force and magnetism. This removed the mystery of some phenomena.

Einstein dominates the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1905 he published 4 papers that forever changed the consensual illusion about the universe.

1. He postulated that the photo electric effect could be explained by little energy bundles called quanta that interacted with matter. This led to quantum physics, a description of the invisible world – describable laws – proof of the existence of atoms and our understanding and that we really could destroy each other.
2. The nature of motion
3. In his 3<sup>rd</sup> paper he postulated the theory of relativity – out went the notion that there was such a thing as absolute space and time.
4. In the 4<sup>th</sup> paper that matter and energy were equivalent  $E=mc^2$

Out of these theories would come questions. What does time mean? Is time capable of being slowed? Is the universe continuing to expand? How exactly is the world created? So the world wasn't created in 7

days as Genesis tells. Is the Bible literal or allegory? Is the Bible subject to human interpretation? Where is the authority?

Another area that leads to questions about who we are is science. In 1927 Heisenberg introduced us to the Uncertainty Principle. The **Uncertainty principle** is also called the **Heisenberg uncertainty principle**. Werner **Heisenberg** stumbled on a secret of the universe: Nothing has a definite position, a definite trajectory, or a definite momentum. ... That is because the uncertainties in position and velocity are so small that we could not detect them. Heisenberg concluded that absolute truth, only truth relative to the perceiver – be it sacred or secular – no innate meaning until it is read. The more you know about the speed of a thing, the less you know about its position until finally one has to concede that the act of observing itself change the thing observed. What did that imply for sola scriptura? We have the fraying of the waterproof casing. The work of Einstein and Heisenberg reinforced and broadened what was already happening. Science led to questions about who we are.

The philosophers, Hegel and Marx, had a direct influence on the role of institutions and eventually self-help groups. Hegel taught that everything had a direct opposite- one could only exist in opposition to the other. When the 2 opposites resolve their conflict, they synthesize, and the thing they were ceased to be. He concluded that all life was only a becoming, never a being. Marx built on the theories of Hegel. Using those beliefs Marx concluded that government or the state becomes the presence of the Absolute on earth (where the authority lies). Under this system we are intended to serve the state and other forms of authority had to be eliminated and this meant religion. This was a frontal attack not only on religion but also on concepts about human responsibility, individual worth, and existential purpose. In this country there was a major push back from unfettered power in the hands of government.

In the field of psychiatry, Freud opened the public to the world of the unconscious. His genius was building constructs or models of the mind that demand further investigation. Theories of human consciousness didn't require an explanation of God or supernatural beings. A whole new world effectively unknown to and unperceived opened. Karl Jung, student of Freud, made his writings accessible to laity and scholars alike. He built on Freud by speaking of a collective unconscious, the concept of libido (the energy of the sexual drive as a component of the life instinct).

Along comes Joseph Campbell who was motivated by Jung. The old story held that Jesus and only Jesus is God-among-us and that no salvation for humankind anywhere, anytime independent of belief in Jesus. He challenged this belief using the new technologies of mass communication.

Leaps forward in technology made it easier to produce and transmit information. A few of us may still remember Bishop Sheen. He recognized the immense potential of television for shaping religious laity – one of the first televangelist. Joseph Campbell showed the universality and commonality of religious thought and sensibilities. Scientist began to question the old standing definitions of "Self." Now there are fields of science that didn't even exist two or three generations earlier. Questions of who you are? What are you? How do you know? What does it mean, this "knowing" thing? How do you know you know? The questions are endless, as are the media sources willing and able to broadcast them.

Some of you may remember Bill Moyers on PBS and his presentation on *The Power of Myth*. The visceral reactions proved the foundations of authority were again being shifts and cracked. People began asking questions.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus, a German philosopher and writer of the Enlightenment, back in the 1770's asked; "What if Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus of Western history are not the same? The question Reimarus asked years ago didn't go far because people had no access to his works, but Albert Schweitzer asked the same question again in his book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Unlike Reimarus, Schweitzer was a popular figure in a time with mass communication. His conclusion was – we will never know that real or historical Jesus. This book is regarded as marking the end of the era of *sola scriptura* – in the Protestant tradition, now people began to look and use literary deconstruction and form criticism, to understand just where and how editors or redactors had changed original texts of the canonical gospels. They were questioning the believability of certain events. Now we experienced an honest discussion of clashing interpretations.

The drug culture of the 60's and 70's offered a radically different understanding of reality and a radically adjusted perception of subjectivity. What was on full display was the barrenness in American Culture of Christian teachings about spirituality equaled only by the ineptitude to address the shifting dynamics. From experience, people knew there was more to spirituality than they were being told. Drugs opened to public view the question of what is consciousness. There is a direct line from LSD straight to the Great Emergence and our current disorientation about what exactly consciousness is and we are.

In 1895 there was a conference among conservative Protestants that issued 5 principles necessary to claim true Christian belief. They were: inerrancy of scripture, divinity of Jesus, historicity of the virgin birth, substitutionary nature of the atonement and finally, physical, corporeal return of Jesus, the Christ. We see in this the beginning of the rise of fundamentalism. One of the questions we deal with as culture is how to accommodate these fundamentals with a theology of the more diverse religiously and culturally emergence?

Bethel Bible College was founded by Charles Parhan in 1900. He provided the earliest breeding ground for experiences that would change Christianity forever with the rise of Pentecostalism. Parhan never ordained but he began conducting religious meetings. He believed too much education kept God-fearing men from being effective, open to Spirit- impossible to preach within the restrictions and confines of dogmatism. He gathered a community who would pray together, seek God together, and study the bible. From this group we have the first documented case speaking in tongues. Enters William Seymore, a student of Charles Parhan, William came to L.A. at Azusa Street teaching baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues. One of the attendees Edward S. Lee suddenly spoke in tongues and eventually others received the gift. Word spread like wildfire. April 14, 1906 Pentecostalism became a major player in the rummage sale.

The impact this development had on African Americans is enormous. We witness the incorporation of African American spiritual experience into the greater body of the church. The immediacy of palpable contact with the divine central is to Pentecostalism since Azusa Street. This last component led to

changing the way and expectations of non-Pentecostal worshippers across the globe. By definition Pentecostalism assumes direct contact of the believer with God and by extension, the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. Ultimate authority is experiential rather than canonical. If forced to make a choice between what a believer thinks about scripture and an apparent contradictory message from the Holy Spirit, they accept the more immediate authority of the Holy Spirit. The authority of the Holy Spirit becomes central to their belief. Pentecostalism strained the question of allegiance between the written word and the experienced Spirit.

In 1943 Pius xii encyclical “Divino Afflante Spiritu” (Inspired by the Divine Spirit) granted permission to theologians to pursue biblical studies and scholarship on the basis of original sources, not just the Latin Vulgate. They were to apply 20th century textual criticism to the canon. A variety of opinions about what was/was not textually accurate and/or authentic (Variety of Bibles) emerged. With the discovery of Nag Hammadi and Qumran in 1945 and 1947 respectful scholars now had primary sources to support what had only been a theory.

As we look back we can see the proclivities and prejudices that would later inform and shape Emergence Christian’s thinking. It has deep roots in egalitarianism “In Christ, all one body”. Open to all without exception. Participatory worship became the standard. Less than a century later Pentecostalism is fastest growing religious trend in global Christianity.

Along comes the Model T and we Americans took to the roads and never looked back. We were free to roam off front porches. This eroded the usual way we spent the Sabbath. Grandma lost her place and it had been a formidable one because she often and directly reinforced religious instruction. The car took her kingdom away. As well, a re-definition of traditional family roles across several generations is still a principal contributor to the shredding of the cable and exposing its parts.

Some say AA was the first prime mover in this shift. ( Rev. Shoemaker, Bishop Sheen and Fr. Edward Dowling, and Fr. John Ford both Jesuits Sr. Ignatius Gavin, S.C.) The arrival of AA was also seen as a shift in regard to the role of institutions and the formation of self-help groups. AA wanted to be open to all which is why it doesn’t define GOD. The experiential belief was that the addicted rather than experts or authorities were more effective healers. Unintentionally, they delivered a serious blow to the role and authority of clergy. There were other examples of this same small-group dynamics – vet centers as one example but AA opened the floodgates to spirituality by removing it from the confines of organized religion. By the 70’s children of the late 40’s and 50’s would say they are spiritual but never again religious. There is a shifting of relationship with spirituality.

1965 Immigration and Nationality Services Act was passed. As a country we have a checkered past when it comes to immigration. Foreign labor from China built the railroads. They were being used to raise profits on the back of foreign workers to the detriment of American Labor, this created major animus.

Those of Asian descent barred from citizenship in 1882. Because of war we are engaged with the Far East – WWII, Korean War and Vietnam. We now had person to person contact, people fell in love, children are born and there is a cry for citizenship. With this we are now exposed to a spirituality that doesn’t require a religion to function. Enter Buddhism. Buddhists were comfortable with the life of the human spirit.

They had a language for it with practices for incorporating the body into spirit's world. It was easily adapted into the Christian and Jewish practices for a people starving for those experiences without the baggage of formalized religion.

Theologically new ideas emerged, old ones revisited and revamped. Times were changing in a disorienting and cataclysmic ways (sociologically the cultural narrative of the United States was being shredded.) The exploration was outright condemned-people were hungry and unsatisfied by church institutions – restiveness and discontent. The church failed to engage or help to resolve. New conversation without the restrictions of dogma and enculturated doctrine ensued. People were not afraid to question. Why not push beyond religion and get to the Holy?

Liberation Theology - In 1981 Johann Metz a student of Karl Rahner, influenced the shape of liberation theology. He recognized a new construct that would arise from the grass roots. He addressed this emergence in a scholarly treatment not only of its religious but also its sociological make-up and implications.

In Latin American, particularly we see a drive toward equality for all people- social justice. Theological and ecclesiology is in divisive turmoil with no present resolution. Many established and/or traditional church congregations, while they believed in social justice and continued to fight for it with words, dollars and time were less ready to welcome the results into worship spaces and their lives. For others, the battle for equality was a battle for the fullness of life and worship for all people in every part of our common lives. While activists of all persuasions had argued theologically for the rightness of their cause, evangelicals of all denominations began to argue biblically against these changes.

From experience, people knew there was more to spirituality than they were being told. The barrenness of the American Culture of Christian teachings about spirituality was equaled only by the ineptitude to address the shifting dynamics. Each time we ask these questions of ourselves the answers become important because once they are defined, they become the vehicles for transmitting the identity of the newly established authority into the politics, economics, learned discipline, cohesive culture, and legal norms as well as religious institutions and codes.

How we respond to these changing dynamics will set the foundation for what will emerge for the next 500 years. For Catholics, the Synodal process initiated by Francis will determine what we keep as central to our belief and what we will let go.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

### The “Signs of the Time”

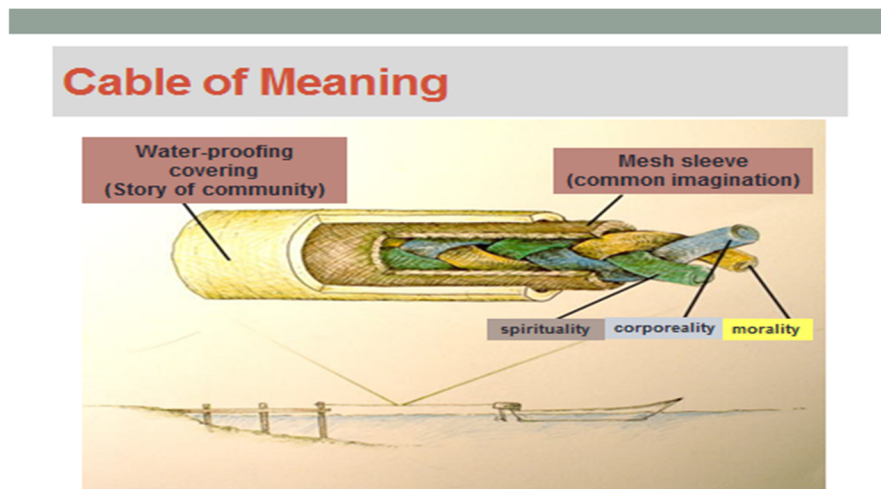
- We have been called to read the ‘signs of the time.’ What are you seeing that has led to the splits we are witnessing in the fabric of our faith journeys?
- Phyllis Tickle lays out for us how the times have been changing in a disorderly and cataclysmic ways. It has led to restiveness and discontent within our institutions. What should be the core of our response to what we see?
- How do we as individuals and community navigate these waters in our culture? What do we have to offer when there is disarray and chaos in the culture? What do people need to hear in order to answer the important life’s questions?
- In all the movements outlined in this article, how have you integrated this knowledge into your approach to spirituality?
- Tickle says that organized religion has been the soul of the culture. The culture is the body in which religion acts. Using the image of a cable to describe how the human community connects to a greater power than self to inform, counsel and temper society. According to the Pew Research Center in 2024 80% of the U.S. population is saying that religion is losing its influence in public life. Republicans and evangelicals believe that democrats and secular liberals are going too far in influencing government and public schools. Democrats and secular liberals believe the other side has gone too far when it comes to enshrining Christian beliefs in these institutions. We see this same divide in many of our churches. How do we find shared meaning strong enough to bring people together?
- Brian McClaren questions are worth our reflection:
  - What if it is time for a phase in the unfolding mission God intends for the people who seek to know, love and serve God?
  - What if God is actually behind these disillusionments and our movement into the wilderness?
  - What does the Pentecost experience mean in this day and age?



## THE GREAT EMERGENCE AND THE HUNGER FOR COMMUNITY

Within the Great Emergence is a period called the hinge time. We know where we have been but have no certainty as to where we are going. More than religion is in turmoil during hinge times. We see this in every human institution from government to educational settings. Religion in a time of reconfiguration responds to, and is informed by, more than external shifts in the consensual illusion and our human imaginings about how the world is.

Organized religion has been the soul of the culture. The culture is the body in which religion acts. Phyllis Tickle uses the image of a cable to represent the tether that secures human life to meaningfulness. It connects the human community to some purpose or power greater than themselves. Its function is to inform, counsel, and temper the society in which it exists.



It is part and parcel of human life to ask questions of "Why". Instinctually we reach a point in our journey to feel there has to be more. What is our purpose? What governs our conduct and informs our choices? Is there a meaning to suffering? We struggle with these questions individually and communally. People bounce back and forth from the old story and from the emerging story. In these times people live in two worlds which can be both frustrating and challenging. Using the image of The Cable of Meaning Tickle goes on to describe what is happening in the hinge times.

**The Cable** represents that attachment to that power we call God. It has a waterproof covering because it protects the story of community that keeps the internal structures functioning. It represents our shared history (mythical, actual, assured), the ethos we all share in common and by which we recognize one another as being alike or of one piece.

**The Mesh sleeve** is our common imagination. It isn't necessarily the "truth" of community but it is that which the community has agreements among themselves. (i.e. the world is flat) The adherents structure their worldviews based on these agreements.

There are three strands or braids within the Cable of Meaning.

- **Spirituality:** Within this strand the community names the central experiences and values of individuals and community.
- **Corporeality:** Within this strand embraces the physically embodied religion external practices and objects of practices.(bldgs. Scripture, hymnbooks)
- **Morality:** Within this strand is the lived reality and expectations of the application and enactment of values

When the outer casing and inner sleeve take a blow at the same time, a hole is open and each braid is taken out one at a time and examined, spirituality first, corporeality second and morality third. In transitioning times words move from one generally agreed upon meaning to an assortment of meanings, perhaps even contradictory ones. (gay, salvation, atonement, church) It requires an examination of the strands and a redefinition of meaning. Once satisfied with one strand, it is put back and next examined. When complete the sleeve is mended and the casing resealed. This is only good for about 250 years and the process starts all over again.

What is happening today is the product of a recurrent pattern. A major characteristic of previous hinge times is the tension toward changing things externally into new forms, as opposed to reworking the internally into what should be will continue to be a part of our current hinge time. Phyllis says, it is imperative not to fear either of the two coursings, but to fear with all our hearts and minds and souls the pattern of bloodiness that has in the past characterized the separation of innovators and retraditioners from one another.

When there are no answers there is disarray and chaos in the culture. Who do we listen to? Each time we ask this question and the answers become important because once we define, they are the vehicles for transmitting the identity of the newly established authority into the politics, economics, learned discipline, cohesive culture, and legal norms as well as religious institutions and codes. The authority answer defines who the community listens to for answers to life's questions and how we live together. In previous hinge times, the church has always been sucked along in the same ideational currents of the culture in general.

People change only if they believe that a new insight, a new idea, or a new form is important to them. Is the shared meaning they have strong enough to bring people together and hold them together as they move forward?

One of the ubiquitous cries we hear today is for community. People under 40 want to spread out horizontally. They want to be communal. They're going to be actively involved in social justice as they define it. They are connected to the world. They think glocally. (globally and locally) All of those things are sensibilities that are ingrained now; they have no intent to return to what was. They think of themselves

as communal and relational more than sacred or holy. Covenanted to each other but flexible enough to hear and respond immediately to the cry of Spirit and humanity.

If community is to become an option for more than a fortunate few, we must shake off any romantic notions or fantasies and create forms of life together that respect contemporary realities. Being in a community need not be the constant context of life. Our commitment to each other should have an end point. It is living an intentional life.

As the Congregation of Divine Providence we are to read the “signs of the time.” How does the Holy Spirit work in any era? This is the question Tickle asks in the Age of Spirit. Some would say that we see the work of the Holy Spirit at work in the events like the political upheavals, re-ordering of governments and people...upending the apple cart. Some also say that the religious and spiritual upheaval may in fact be characterize the Holy Spirit’s most essential work. In every time and place, the Holy Spirit is about movement/disruption and change/transformation.

The Holy Spirit can also use the dynamic of vulnerability- as sickness, pain and trauma—to awaken solidarity and hope in these life experiences that do not yield easy to our understanding and meaning. Brian McLaren wonders, “What if it is time for a new phase in the unfolding mission God intends for the people who seek to know, love and serve God? What if God is actually behind these disillusionments and our movements into the wilderness?” Religious belief will always persist. The form is yet to be determined.

In the Pentecost experience the Holy Spirit came down on the frightened community as the Spirit of Christ in the form of tongues of fire, descended on all the room and they began to speak in tongues. People from different parts of the world heard their strange way of speaking and came to see what was happening. What does the Pentecost experience mean in this day and age? “If Christianity’s prime contribution to humanity can be shifted from teaching correct beliefs to practicing the way of love as Jesus taught, then our whole understanding and experience of the church could be transformed . . . [into] a *school of love*.” —Brian McLaren

These changes are also happening to our expression of religious life. As we move into the future, we recognize that the community will not resemble the monastic structures of the past. What will community life look like, how will we live out our Constitutions and what will need to be the focus of our initial and on-going formation programs? What should undergird our decisions about the future?

Sandra Schneiders IHM in her article Formation for Community in the Current Ecclesial Context: Biblical Reflections States; “Religious Congregations have let go of what we might call the ‘common life’ model or definition of community. What has evolved is what we might call the ‘common life’ model which is not entirely worked out yet, but which is clearly NOT ‘common life.’” She suggest that; “ the new role or purpose or function for Religious Life in the Church in relationship to the world may be emerging in our time if we recognize it, accept it, foster it in and among ourselves, and for the Church and the world. Maybe today we are called to be a prophetic presence in both Church and world. “

The questions placed before Schneiders and all congregations are: "...what is the community life for which we are forming people? What is the role of community in the life, that is, Religious Life, to which some people continue to be called?" Additionally, how do we define community and the necessary values, beliefs and virtues that undergird healthy community?

Mark Nepo in his work entitled *More Together Than Alone: Discovering the Power and Spirit of Community* defines community by looking at the root meaning. "The word community derives from the Latin, *commun*, meaning 'Common.' The same root informs the word *communicate* (to share our understanding, to have understanding in common) and *communion* (to share our experience in common). It's not by chance that the word community contains unity." Nepo tells us that our possibility is rooted in the very word. "For community is an ever-potent seed waiting for our effort and care to animate what we have in common, so we can share our understanding and experience in our time on earth." We form our communities from the same two needs: the need for self-determination and the need for one another, according to Parker Palmer.

The early church and Christian scripture speaks to a common life. There has always been religious communities who have lived this out through religious vows and promises that physically create a common house, food, and purse, according to Ron Rolheiser.

Henri Nouwen had a profound experience of community living in the L'Arche community in Canada. He writes; "Community is like a large mosaic...a fellowship of people who together make God visible in the world. For him, what is held in common was the belief and values held by those with a common belief around which the ministry evolved.

Nepo similarly looked at the Ammas and Abbas of the desert and what they revealed about community. "The notion of connection comes from the early Christian mystics who gave us the metaphor of the Great Spoked Wheel. Imagine that each soul on earth is a spoke in an infinite wheel and that no two spokes are the same. The rim of the wheel is our living sense of community, and each spoke does its part to hold up the rim. But the common hub where all spokes join is the one center where all souls come from." They don't simply look at each other's lives and listen to each other's thoughts and stories but they look at a third thing and it's that connection with the Divine that leads us to people whose love and honesty and insight we can trust. Determining what is essential and ancillary to community needs to be a part of our dialogue.

In Nouwen, Nepo and the Ammas and Abbas, we find two critical components that bind people to each other. First, what forms the bonds of community was the centrality of their belief in God and the values that flow from that mutual gaze. Second, the organizing of their lives took shape in response to what God reveals to the heart and soul. What do we the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence hold in common? What shared understandings and experiences form our common hub? Do our understandings and values embody the keys to what community will mean in the future? Is this the gift we have to offer to those under forty who are seeking community?

Our Constitution has a wealth of guidance about what we should strive to become. It sets a vision for community. Since our founding we have embraced that our core founding spirit is:

- “The spirit of the institute is, above all, the spirit of Jesus Christ himself.” (Constitutions, 1852)  
We further declare that ‘under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we strive always for ‘that mind which was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil.2:5); we seek to live as Jesus did, striving always to do God’s will. In spirit we are present to the world through our service and through our mission of witnessing to the Provident God.”
- “We who gathered together in the name of Christ rejoice in his presence among us and form a community of faith and love. (PC15).
- Because we are one in him we strive for genuine communion with our sisters. Through mutual support of prayer and sisterly concern, we deepen our understanding of, and love for, one another. Endeavoring to recognize the enrichment that comes to our common life and work from the variety of opinions and personalities among us, we grow in our appreciation of communal life. (26)
- In God’s love we find strength for the daily task of building community. This task requires an attitude of respect for the dignity of each person, of trust and sincerity, and the practice of open communication, mutual encouragement, and the willingness to ‘carry one another’s burdens.’
- In the spirit of redemptive love, we freely admit our mistakes, show compassion for the weakness of others, and, as soon as possible, resolve misunderstandings and conflict. (27)
- We strive to develop a quality of presence with one another. This presence is marked by a desire and willingness to spend time together. (27A)
- Community life contributes both to our personal growth and to the effectiveness of our apostolate. The love of our sisters in community is the reassuring sign of God’s love for us; it encourages us to risk ourselves in the works of the apostolate and to love according to Gospel values. We are called to accountability – the Community to the individual Sister to the Community. (28)”

Parker Palmer noted that an organization with a coherent center is able to sustain itself through turbulence because of its clarity about who it is. It is able to move through the world with confidence and surety about their mission.

We are a group of women who come from different walks of life, heritages, countries of origin, work histories, single, divorced, religious traditions among other things. What draws us together is the belief that God has called us to religious life in and through our congregation. The hub and the spirit that animates and around which we gather is “above all the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself.” Jesus has left us a pattern for living, an accounting of his life in the Gospels and his spirit. Gathering around the person of Christ and sharing his Spirit is the basis for community.

What does that mean? The spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, is defined in scripture as charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness, and chastity. Living in these virtues is what binds us into community in such a way that we are immune from separation by distance, temperament, race, color, gender, ideology, social status, history, creed, or even death. All who live in these virtues are one body with each other and constitute church, according to Rolheiser. Thomas Merton says, “Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.”

**How do we extrapolate this for religious life today?** How do we sort this out? What does it imply for our future? How does the Holy Spirit work in this era? What gifts do we possess to lay the foundation for what comes next? Many spiritual writers have focused on the working of the Holy Spirit in trying to answer the questions of our day. Below are some of the authors who are asking the right questions for our communal discernment.

- Incarnation: A New evolutionary Threshold and God in the Midst of Change by O’Murchu
- The Age of Spirit by Phyllis Tickle
- She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theology by Elizabeth Johnson
- Come, Holy Spirit by Leonardo Boff

The following text illustrates what these writers are saying about the work of the Holy Spirit.

- *“We are called to attend to the urgings of Spirit not merely in the human heart, but as the energizing, empowering source of everything in God’s creation.” (O’Murchu)*
- *“Be alert to the lure of the Great Spirit, weaving a trans-religious awakening, a synthesis of a very ancient wisdom, and a thrust of new hope for creation at large.” (Boff)*
- *Diarmuid O’Murchu in his book **The Transformation of Desire** reminds us that the lure to a new and better future often....evolves through the birth pangs of the great paradox of creation- and – destruction.... We need to trust the process.*
- *Boff tells us to pay attention to what may be becoming. An inner disposition of freedom allows the Spirit to move in and surprise us with a new way we had never dreamed of before.*
- *O’Murchu further says; “We are called to discern our ability to flow with the ebb, to be ever alert for the transformation that may shatter all our comfort zones as the Holy One leads us to new and daring horizons. An exciting call, but one that demands not just generosity of spirit but above all an alert mind and discerning heart.*

Before the late 1960’s not much found on the topic of the Holy Spirit. In 1991, Spirit theology erupted on the public arena of the global church. We may ask: What in the world is God doing? Some would say we see the working of Spirit in the upending of so many apple carts. What has the laity been doing in these ensuing years and what has been the role of the Holy Spirit?

In the words of Isaiah we are asked to discern what all this mean for our day and age. The words of Isaiah call us to listen. “Behold, I am doing something new. Do you not perceive it? “ Isaiah 43: 19 What is the foundation we can help to build for a future we will not see in our lifetime on earth?

A group falling together and making the best of their situation is not likely to bear the kind of fruit more intentional and deliberate groups can bear. Our constitutions provide the vision for a deliberate and intentional embracing of a common destiny. Very often the price of belonging is to forfeit one’s individual autonomy but conformity is exhausting and literally death and lifelessness. In community we cannot abandon our need for self-expression. People need freedom and community needs to support individual freedom. An individual must acknowledge their neighbor and make choices based on the desire to be in relationship with them as a means to their own health and resiliency.

In human communities, the condition of freedom and connectedness are kept vibrant by focusing on what's going on in the heart of the community rather than being fixated on the forms and rules of the community. Parker Palmer suggest that we ask the following questions: "What called us together? What did we believe was possible together and was not possible alone? What did we hope to bring forth by linking with others?" Parker goes even farther: "Belonging together is defines by a shared sense of purpose, not by shared beliefs about specific behaviors. Staying centered on what the work is together, rather than on single identities, transforms the tension of belonging and individuality into an energetic and resilient community.

Our call to a communal way of life is through mutual support and prayer in order to facilitate our growth into spiritual maturity. A group of women coming together and simply making a comfortable life or making the best of our circumstances was not the intent of our founders. It will not support our core mission to put on "the mind of Christ." Our constitution provides a vision for a deliberate and intentional embracing of a common destiny.

Rolheiser further adds in his book Sacred Fire: "The group of disciples that first gathered around Jesus came from very different backgrounds and temperaments, had different visions of what Jesus was about, were jealous of each other, and were as scripture tells us, occasionally furious of each other. They loved each other, in the biblical meaning of that phrase, but they did not necessarily like each other." Much could be said of our community today and the communities of the past and future.

Just because we share some common understandings, we often have unreal expectations about what community life entails. According to Rolheiser, we often have an unreal set of beliefs about what community means. "Community is not and never will be the place of bliss and harmony that some aspirants or people outside may harbor in their romantic notion of religious life. Community supplies the raw material and the obstacles to challenge us in the process of maturation. We are always struggling with the content of life in the process of learning and transforming. In one of Keatings' books he talks about marriage as mutual polishing. The same can be said for communal life. If community doesn't allow any sort of meaningful development and conflict, we become cramped even warped.

It takes courage and spiritual maturity to permit the necessary vulnerability to be with each other, despite the many differences of our experiences. We absolutely will encounter differences and we need to resist the natural instinct and fear that wants to make everything and everyone else like us. Do we place a value on different perspectives borne of each of our experiences? Do we believe that differing perspectives provide a much more comprehensive picture?

Diversity and unique gifts become a contribution rather than an issue of compliance or deviance. Problems of diversity disappear as we focus on contributions to a shared purpose rather than legislation of correct behavior.

Parker Palmer says it this way about his own life: "I want my inner truth to be the plumb line for the choices I make about life—about the work I do and how I do it, about the relationships I enter into and how I conduct things." He uses the following questions in making his decisions: "What are we sending from within ourselves out into the world?" What is the world sending back at us? What impact is it having

‘in here?’” A strong commitment helps people develop a sense of their true self, for only in community can the self-exercise and fulfill its nature; giving and taking, listening and speaking, being and doing.

Our willingness to engage with the other and see together what is means to live out our foundational beliefs and the Gospel is to risk one’s personally held beliefs. We enter together into the liminal space during these hinge times where Spirit can birth something new.

The virtues required are the same that our foremothers needed to navigate their day. It is trust in God’s providence, courage and the capacity to listen with head and heart. Our shared values come from our heads. We come to those agreements through our chapters. Those agreements help us to form the basis and the direction of our life together. If our hearts are not open to the forces of love, then we understand our humanness and are connected to Spirit. We will have wrestled with our stories, revealed ourselves, unmasked our false self and now we can discover a common meeting ground that provides the material for a healthy community.

Many people resist this type of inner work. It’s worth repeating, resistance tells us there is already a pull toward something new. Angelis Arriens shows that if our hearts aren’t open, clear and strong, we cannot be conduits for Spirit in the world. If we aren’t full hearted we will approach situations and people half-heartedly. The outcome is that we are not suitable conduits of compassion and empathy for God’s people. Our hearts reveal to us that unless we soften those obstacles and face resistance, we cannot serve Spirit. Nepo says that compassion is the key to whether we understand each other or not.

Empathy is a part of our biological inheritance. Native Americans put it this way-“care is part of our original instructions.” Neuroscientists have discovered mirror neurons in the brain that confirm our biological capacity for empathy and compassion. Nepo writes; “When one person is hurt, humanity feels it. When one person is touched, the world sighs, though we may not hear it.” Our direct experience of being who we are, our direct giving and receiving of care and attention, makes empathy possible. The felt experience of empathy from others makes our connections visible.

If within ourselves and in communal dialogue abounds in confusion about our mission and direction, we are not clear-hearted. We listen. Spirit will prod us to wait with patience and receptivity for inner direction. Our discerning insures that it is the work of Spirit being done.

There is a paradox in regard to community pointed out by Parker Palmer. It is that we are “being alone together” being present to one another as a “community of solitudes.” Solitude and community rightly understood, go together as both-and. To understand our true selves-which knows who we are in our inwardness and whose we are in the larger world—we need both the interior intimacy that comes with solitude and the otherness that comes with community. This creates the space between us that is hospitable to the soul, a community of solitudes where we can be alone together.

Nepo recounts that “From 750 to 1492 in southern Spain Muslims, Jews and Christians forged a strong integrated culture. The mindset that made this remarkable community possible rest largely on the willingness to allow contrary views to exist without one view dominating another. The ethic of leaning



into each other while withholding judgment is crucial to lasting relationships, whether personal or societal.

Leaning into each other and opening ourselves to communal dialogue without judgment is the context for creating the climate where Spirit can enter the conversation. Keeping the common good central in our thinking is critical. Without that value, we can become petty, small and narrowly focused and begin to act from our personal wounds, preferences and biases. The creation of a common meeting ground is a foundational covenant of healthy communities. It helps connect members to something larger than themselves.

People face each other with their whole being, with sickness, neurosis etc. These parts of ourselves can only be shared in a healthy relationship that leaves each individual safe to share all those parts. We cannot escape the journey of trauma that undoes us. Yet, in time, we can be put back together, if given the chance to know and be known thoroughly. Putting ourselves back together, by finishing what is unfinished within us, and between us, allows community to form. But each of us must find our own way to listen to what we've done to each other in order to make a university of our suffering. Each of us must find our own way to make public spaces intimate so we can help each other release our feelings.

People in communal relationship need courage to be vulnerable with each other, no matter how different our experience may seem. Even when the sting of our wounds and our sense of outrage prevents us from being kind, something deep within us is ready to betray our injustice and be kind nonetheless. We often try to quiet this humane impulse. If lucky, our unconditional kindness wins and we keep the world going, a human inch at a time. If people are truly themselves rather than presenting fronts of appropriate behavior to each, if that say what they truly feel, think and experience, rather than saying the expected or appeasing-grace moves in.

The moment we dare to speak humbly and directly from our heart, we find each other. The moment we speak from the truth of compassion, we speak the same language always waiting underneath our differences. The mystery here is that when we speak from the divine center of things, from our own understanding of God, things become one again.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Great Emergence and the Hunger for Community**

- How do you define community?
- How do the Constitutions and the Amici Cordis Way of Life help in our understanding of the core values, beliefs and virtues that undergird healthy communities?
- Community supplies the raw material and the obstacles to challenge us in the process of maturation. Do you place a value on different perspectives borne of each of our experiences? Do you believe that differing perspectives provide for a much more comprehensive picture?
- How will you deal with the obstacles and challenges presented to you in community?

- How do you meet the challenge presented by the ego's cry for significance when it shows up in disagreements, competitiveness, comparative evaluations of each other and the dehumanizing ethos that is engrained in the culture?

## VIRTUES AND BEHAVIORS NEEDED FOR COMMUNITY

Thomas Keating speaking about marriage, say it is a relationship of mutual polishing. He was not the first to speak about relationship in this way. St. John of the Cross referred to religious life as a place of mutual polishing. People are forced to rub up against each other, to bump up against in love and rejection. Of course, St. John lived in different days and in a cloister where many people couldn't escape each other's company...forced physical intimacy. But both Keating's and John's insights on the value of community and relationship as a place of mutual polishing are still relevant. It is in community that we have the opportunity to know each other, the world, good, evil, heights and depths. Our reflection on these experiences and our reactions can result in a healthy dose of self-knowledge.

Most of the passions aroused by others have to do with our own inner world and conflicts, rather than the flesh and blood people we bump up against daily. Few people or institutions have the authority and power our inner conflicts and past histories tend to project on them. When we can finally stop placing blame outside ourselves and step toward maturation, compassion and empathy emerges toward our humanness and that of others.

The human soul experiences the need from conception to grow, expand, and develop an autonomous, independent, and complete self. It is an ongoing struggle for all of us to become more conscious and to continue to integrate more of the unconscious aspects of our personalities. We can become totally out of touch with personal authority and power; very lacking in freedom; and finally, all things we managed to push out of our consciousness begin to come out sideways. What we fail to resolve or integrate doesn't just disappear. It gets projected.

Sometimes we use the rules and the directional papers as clubs to heap our judgments on our sisters as they struggle through stages of normal development. We've seen the speck in their eyes while missing the two by four in our own. Everybody has setbacks and disasters in their journey toward personal growth and development. We sometimes hold people in bondage for their mistakes. As a result we never allow the lessons they've extracted from their experiences to become wisdom for the community. How many of us would feel safe speaking to each other about our struggles to be obedient, celibate, and living simply?

Abraham Heschel offers that the aim of any community is not to conquer or possess, but to relate and pass on meaning, to discover and to understand. If one reflects on the importance of choice in the individuation process, we must accept the repercussions of choice for the individual and on the quality of any common life. There are people in community who know themselves as always being in the process of internal reformation or transformation on a deep level and who discover at the deep levels love, compassion, and empathy for themselves and others. 'Community exists only when people know each other's stories' says Wendell Berry. If there is no honesty, no shadow, nothing real can be built. If we can share our weaknesses and pain as well as our strengths, nastiness as well as love, perhaps it is worth the struggle of a less perfect appearing harmony.

We come to those agreements through chapters. Those agreements help to form the basis and the direction for our life together. If our hearts are open to the forces of love, then we understand our humanness and are connected to Spirit. We will have wrestled with our stories, revealed ourselves to ourselves, unmask our false self and now we can discover a common meeting ground that provides the material for a healthy community.

Many people resist this type of inner work. Many of us need to recall again that resistance tells us there is already a pull toward something new. Angelis Arriens shows that if our hearts aren't open, clear and strong, we cannot be conduits for Spirit in the world. If we aren't full hearted then we will approach situations and people half-heartedly. The outcome is that we are not suitable conduits of compassion and empathy for God's people. Our hearts reveal to us that unless we soften those obstacles and face resistance, we cannot serve Spirit. Nepo states that compassion is the key to whether we understand each other or not.

The truth of another person can be far more lovable than one thought when only judging by externals. In daily life it can be helpful to know that what seems simply on the outside a struggle for personal boundaries can be a battle for inner freedom; that what seems a disagreement with authority can be about learning to tap into personal power. Ultimately the integrity of a community depends on the field of trust that the authority of our kindness makes possible.

The Constitution of the Sisters of Divine Providence says: "Remembering that we all have been given to us by our Provident God, we cultivate a spirit of genuine Christian hospitality." What are values, attitudes and behaviors that foster this climate of hospitality foundational to the building of community? Scripture tells us to "love our neighbor as ourselves." The how we do this tells people of our intent because they see in practice that our words and actions match.

Hospitality was considered a sacred art down through the ages. The very root of the word reveals its meaning. It originally came from the Latin hospes/hospital and the Old French hospitalize. The derivatives are easily recognized: hospice, hostel, hotel, host, and hostess. All the words and the derivatives encompass certain behaviors toward guests, visitors, strangers, the infirmed and the homeless.

The French scholar, Chevalier Louis de Jancourt, wrote that hospitality was "the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through ties of humanity." All forms of the word point to providing a sacred place for shelter, sustenance and healing. With the practice of hospitality we become a living presence of comfort, support and safety.

Hospitality is a virtue that is central to our needs and to the needs of community. There are two fundamental characteristics of hospitality. First, it is recognizing that the core identity of every human being is their spiritual nature. Second, that science has shown us that we are all interdependent. It is these two characteristics that lead us to embrace the spiritual values and behaviors that create community. Hospitable behaviors flow from knowing we are all spiritual people at our core and that we need each other and all of creation.

To be hospitable requires openness and receptivity of thought in order to grow, develop and be promoted. By necessity it involves spiritual, personal and physical preparation. Hearts must be open and waiting to receive spirit infused messages. It will require our willingness to move out of our comfort zones and to incorporate other spiritual values that are tightly woven together that create the fabric of our lives in community.

Hospitality will challenge previous social norms and reveal something about the cohesiveness of the larger community. Unpleasant truths will be revealed about ourselves. How do we meet the challenges presented by the ego's cry for significance when it shows up in disagreements, competitiveness, comparative evaluations of each other and the dehumanizing ethos that is ingrained in the culture?

What does it take to build a hospitable community that makes room at the table for everyone and which is inclusive of all life? What methods are available to cultivate spiritual consciousness and calm the internal chatter and discover or rediscover our spiritual centers? How do we work with our own resistance when we feel pushed out of our comfort zones? Nepo reflects that what we build visibly in the world depends on what we build visibly between us.

Self-knowledge is part of the ultimate secret as those spiritual qualities and values are being cultivated and instilled as a moral influence in our lives. The values, principled attitudes and behaviors flow from "Love our neighbor as our self." This is the underlying spiritual impetus for hospitality. The test for each member is to practice these behaviors that will lead to being hospitable persons.

- Open
- Receptive
- Nurturing love
- Tangible generosity of spirit
- Confidently comfortable
- Cooperative charitableness
- Unsparing graciousness
- Ungrudging sincerity
- All-inclusive
- Mutual respect
- Ethic of reciprocity
- Friendly
- Interdependent co-operation
- Sacred listening
- Empathy
- Peaceful resolve
- Mindful response
- Respect
- Grateful heart
- Tangible state of tranquility
- Benevolence
- Polite

What happens when we offer a safe haven to others? In her article Promoting Hospitality as a Way of Life by Linn Moffett, she discusses the outcomes of promoting a hospitable environment. Individuals are able to conquer their fears when offered a safe haven. Those who have individual and generational trauma are offered a counter to those experiences. This brings great relief to suffering. Both the giver and the receiver are considered blessed. Individuals are inspired to work for each other's common good and it makes it easier to be hospitable toward those we are not close to. The definition of home is reframed and redefined to be that sacred place called spiritual consciousness. Within this nurturing atmosphere the cohesiveness of the larger community is revealed.

The outcomes allow individuals to have the capacity to shift the shape of an individual's story and to connect with others through the heart and to mend brokenness. We can pay attention to damaged spirits and serve as guides to the dispirited and become vehicles for their restoration. "Left to our own natures, the human community never holds back its light and warmth or its care and innate impulse to build and repair" according to Nepo. By making the effort to place soul and spirit at the center their values and concerns shifted significantly.

The values, attitudes and behaviors associated with hospitality are especially needed when there is conflict in the community or when members have been criticized, rejected, or physically or emotionally harmed. Finding ways to reconcile our disagreements and conflicts and getting them into the open allows us to learn from them, where the problem might be worked through and trust built.

Community requires a listening with joy, openness, loyalty, and presence to Spirit's dealing within each person. For those in this web of relationship called community we have friends for the soul. We seek the best for each other and expose ourselves to others, to learn to be made over by it while seeking the reality of God in our lives. The impulse to share is at the heart of all community. For sharing what we know and what we hold helps to knit us into a web of relationship with each other.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

### **Virtues for Community**

- Resistance in our life with Spirit tells us that we are being drawn to a place of growth that a part of us fears. How do you show hospitality to the part of us that fears changes we may have to make in ourselves? How do we work with resistance when we feel pushed out of our comfort zone?
- Hospitality was considered a sacred are that points to providing a sacred place for shelter, sustenance and healing. Emotional competence and affective maturity allows us to resolve or integrate the unconscious aspects of our personalities leading to internal reformation to discover love, compassion and empathy. How do we wrestle with our stories revealing ourselves to ourselves, unmasking our false self to discover the common meeting ground to create a hospitable community?

**INTROUCTION TO HANDOUT BY CAROLYN SAARNI  
TAKEN FROM JOHN MARK FALKENHAIN HOW WE LOVE**

There are foundational skills for affective maturity that support and hold accountable those who choose to live with or associate with a religious community through a vow of fidelity. Emotional intelligence encompasses abilities to know and understand one's affective or emotional experiences. With affective maturity one possesses the ability to communicate with others, serenity of spirit, compassion for those suffering, love for the truth, and a correspondence between actions and words.

Signs of affective maturity are prudence, vigilance over body and spirit, compassion, care for others, ability to express and acknowledge emotions, capacity for esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships.

Signs of affective immaturity are poor boundaries, failure to empathize, selfishness, emotional coldness and poorly controlled temper. These are detrimental to community.

Carolyn Saarni, list 8 skills associated with "emotional competence." She arranges them from basic level skills to higher level functioning.

## **EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE AND AFFECTIVE MATURITY NECESSARY FOR COMMUNAL LIFE**

### **What is the idea of emotional competence?**

Emotional competence refers to an important set of personal and social skills for identifying, interpreting, and constructively responding to emotions in oneself and others. The term implies ease in getting along with others and determines one's ability to lead and express effectively and successfully.

1. Awareness of one's emotional state, including the possibility that one is experiencing multiple emotions, and at even more mature levels awareness that one might also not be consciously aware of one's feelings due to unconscious dynamics or selective attention.
2. Ability to discern other's emotions, based on situational and expressive cues that have some degree of cultural consensus as to their emotional meaning.
3. Ability to use the vocabulary of emotion and expression terms commonly available in one's (sub-culture) and at more mature levels to acquire cultural scripts that link emotion and social roles.
4. Capacity for empathic and sympathetic involvement in other's emotional experiences.
5. Ability to realize that inner emotional states need not correspond to outer expression, both in oneself and in others, and at a more mature levels the ability to understand that one's emotional-expressive behavior may impact on another and to take into account in one's self-preservation strategies.
6. Capacity for adaptive coping with aversive or distressing emotions by using self-regulatory strategies that ameliorate the intensity or temporal duration of such emotional states (e.g. "stress hardiness")
7. Awareness that the structure or nature of relationships is in part defined by both the degree of emotional immediacy or genuineness of expressive display and by the degree of reciprocity or symmetry within the relationship: e.g. mature intimacy is in part defined by mutual or reciprocal sharing of genuine emotions, whereas a parent-child relationship may have asymmetric sharing of genuine emotions.
8. Capacity for emotional self-efficacy: The individual views her or himself as feeling, overall. The way he or she wants to feel. That is, emotional self-efficacy means that one accepts one's emotional experience, whether unique and eccentric or culturally conventional, and this acceptance is in alignment with the individual's belief about what constitutes desirable emotional "balance." In essence, one is living in accord with one's personal theory of emotions when one demonstrates emotional self-efficacy that is integrated with one's moral sense.

### **A Skill-based Model of Emotional Competence: A Developmental Perspective by Carolyn Saarni, Ph.D**



## Behaviors Detrimental to Community Life

There are individual traits and behaviors that cause distress in others and may make a person unsuitable for communal life. These traits and behavior may have developed at a very young age as a result of trauma and stress. They are survival responses. In order to change negative responses that no longer suit in one's current situation, an individual must be willing to see themselves, the impact of their behaviors on others and the discord brought into communal living. Only then, will they be able to discover the motivation to change.

### Behaviors

- Having a constant need for positive or negative attention-always wanting to be the center of attention
- Manipulating people and situations
- Playing the victim in every situation
- Failing to own their feelings-emotional lability
- Failing to listen to others
- Creating drama-exaggerating situations
- One-uping
- Gaslighting – seeing everyone else as crazy
- Lying, omitting the truth, dishonesty, deceitful
- Collecting of injustices- won't let go of the past
- Keeping you guessing about which version of them you'll meet
- Failing to apologize or own mistakes
- Ignoring people's boundaries
- Invading other's personal space
- Failing to respect other's time
- Demanding they be accommodated
- Acting overprotective or smothering
- Testing relationships
- Changing personality and value depending on who they are around
- Having compulsive disorders like ATOD, OCD or paranoid about privacy
- Using money to control
- Belittling others and destroying reputations of someone who crosses them
- Bullying
- Weaponizing incompetence – pretending they are clueless when confronted
- Leeching off of others
- Pushing their beliefs as the only correct ones
- Expecting loyalty but are not loyal in return
- Disappearing or ghosting you when you no longer serve their needs and wants.
- Having an over-inflated ego.

If we are being honest with ourselves we will find some of these traits in ourselves and varying points of our spiritual journeys. Every so often, in a moment of truth, we realize the conflict between our behaviors and our deeper knowledge. It is important at those times to ask ourselves: Who have I become? This

question keeps you noticing how you are creating yourself. Are the core principles, that we have agreed to follow, discernable in my actions? Am I helping to create the community we have envisioned? This is the purpose of Examen.

St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, knew this about us as human beings. He knew that we can become distracted by and attached to many things in life. He also knew that, while some of our distractions can be life-giving, most tend to lead away from our best sense of ourselves and God, and can actually interfere in our deepening relationship with God. Ignatius had the wisdom and insight to see that God, as creator of all, exists in all and that in the very human midst of our distracted living, we may miss the love, power, teaching and substance of God in our day.

To help us become more present and disciplined to the experience of God in everyday living, and to encourage us to live more consciously in and of the presence of God in our daily lives, Ignatius gifted us with what he called “the most important prayer” that we could do, the daily Examination of Consciousness or the daily Examen. In the Examen, we have an opportunity to spend a few moments reviewing our day, paying special attention to the moments we most felt God’s presence with us, and conversely, becoming aware of the times when we felt separated from God.

The Examen further invites us to practice living in gratitude as we are asked to remember those people, situations and events in our day for which we are most grateful, and also to ask special blessing and prayer for those hopes and concerns in our hearts. Lastly, the Examen reminds us that each day we may ask forgiveness for any and all transgressions in which we feel we did not follow the best path that God offers to us in our words, thoughts or deeds.

By recognizing our need for forgiveness and God’s desire to forgive us through this daily examination of consciousness, the power and freedom of living in ongoing redemption becomes possible. Our spiritual path becomes a dynamic experience of conscious living based on our relationship with God. It is each person’s responsibility to acknowledge and do address these detrimental behaviors.

There are those individuals with a multiplicity of these traits and behaviors that may indicate a personality disorders and/or mental health diagnosis. We need to recognize that some of these diagnosis result in particular destructive behavior in community and are not easily amenable to change. This is especially true when feedback is deflected or just plain rejected. These individuals have no insight into themselves. It doesn’t matter what the label is on the behavior. We still have to deal with the behaviors. This is often a deeply wounded individual who may be constitutionally unable to bring significant change to their behaviors.

The essence of inner work in spirituality is to come to self-knowledge, to allow ourselves to be revealed to ourselves. It is this inner journey where we learn of compassion and empathy for ourselves and others. It is where we experience guilt and shame. Failure early in life because of trauma and developing of these traits as a means of self-protection can make one incapable of having compassion, empathy, shame and guilt which is often used as the motivation for change. It is great love and suffering that draws us to the great spiritual questions of our lives.

A person **entering religious life or** living in a community must be capable of traveling to these inner realms. It is here that true humility is discovered. Humility allows us to “stand in the truth” acknowledging our strengths, weaknesses, faults and gifts. Without empathy, compassion and humility true heart to heart relationships with others, much less the divine, is impossible. Unfortunately, these wounded individuals see people as extensions of themselves who have no needs or wants of their own. These individuals are stuck in an internal space, a created world, where they have control. They cannot be real with themselves.

These truly wounded individuals may live among us and our only Christian response is charity. That doesn't mean we accept the behavior or that we don't have the obligation to protect ourselves and others from the impact. Sometimes as Christians we get caught between what we think is real Christian charity but which is really enabling. People with these toxic traits will use your enabling and your compassion and empathy to control you. Since we value empathy and compassion and reaching out to the wounded, we are susceptible to people who will use those values against us.

Ken Wilber in his book *No Boundaries* uses a phrase that some find offensive to describe enabling “Idiot compassion.” Because of his words don't overlook the message he is trying to convey. He tells us to look at the long-term impact of enabling that only encourages this behavior not only to continue but to strengthen. You cannot help someone who believes they do not need help because they have projected their woundedness onto others. Your self-care is what protects your psyche and leaves you free.

**Shutting down these toxic behaviors consist in a number of strategies.**

- When speaking with these individuals call them by their name. It gives them a clear message that you are not afraid of them. Use their name often in the conversation. They control others through fear.
- Be a blank slate in terms of your emotional response when speaking with them. They lack insight into themselves but they clearly read other people's emotions in order to manipulate and gaslight them.
- Stick to the subject when having a conversation with them. Their goal in a conversation is to look for information to hurt you and put you in your place below them.
- Don't sink to their level and give as good as you get. They are pushing your buttons to get a response. They make no attempt to understand your position or feelings.
- Never take responsibility for their emotions.
- When they are attacking you, don't speak to them. They are trying to use you as a punching bag to get you back in line.
- Don't allow them to deceive you. Always fact check. They lie in order to feed their entitlement. Recognize that you are being deceived. They often contradict themselves. You have a feeling that things just don't add up. Call them out on their deception. Write things down. Share information with others. Keep things transparent. Document! Document! Document!

- Say no clearly to their demands. Don't let them be the center of your universe. Don't hedge or debate. Give your no clearly in a calm and gentle way. They will make it uncomfortable when you say no. They will try to wear you down and pressure you to doing what they want. You cannot reason with them. If you give in, you feed their ego and their sense of superiority.

As Christians, Followers of the Way, we have been given a pattern of living. Clearly, , we are told to "put on the mind of Christ." That spirit we incorporate into our living is LOVE. Agape is the highest form of love, charity toward the other. It is a form of love that is selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional. It is the love that is of God. It is not a sappy or sentimental surface type of feeling. It is a love that expresses the very nature of the divine who we try to imitate. God loves extends to even the unlovable. Divine love is unmerited and graciously merciful. For Christians and those in religious life it flows from an act of will. We pray for the grace.

In addressing behaviors in an individual that are detrimental to communal life, discerning our intent for using the strategies comes into play. After prayer and reflection am I convinced that such an action is the only honest, loving response? Remember, as long as the Spirit of love remains within, we are on the right path. When that Spirit is extinguished and we are motivated by anger and resentment, we are choosing against agape. The Christian response is wrapped in love, a love that cannot be manipulated by the other to the detriment of communal life.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

### **Detrimental; Behaviors**

- When you reach that moment of truth and realize there is a conflict between your behaviors and the deeper knowledge, how will you allow yourself to own your material and address the behaviors that are detrimental to community?
- The Examen was intended to help us examine when we felt God's presence and conversely when we felt separated from God. We are invited to live in gratitude and to ask forgiveness when we didn't follow the best path. How does the Examen help us live a dynamic experience of conscious living based on our own relationship with God?
- "Putting on the mind of Christ" gets challenged when we are dealing with individuals who have behavior detriment to community life. How is enabling not a compassionate response and leads to further destruction of the foundations of community?

## Our Prophetic Servant's Mission

Catherine of Siena said; "Speak the truth in a million voices. It is silence that kills." Thus arises the need for the prophetic voice among us. Through compassion, Followers of the Way, see the world through different eyes. The call of Spirit in the depths of souls is to serve, to tell the truth, to protect the disenfranchised, to return dignity to those deprived by those in power. The call from Spirit is always to serve the world in some capacity. Parker Palmer in his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, writes; "the soul is generous and takes in the needs of the world. The soul is wise; it suffers without shutting down; it engages the world in ways that keep opening our hearts."

Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar, highlights for us what God had in mind in his book *Journey to the Common Good*. He describes the slavery in Egypt as what "happens because the strong ones work a monopoly over the weak ones, and eventually exercise control over their bodies. Not only that; in the end the peasants, now become slaves, and are grateful for their status." The outcome is that those living under this system have no time or energy for the common good. Exploitative practices used by Pharaoh preclude the common good. All groups within the system experience anxiety and fear. Slaves are exploited and the leaders of Egypt live in fear and are on guard against rebellion and loss of labor force.

The role of the prophet is to expose the evils and oppression of our day. Prophets provide a moral and spiritual compass to bring justice to the community and to promote systemic change. They often use satire, parody or even abrasive language in their exhortations. They speak to the culture when it is off course and call for a return to God's ways. We are a people walking together with the Lord on the road of history. As people with a prophetic mission, in the words of John XXIII, we are "bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel."

The Hopi Nation understood the need for observance of the dynamics of the community, thus the role of the Sacred Clowns, the Koshare. The Koshare after observing the people and their behaviors, imitated and depicted the behaviors that were unacceptable and detrimental to community life. They may decide to target any member of the audience during one of their performances. Nobody was safe from being ridiculed or included. The function of the Sacred Clowns served to protect the cultural behavioral customs. The people of the Pueblo both revered and feared them. Those who witnessed the performance were expected to address their personal behaviors that brought disharmony to the community.

What would the Sacred Clowns of the Hopi expose about the "signs of the times" in our culture? Who do we cast out in our communities? Who faces dehumanization and degradation? Who do we exploit? Whose behavior would they imitate for them to see the errors of their ways? These are not easy questions to unwrap. There is however, a responsibility born of faith, for those of us in privileged positions to speak up. We hear Catherine of Siena's words reminding us that "silence kills."

Nepo describes the meaning of the word idiot which comes from the “Greek idiotes, means a citizen not involved with their community, a person who doesn’t care about others. The word idios refers to a person collapsed into themselves. Being an idiot was a sorrowful condition, not a stupid one. It implies a walking state of disconnection and isolation.” As Christians we believe in the Beatitudes and our responsibilities to each other.

Our founder, Bishop Emmanuel von Ketteler, in his speech, A Catholic View of the Economy: Excerpt from Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler’s The Labor Question and Christianity” believed; “Practicing Christian love through works of Christian mercy has always been a prominent part of the life of the Christian Church. From this has emanated that magnificent solicitude for all types of human distress. Every question concerned with remedying that distress is therefore essentially a Christian, a religious question, in which the Church and all its living members should participate most fervently.”

He further adds: “One wants to raise the “moral and economic condition of the working class” and to make certain proposals to this end. What can be more important than knowing how these proposals stand in relationship to Christianity, [knowing] whether we agree with them, may support them or not, [knowing] what special methods Christianity possesses for the moral and economic elevation of the working class? These are honest questions that are intimately connected with the Christian religion, ones that I, as a Christian, and even as a bishop, feel called upon to judge.”

Human cries evoke God’s divine resolve and raises up a human agent who can act for the sake of the common good to teach a new story and new freedom. Like Ketteler, the life of Simone Weil and see her dedication to the poor and oppressed as she shared and wrote concerning the burdens she shared with the women and men forced to endure the rigors of the assembly lines, the poverty of the unemployed and the refugees. We see her refusal to eat more than the people of France were given when rationing was strict and food supplies were low. Simone “recognized that love and goodness did not have to be defeated even by affliction, that even in the midst of soul-destroying suffering, God could be present.”

Dorothy Day stood for the rights of workers even when it meant confronting a cardinal of the church. Edith Stein raised the consciousness of women’s contributions to a civilized world amid the Nazi horror. Hildegard wrote scathing letters to the hierarchy, including a pope, about their failures to provide the necessary leadership. She stood courageously against a bishop even though for her and her community it led to interdiction. Martin Luther King faced the culture’s racist behaviors knowing his life might be the price. These are only few of the prophetic leaders who have served us by their willingness to not be silent.

Since we, as individuals, create and sustain our society, we are responsible to a degree for the dark side of our culture. There is a loneliness that comes from facing the currents of our day. The dividedness or harmony of an individual often reflects or mirrors the dividedness or harmony of the society they live in. p. 174 Nepo society they live in. p. 174 Nepo

There is a value in understanding alienation as the separation of people from aspects of their human nature, such as one’s sense of self and one’s innate regard for others. Emily Durkheim, a French Sociologist, articulated the concept of alienation (anomie) when he observed that values regarding how

people should treat each other were breaking down. With less attention focused on relationships, people didn't know, what to expect from one another. As societies become more complex, people are no longer tied to one another and social bonds become impersonal. Periods of drastic social disruption bring about greater alienation and higher rates of crime, suicide and deviance....type of social suicide...the need to repair and reanimate our human nature more than ever. P.174-5 Nepo

It's the personal that always sparks the communal. It's the fact that someone we loved drowned in that river that awakens our commitment to do something about it. Compassion strengthens everyone involved. Then we're moved to hold an injured person, failing dream, or fading tradition like a broken plate, pressing the pieces together until the bond sets. In essence, holding the brokenness in people until the bond sets is the atom of all community action. P.. 186 Nepo

Rolheiser says that community is the church and it is a particular kind of community, an apostolic one. There are some groups that we deliberately choose to enter, like being called to religious life, and there are other groups that just happen and we discover ourselves increasingly within Spirit. Consciously and unconsciously, we find ourselves participating in community, a place of self-transformation and how our individual journeys impact and serve the world. Community life contributes both to our personal growth and to the effectiveness of our apostolate. The love of our sisters in community is the reassuring sign of God's love for us; it encourages us to risk ourselves in the works of the apostolate and to love according to Gospel values.

To be an apostolic community, church, is not necessarily to be with others with whom we are emotionally, ideologically, and otherwise compatible. Rather it is to stand, shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand, precisely with people who are very different from ourselves and, with them, hear a common word, say a common creed, share a common bread, and offer a mutual forgiveness so as, in that way, to bridge our differences and become a common heart. Church is not about a few like-minded persons getting together for mutual support; it is about millions and millions of different kinds of persons transcending their difference so as to become a community beyond temperament, race, ideology, gender, language, and background. P.115 Rolheiser Centrism of any kind can hinder our understanding of others and the world around us. It leads to fundamentalism and exclusion.

If we have the gift of consciousness: to be constantly aware of the common good we are a part of and which we work toward enlivening. What we build visibly in the world depends on what we build invisibly between us. Weaving knowledge and practice to heal, maintaining a safe, public place where truth can be voiced, and creating deep personal connection in order to build together—these are tools that have no visible handles. Yet these forms of kinship are necessary if there's to be substance in our everyday existence. P. 189 Nepo

Peter Block in his book, *Community-The Structure of Belonging* talks about the pain of avoidable political suffering. "Some of which is visible: poverty, homelessness, hunger, violence, the diaspora of those unable to return to their homelands, and deteriorated housing projects, or a neighborhood in distress." This kind of suffering seen by prophetic voices in the past grows out of human choice about the

distribution of power and control. Block believes that “political suffering will decrease as we collectively choose to be together in a way that creates a space for something new to occur.”

If there is any chance of restoring humanity, we must take the blinders from our eyes and find and open the stoppages that keep us from noticing “the signs of the times” and where a prophetic voice needs to be raised. I am again reminded of the words of Nepo, what we build visibly in the world depends on what we build invisibly between us.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

### **Service**

- How do you define service as a ministry?
- Far more often we serve by who we are and not what we know. What do you bring to your service?
- Do you see service as mutual between giver and receiver? Explain
- Lamed-Vov: God tells us that he will allow the world to continue as long as at any given time there is a minimum of 36 good people in the human race. People who are capable of responding to the suffering that is part of the human condition. If at any time, that there are fewer than 36 such people alive, the world will come to an end. The Lamed-Vovniks themselves do not know for sure the role they have in the continuation of the world, and no one else knows either. They respond to suffering because the suffering of others touches them and matters to them. They respond to all suffering with compassion. Without compassion, the world cannot continue. Reflect on the Lamed Vov and to the relationship of service.
- How is service connected to a prophetic voice? How does this relate to the common good?
- How does the ministry of service confront the core values of our culture that values mastery and control, and cultivates self-sufficiency, competence and independence?
- Put your own mask on first before you try to help the person next to you. How will you keep yourself from being depleted in your life of service?



**Resources used for this document. This document is not for distribution and only for internal use.  
Individual attributions are not always noted.**

- More Together Than Alone by Mark Nepo
- Community: The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block
- To Know As We Are Known by Parker Palmer
- Restless Hearts by Ronald Rohlheiser
- Everything Belongs by Richard Rohr
- Come Holy Spirit by Leonardo Boff
- The New Age of Spirit by Phyllis Tickle
- The Great Emergence by Phyllis Tickle
- Emergent Christianity by Phyllis Tickle
- The Four-fold Way by Angeles Arriens
- Open-Mind, Open Heart and Invitation to Love by Thomas Keating
- Dark Night of the Soul by John of the Cross
- Constitution of the Congregations of the Sisters of Divine Providence
- Promoting Hospitality as a Way of Life by Linn Moffett
- How does the work of the Catholic Bishop of Mainz, Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century still influence many aspects of life in Germany today? by Sr. Clara Kreis
- Twelve Steps to Compassion by Karen Armstrong

## **THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM**

Two traveling Angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead they gave the two angels a small space in a cold basement. They made their beds on a hard, cold, and damp floor. The elder angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. The younger angel asked why. The elder angel said "Things aren't always what they seem."

The following night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the farmer and his wife let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. When the sun came up the following morning, the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow whose milk had been their sole income lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the elder angel how could you have let this happen.

The first man had everything, yet you helped him, she accused. The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die. The elder angel said; "Things aren't always what they seem." When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he would not find it. Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for the farmer's wife, so I gave him the cow instead. The elder said; "Things aren't always what they seem." Sometimes that is exactly what happens when things do not turn out the way they should. If you have faith, you just need to trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You might not know it until sometime later.

# DISCERNMENT

## Steps in the Ignatian Method of Discernment

Place in your mind's eye the things on which you wish to make a choice.

- *Have a concise statement of what is being discerned.*

Ask God to move your will and reveal to your spirit what you should do best to promote His praise and glory.

- *Listen: Open your heart to God by being inwardly still and receptive to what God is showing you.*
- *Disclose: Reveal yourself in prayer, just as you are.*
- *Share: Allow the life of the Lord to become deeply connected to your own by absorbing God's word and by sharing in the events of Christ's living, dying and rising.*
- *Reflect: Deepen your experience of God by becoming more and more aware of the ways in which God meets you in your daily life.*
- *Give: Free give to others the gifts you have received; sharing God's love and spreading God's message of love.*

Have as your aim the end for which you were created, praise of God and the salvation of your soul. Remain indifferent and free of inordinate attachments (like the equalizing scales of balance).

- *Indifference is the absence of compulsion toward one thing or another; no special liking or dislike of something. In modern terms this is called "inner freedom."*
- *When the process has worked well and the inner struggle of oscillation is over, peaceful and quiet feelings inhabit the soul.*

Use your reason to weigh the many advantages that would accrue to you. Consider the disadvantageous and dangers it might hold for you.

- *Reflect on the situation.*
- *Look for information.*
- *Consult people you see as experts.*
- *Collect and file away data on the situation you are considering.*
- *Analyze and synthesize.*

Weigh and examine then consider which alternative appears more reasonable-using strong judgment of reason.

- *Identify what seems like a reasonable choice.*
- *Weigh the option according to your values of your faith.*
- *Present the conclusion of our intellect to your heart. "What is possible, here and now, for me?" Heart is often the last word.*

After decision has been made, turn in diligence to prayer in the presence of God and offer that choice that God may accept or confirm it.

- *Take time and let the decision sink in.*
- *Meditate, contemplate and ruminate with it and about it.*
- *Hear the echo of its impact at the very bottom of your heart.*
- *If Spirit indicates agreement, you are in tune with one another, and have decided together God's will.*

## **Individual Discernment Process before Request to Make a Vow of Fidelity to the Sisters of Divine Providence of the Marie de la Roche Province**

The Directives of the Sisters of Divine Providence and of the Way of Life of the Amici Cordis says: “We strive to cultivate the inner silence, the contemplative attitude and the disciplined spirit that, in the midst of activity, make us sensitive and responsive to God’s action in our lives.” We do this through a process of discernment with a spiritual director.

The word discernment comes from a Latin verb meaning to separate, to distinguish accurately one object from another. The purpose is to decide which movements are of the spirit of God and which are not, choosing the voice to follow.

Place in your mind’s eye the things on which you wish to make a choice.

- *Have a concise statement of what is being discerned.*

Ask God to move your will and reveal to your spirit what you should do best to promote God’s praise and glory.

- *Listen: Open your heart to God by being inwardly still and receptive to what God is showing you.*
- *Disclose: Reveal yourself in prayer, just as you are.*
- *Share: Allow the life of the Lord to become deeply connected to your own by absorbing God’s word and by sharing in the events of Christ’s living, dying and rising.*
- *Reflect: Deepen your experience of God by becoming more and more aware of the ways in which God meets you in your daily life.*
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Have as your aim the end for which you were created, praise of God and the salvation of your soul. Remain indifferent to and free of inordinate attachments (like the equalizing scales of balance).

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- *When the process has worked well and the inner struggle of oscillation is over, peaceful and quiet feelings inhabit the soul.*

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- If Spirit indicates agreement, you are in tune with one another, and have decided together God's will.

## **PREPARATION FOR A COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT FOR TAKING A VOW OF FIDELITY AS AN AMICI CORDIS TO THE SISTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

In preparation for communal discernment ask each focus person for a list of any persons he or she especially wants to be a part of this discernment. *(These individuals chosen by the candidate should have personal knowledge, wisdom, groundedness, trust and openness, no personal biases. Generally there are 3-5 participants from different backgrounds, ages and relationships.)* Members of the Amici Cordis Committee will also participate.

The candidate is asked to reflect on the following areas:

- a recounting of relevant background factors that may bear on the their choice to take a vow of fidelity;
- an exploration of any issues, positive or negative, that may arise as a result of this choice.

The individuals participating in the communal discernment are asked to read the following material:

- The Amici Cordis Way of Life
- The Request Form for Making a Vow of Fidelity

The meeting begins when the candidate gives a brief summary of their reasons for taking this step. Then the other members in attendance may speak—but everything they say is governed by one rule, a simple rule -- and yet one that most people find difficult and demanding: members are forbidden to speak to the candidate in any way except to ask honest, open questions. This means absolutely no advice and no amateur psychoanalysis. Nothing is allowed except real questions, honest and open questions, questions that will help the focus person and the Amici Cordis Committee to get clarity around the focus person's readiness to make a vow of fidelity.

What is an honest, open question? It is important to reflect on this, since we are so skilled at asking questions that are advice or analysis in disguise. The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it; e.g., "Did you ever feel like this before?" There are other guidelines for good questioning. Try not to get ahead of the focus person's language; e.g., "What did you mean when you said 'frustrated'?" is a good question, but "Didn't you feel angry?" is not. Ask questions aimed at helping the candidate rather than at satisfying your curiosity. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with background considerations and rationale—which make the question into a speech. Trust your intuition in asking questions.

Normally, the candidate responds to the questions as they are asked, in the presence of the group, and those responses generate more, and deeper, questions. Though the responses should be full, they should not be terribly long. Resist the temptation to tell your life story in response to every question! It is important that there be time for more and more questions and responses, thus deepening the process for everyone. The more often a candidate is willing to answer aloud, the more material the person—and the committee—will have to work with.

The discernment must not become a grilling or cross-examination. The pace of the questioning is crucial—it should be relaxed, gentle, humane. A machine-gun volley of questions makes reflection impossible and leaves the focus person feeling attacked rather than evoked. Do not be afraid of silence in the group—trust it and treasure it. If silence falls, it does not mean that nothing is happening or that the process has broken down. It may well mean that the most important thing of all is happening: new insights are emerging from within people, from their deepest sources of guidance.

From beginning to end of the discernment, it is important that everyone work hard to remain totally attentive to the focus person and his or her needs. This means suspending the normal rules of social gathering—no chitchat, no responding to other people’s questions or to the focus person’s answers, no joking to break the tension, no noisy and nervous laughter. We are simply to surround the focus person with quiet, loving space, resisting even the temptation to comfort or reassure or encourage this person, but simply being present with our attention and our questions and our care. If a member of the communal discernment damages this ambiance with advice, leading questions, or rapid-fire inquisition, other members, including the focus person, have the right to remind the offender of the rules—and the offender is not at liberty to mount a defense or argue the point. This communal discernment is for the sake of clarity for all involved. Egos need to recede.

The communal discernment should run for the full time allotted. Don’t end early for fear that the group has “run out of questions”—patient waiting will be rewarded with deeper questions than have yet been asked. About fifteen minutes before the end of the meeting invite committee members to mirror back what they have heard the focus person saying. Mirroring simply means exactly what the word suggests: reflecting the candidate’s language, and body language included. This gives him or her a chance to say, “Yes, that’s me” or “No, that’s not,” though no response is required. In the final five minutes of the meeting, the facilitator should invite members to celebrate and affirm the focus person and his or her strengths.

## COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT FOR A REQUEST TO MAKE A VOW OF FIDELITY TO THE SISTERS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE OF THE MARIE DE LA ROCHE PROVINCE

“When, after discernment, the candidate and the Community determine readiness for the life as Amici Cordis, the individual writes a request to the Provincial Director for admission. After consultation with the appropriate Community members and with the consent of the Provincial Council, the provincial may admit the individual to take the Vow of Fidelity to the Province.”  
(Amici Cordis Way of Life)

### Opening Ritual

We begin this discernment with ritual. Ritual allows us to attach ourselves to the sacred and to permit us to see and feel the holy.

*Lighting the candle*, we make this place sacred by separating it from the ordinary world. By lighting this candle, we honor the sacred source of life. To speak and listen to the creative source in these sacred grounds, we must be in the appropriate frame of mind, receptive to the promptings of Spirit.

The *incensing ritual* separates us from every outside influence outside this circle: from worries, pain, antagonisms, from ordinary fears of daily life, from all except the feelings of the spirit within the circle and within each of us.

Today we are here to discern with \_\_\_\_\_ whether God is calling her/him to life as an Amici Cordis with the Sisters of Divine Providence of the Marie de la Roche Province.

Enter into a silent time of prayer seeking wisdom and letting go of preconceived ideas. Recall the phrase, “Be still and know I am God.” Ask for radical freedom, generosity, patience and deep spirituality. Cultivate an attitude of “holy indifference” until the Spirit reveals a direction.



### **Engage in Thoughtful Reflection on the Information Gathered in this Process**

The focus person starts by giving a brief summary by stating their reasons for wanting to take this step.

Members of the Communal Discernment:

- Ask questions that are simple, honest, open and non-directive.
- Look for signs of God. Pay attention to where God seems to be breaking through with love, joy, or compassion.
- Allow for times of silence and prayerful reflection.
- Listen carefully to each other.
- Give others the opportunity to ask questions.

This process continues until the group is satisfied that they have enough information.

### **Prayerful Reflection and Mirroring**

Members of the group spend 15 minutes in prayerful reflection on what they have heard. The members are now given the opportunity to mirror back to the focus person what they have heard. The focus person is given the chance to say, “yes, that’s me” or “No, that’s not,” though no response is required.

### **Affirming the Focus Person’s Strength**

Members of the group have the opportunity to affirm the strength and courage of the focus person and their willingness to a part of this discernment.

### **Closing Ritual**

The facilitator thanks everyone for their participation and formally closes the discernment.

## Participant Training for a Communal Discernment for an Amici Cordis

### Requesting to Make a Vow of Fidelity

This process of discernment is based on the evocative method for spiritual direction and the Clearness Committee for discernment in the Quaker Tradition. These methods were developed to assist an individual to find clarity around important questions regarding their life's journey. This discernment process is not about giving advice, but rather to help create the conditions for the individual to discover their own inner truth about their decision to make a vow of fidelity.

You have been asked to participate by \_\_\_\_\_ as he/she is deciding to take on this important step around a commitment as an Amici Cordis. This individual believes you have the personal knowledge, wisdom, groundedness, trust and openness with the capacity for deep listening to participate in this discernment. It is important to understand that confidentiality is of the utmost. You are not free to share the content of this discernment. You are also not free to discuss it in the future with the individual requesting this process.

\_\_\_\_\_ will present to you at the beginning of this process a concise statement of where they are at this point in their personal discernment. They will recount relevant background material that may bear on their present decision-making process. This will be followed by a period of silence to allow you, the participant the opportunity to reflect on the clarifying questions of a factual nature you may want to ask.

As a participant you may take notes to enhance your attentiveness but at the end of the discernment these notes will be gathered and destroyed.

Everything you say is governed by one simple rule that most people find difficult and demanding. You are forbidden to speak in any way except to as honest, open question. This means no advice giving and no amateur psychoanalysis. Nothing is allowed except open, honest questions that help \_\_\_\_\_ to hear his/her own inner truth. It is assisting this individual and the participants to "hear each other into a deeper speech" that allows insight.

You begin by being open to the invitation of your own inner teacher, inviting questions to bubble up from deep inside. Every time you start thinking about and having questions come from your mind, return quietly, continuing to listen to your own inner depths and trust that questions will come.

What is an open, honest question? It begins with intuition, presence and a spiritual discipline to be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are so skilled at asking questions that are advice or analysis in disguise.

- "Have you ever thought that it might be your mother's fault?"
- "Why don't you.....?"

The best single mark of an open, honest question is that the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it. Those are honest, open questions because I can't possibly be sitting there thinking, "I know the right answer to this question, and I sure hope you give it to me."

Open-ended questions start with “Why?” “How?” and “What?” They encourage a full answer, rather than the simple “yes” or “no” response that is usually given to a closed-ended question.

Not only are these questions designed to elicit a longer and more detailed response, but they, likewise, ask the respondent to take extra time to consider what is being asked of them and what they should say. Think of it this way; open-ended questions are for gathering insights rather than just answers.

While “why” questions are open-ended, they can often trigger a defensive answer from the respondent. For example “Why did you do that?” sounds accusatory, whereas “What did you use as the basis of your decision?” does not. *What does intentional mean to you?*

- *If you pause, close your eyes, and ask the wise woman who lives inside you to show you the way forward, what does she have to say?*
- *What surprises you? What moves or touches you about this? What inspires you?*
- What image comes to mind as you think about this situation?
- How are you feeling as you relate this story?
- What color would this situation be?
- What would the opposite be...?
- How would this be different if...?
- Will you say more about (a particular word, phrase, image)...
- Is there another aspect...?
- What advice might a wise friend give. . .?
- What metaphor describes what you are feeling or experiencing?
- What led you to say what you just said?
- How might that choice play out in your life?

Reminders:

- Try not to get ahead of \_\_\_\_\_ language. “What did you mean when you said frustrated?” is a good question, but “Didn’t you feel angry?” is not.
- Ask questions that help rather than satisfy your curiosity.
- Ask questions that are brief and to the point...not a speech.
- Ask questions that go to the person as well as the issue—for example, questions about feelings as well as about facts.
- Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if your instinct seems off the wall; e.g. “What color comes to mind as you think about making this vow of fidelity?” If the question feels insistent, ask it.

Normally, the person responds to the questions that are asked in the presence of the group, and those responses generate more and deeper questions. Though the responses should be full, the individual should resist the temptation to tell their life story in response to every question. It is important that time

be given for more questions and responses to deepen the process for everyone. The individual maintains the right to set limits on answering some questions aloud and may want to reserve the right to answer in a more private setting.

Remember this is not a grilling session. The pace of questioning is crucial—it should be relaxed, gentle and humane. It leaves time for reflection. Times of silence should be trusted and treasured. Silence may mean that the most important thing of all is happening; new insights are emerging from the deepest source of guidance.

It is important through the process that everyone work hard to remain totally attentive to the \_\_\_\_\_ needs. There is a suspension of normal rules of social gatherings—no chit-chat, no responding to other people's questions or to \_\_\_\_\_ answers, not joking to break the tension, no noisy or nervous laughter. As a group we are simply to surround \_\_\_\_\_ with a quiet, loving space, resisting even the temptation to comfort or reassure or encourage him/her with our attention, questions and care.

If a member of the group damages this ambience with advice, leading questions, or rapid-fire inquisition, other participants, including \_\_\_\_\_, have the right to remind the offender of the rules—the offender is not at liberty to mount a defense. Egos need to recede in this process.

About 15 minutes before the end of the meeting, the facilitator asks \_\_\_\_\_ if he/she wants to suspend "questions only" rule and invite the participants to mirror back what they have heard \_\_\_\_\_ saying. If the person says no, the questions continue. If they say yes, the participants reflect back what they have heard and reflect the language of \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ has the chance to say, "Yes, that's me." Or "No, that's not." though no response is required.

At the end the facilitator asks the participants are there any other questions to make sure nothing is left unspoken that should be offered.

The process ends when there is a general sense or a shift of energy. Questions fall away and the group often becomes silent and more deeply quiet. Sometimes there is just a sensed that the individual asking for the discernment and the group have everything they need.

The facilitator does the following:

After this experience ask: How did it feel to be the focus person? How did it feel to be asking these questions? Were all of the questions honest and open? Which questions were most helpful? A good question to ask is, "What can we hold for you before we see each other again? Are there joys and concerns you want to share with the Circle?"

## **SERVICE**

### **Sponsored Ministries**

#### **Education**

Teaching and sharing the Catholic faith is an important part of the Sisters of Divine Providence's mission. The Community sponsors schools in Pittsburgh and Kingston, MA.

#### **La Roche University**

La Roche University as a College was founded in 1963 by the Sisters of Divine Providence as an independent, private, Catholic college for religious sisters. By 1965, the college admitted its first lay students and conferred degrees on its first six graduates, all Sisters of Divine Providence members. By 1969 male students were admitted to the college and beginning in 1993, the Pacem In Terris program brought students from many countries, mostly developing regions and conflicted regions of the world. La Roche offers over 80 majors and minors at the undergraduate level and nine graduate degree programs.

From its scenic 80-acre campus, La Roche reaches out to students from the United States and other nations, offering the promise of more fruitful lives for individuals and the hope of a better world for us all. In 2019, President Introcaso announced the Pennsylvania Department of Education approved the change in status and name from La Roche College to La Roche University. One thing that has remained constant throughout its history is the spirit that animates the institution. It is the same spirit that has animated the Congregation of Divine Providence since its foundation 174 years ago. It is that spirit that will lead La Roche University for many decades to come.

#### **Providence Heights Alpha School**

Alpha School is a private, Catholic, coeducational school located on the 40-acre campus of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Since 1926, Alpha School has educated children to be independent thinkers, imaginative problem solvers, and caring, compassionate individuals. Voted one of the 25 most innovative Catholic schools in the country, Alpha School provides outstanding instruction in fundamental skills, while encouraging original thinking, intellectual curiosity, moral growth, and creative self-expression. With a student-teacher ratio of 15:1, there is ample opportunity for individual attention and practical classroom experience.

Teaching and sharing the Catholic faith is an important part of Alpha's mission. The school fosters an environment in which faith and Christian values become a living and active part of each school day. Alpha School and the Sisters share a special relationship. Students participate in weekly liturgies in the Providence Heights Chapel. Students are encouraged to incorporate acts of charity and social justice into their school and family life.

## **Sacred Heart Elementary School**

Sacred Heart School of Kingston Massachusetts has been at the forefront of private Catholic Pre-K to 8 education since 1948.

Sacred Heart School, a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Divine Providence, is a private, Catholic, co-educational learning community. The school welcomes students in preschool through grade eight to a respectful community that is academically challenging, and rooted in the Gospel. Students develop critical thinking skills, engage in service to those in need, broaden their awareness of global perspectives, and make God's Providence visible.

## **Retreat Ministry**

### **Kearns Spirituality and Conference Center**

Kearns, located on the Providence Heights property, is a non-denominational ministry offering programs in spirituality and holistic health to anyone searching for a deeper meaning in their lives through a season of events, programs, and classes that are designed to enhance, renew, and revitalize the human spirit. Kearns also hosts many retreats for groups of all faiths.

The Conference Center provides meeting space and hospitality for groups of up to 125 people for meetings and up to 200 people for dining.

The Retreat Center offers 20 double rooms and three suites. A dining room seats 50 with full kitchen or food service available. The Visitation Chapel accommodates 120 people. The grounds offer a Woodland Reflection Trail, a Labyrinth for prayerful walking, a Gazebo and Meditation Garden for quiet meditation, and a spirituality library. In March 2023 was incorporated the Ruah School of Spiritual Direction seeks individuals interested in engaging others in this evocative method of spiritual direction that encourages wisdom, understanding, and compassion. Special services include Spiritual Direction, reiki, and a massage therapist.

## **Social Services**

### **Providence Connections, Inc.**

Providence Connections, Inc., located on Pittsburgh's North Side, was formed in 1994 after the Sisters of Divine Providence sold Divine Providence Hospital to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System. The Community wanted to maintain a connection to this Pittsburgh neighborhood and to focus on the struggling parents who need support services to enable them to provide for their families. Providence Connections is the umbrella corporation under which the Providence Family Support Center operates.

Providence Family Support Center offers family programming and support that is designed to strengthen children and parents and empower them to reach their highest potential. PFSC is part

of the national family support movement committed to promoting healthy families. The focus of PFSC is on prevention and is specifically intended to fill the gaps that many families experience in their support systems. Family support is not intended to be only for "at risk" families; it assumes that every family deserves help, support, and access to resources. PFSC offers child support programs and family-centered services

### **La Posada Providencia**

Located in the lower Rio Grand Valley of South Texas, La Posada Providencia answers to the Gospel call to "welcome the stranger." Founded in 1989 by Sister Carolyn (now Hilary) Hooks, CDP, La Posada provides a safe, nurturing environment to immigrants, asylees, and asylum seekers who have come to the United States seeking safety, protection, and a better life. All shelter residents are in the process of seeking legal refuge in this country. At La Posada Providencia, we do more than provide safe shelter; we help ensure our clients' success. During their stay with us, we help them prepare for life in this country. We offer: Language instruction, life skills curriculum, resettlement assistance, sustainable living skills, and emotional support.

Actually, no more sisters are working at the shelter, but we have a chair on the board, holding a legacy model. A team of very committed lay people was entrusted to carry out our mission.

### **Room at the Inn**

Room at the Inn is a shelter for homeless women and families in St. Louis County. It operates with a day site and nearly 60-night sites. During the day, clients use the shelter's phone, shower, laundry, and computer facilities. They attend classes or see the visiting nurse. They use the kitchen or choose from stockpiles of clothing and personal care items. Most importantly, they work with the client coordinator to plan their return to self-reliance and receive referrals to other agencies.

At night, Room at the Inn's interfaith partners welcome program participants to their congregations. The night-site hosts provide transportation, meals, shelter, and companionship. Room at the Inn enables the compassionate people of St. Louis County to do something concrete and hands-on to help their less fortunate neighbors.

### **Ministries is Collaboration**

#### **Ketteler House of Refuge**

In March 2023, we renewed our efforts to address the refugee crisis in our country and established the Ketteler House of Refuge on our property at Providence Heights in Allison Park, PA. The goal of this ministry is to provide temporary housing for our guests and all that is

necessary to ensure they will become self-sufficient. In May 2023, we welcomed a family of nine from the Republic of the Congo. We spend time each day with the family, addressing their needs and teaching them English. They also attend church, go grocery shopping and, this past summer, participate in children's camps and adult education courses. Language is difficult, but the family is willing to try. This family has enriched us in ways beyond description as we offer them our love and hospitality. As of now, we received three families, two of them are already on their own but we keep always in contact with and currently, we have a family from Afghanistan to which we are ministering. In this ministry, we collaborate with the Associates and lay organizations dedicated to helping refugees.

### **Bridges of Providence**

Bridges of Providence is sponsored by the Ketteler Justice and Legacy Committee of the Sisters of Divine Providence; it seeks the participation of all the sisters and associates of our congregation. This project was generated to look for new, current ways of ministering to those in need. We work in partnership with other congregations and lay people called to service in different countries, especially those considered third-world countries.

Bridges of Providence provides financial support to women and men who demonstrate the willingness to leave oppressive situations in their lives by seeking emotional support and learning and improving their skills, in the programs offered by the different religious congregations and lay organizations Bridges of Providence collaborates with. This support entails, financing small businesses, and paying for psychological therapy. Also, young people who want to study but don't have the means are paid for.

By providing these services, Bridges of Providence is trying to address the whole dimension of a human being; education, the emotional, psychological, and entrepreneurship skills of the person, thus helping to improve their quality of life.



# Mission

*A discussion based on a PowerPoint presentation by Barbara McMullen, CDP*

To set-up the context for a discussion on mission, we begin with a poem by David Whyte, *This Is Not The Age of Information*.

This is **not**  
the age of information.  
This is **NOT**  
the age of information.  
Forget the news, and the  
Radio and the blurred  
screen.  
This is the time of  
loaves and Fishes.  
People are hungry,  
and one good word is bread for a  
thousand.

As he says, "One good *word* is bread for a thousand." Let us have that *word* be "Mission."  
What do think of when you hear the word mission? One of the most often related words is 'call.' Let us turn to the message of Anthony Gittins, CSSp. He tells us that the "origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God literally brought down to earth to continue God's mission. So mission is who God is -- an extravagant Creator, a liberating Presence, and a reconciling Spirit. And, mission is what God does for a living. He:

reaches out,  
gathers in,  
embraces,  
reconciles,  
unites,  
heals,  
upholds,  
renews and  
transforms.

God has chosen us, in an act of great trust, to bring the mission to others."

Father Gittins says that mission is God's outrageous idea that God cannot operate without us. God chose to need us, God calls, invites and commissions us. So Gittins says that we don't have the mission, the mission has us!

When you've experienced a call to something in your life, what are your responses? To question, to seek answers, to test it out with others, check with your friends or mentors, you think about it, sometimes you hope it goes away, and finally you settle into it. You say yes. But how do we know what that response look like? Gittins says, "Jesus is the mission brought down to earth. He shows us what mission is, the way mission is done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is about evangelization: about "good newsing." He doesn't talk about healing and hope, He *is* healing and hope." Jesus is in your face about mission His whole life!

So then our sort of job description, in light of mission, is discipleship. We're called by Jesus to do what he did, be how he was. Discipleship is a summons, a call, to be communities who find their love for one another and others in the raw materials of daily life. It wasn't apart from the messiness of life that Jesus proclaimed the goodness of God. It was right there with the lepers, the outcasts, the marginalized.

Discipleship requires us to do as Jesus has done. We must model ourselves on Jesus and how he does it. Authentic discipleship follows Jesus. We become the evangelization and the mission. Jesus expands everything to embrace all components, including the dust and mess that are intrinsic to evangelization. Through it all, Jesus is faithful to his Abba, his "Daddy," his God. So if we are faithful, if we allow God to work in and through us, then the mission has us! We are gathered to be scattered. Not to keep it to ourselves, but to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This is called evangelization.

Gittins says we need to think differently about evangelization. God sent mission down to earth in the form of Jesus. God's mission became incarnate in Jesus, who came to do the will of his Abba. Jesus spreads God's goodness in a way we can understand.

So, Jesus' job description (not ours) is to be the evangelist. Evangelization is "good newsing," that is, being the good news. Just like Jesus, making a difference one person at a time. Jesus looks for trouble and troubled people. He eats with sinners, he cures the ill, he dialogs with women.

So, if mission is God's job description, and evangelization is Jesus' job description, what is our role? Gittins says mission for us is discipleship. Our discipleship criteria is:

To live, you must choose love,  
To love, you must choose to encounter, To grow,  
you must suffer, and  
Never give up hope.

On an individual level, we might ask ourselves: How am I being faithful to these four criteria? Am I challenged to conversion? And, which for the four criteria am I the weakest in?

If none of that grabbed you, here's another way to think about mission. A river is like the mission of God. Each moment for us in the river is a moment of blessing because God is always blessing us, always calling us to mission, no matter where we are on the river. Our role is to be a part of mission because when we are in mission, we are in God's dream. The river has its source, its own seasons. A river knows where it is going, even though it meanders.

Though each of us may be in a different place on the river and on a different boat, each of those places is a call. Sometimes the river flows freely and gently, and the carrying out of the mission comes naturally and is life-giving for the giver and the receiver. At other times the river is filled with rapids and those disciples need to hold on tight as they are tossed about.

Sometimes the river even runs dry. When that happens, boats need to be picked up and carried to where the river runs free. And, finally, the river reaches its destination, its end, and is absorbed into the sea. Like a river, mission calls us to let go, to be absorbed in something bigger than ourselves. You could think of the river being named "Providence."

If the mission (God), Providence has us, then it goes to the ground of our being. It's what makes us tick. It won't tolerate the inauthentic. Mission will keep us looking at our deepest desires and teach us to trust that those desires for discipleship are in God's heart, too.

Together we radiate the mission because we have the confidence to do what we never thought we could do, the courage to break free from all that holds us captive, and the attitude of openness to all the possibilities that God sets before us.

To summarize MISSION...

Know God has you...Participate in good newsing,  
Life is messy...Pickup your boat and paddle a new course, Get  
absorbed in something bigger than yourself,  
Make Providence visible by radiating love, Contribute your  
talents for the sake of mission, and Be a disciple radiating  
hope!

Although we, the Sisters and Associates of Divine Providence, as well as other religious communities, sometimes talk about our Mission, the truth is that we do not have a Mission. The reason is that Mission is what God is about. It's as if Mission were God's job description. God is the dynamic, interactive movement of goodness spreading out over the universe – that is Mission – that is God.

We can't have a Mission anymore than we can have God. What we can do, though, is immerse ourselves into God, and, therefore, into the Mission, into that dynamic movement of goodness.

Jesus is Mission incarnate, Mission come to earth. He is the Good News of God's Mission. If God's job description is Mission, the job description of Jesus is evangelization or doing the Good News. Our task, and that of the Church, is discipleship, that is, to be faithful to God's Mission. It would be accurate to say, then, that we do not have a Mission, but that God's Mission has us. In the same way, the Church does not have a Mission; God's Mission has the Church. God is the initiator; we, the Church, are the servants of the Mission. We carry out our role of discipleship by imitating the whole life of Jesus, by doing good news-ing as He did.

The primary ways we can do evangelization as Jesus did are by proclamation, witness, dialogue, and liberation. We are called to proclaim and witness the Good News. Proclamation is witnessing with words; witnessing is proclamation without speaking. Witnessing might involve martyrdom, i.e. living or dying for the Good News. It's about laying down our lives for others, not just by dying, but by allowing ourselves to be shaken, changed, converted, and/or recycled.

Dialogue is respectful, mutual discovery of, and conversion to, the Holy Spirit. It is a horizontal exchange, the outcome of which is new revelation. We often fear dialogue because it changes both parties in the process and its outcome cannot be controlled. Dialogue is incompatible with hierarchy. Jesus made Himself horizontal with the disciples when he washed their feet.

Responding to the call to be like Jesus is about foot-washing as well as Eucharist. It is about being willing to wash feet, but also to have one's feet washed. The latter is often more difficult than the former.

Liberation means setting free from any and all forms of unfreedom and injustice. It is what Jesus did throughout His whole public life. He set free whatever was bound, liberating others from the tyranny of injustice. He worked to obliterate the "isms" of His day. We are called to do the same, to recognize the prejudice and lack of justice in ourselves, our society, and our Church and to strive to overcome it. We can do so no matter what our vocation or ministry.

*The preceding ideas are based on the work of Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP. presented to the General Chapter of the Sisters of Divine Providence on July 8, 2007. Adapted by Mary Ellen Ruft, CDP*

Pause for quiet reflection on the meaning of MISSION

## Questions for Reflection

1. What does this view of Mission mean to you and the Church?
2. How could we eliminate the “isms” of our day?
3. How does it connect with your understanding of Mission and Ministry?
4. What is your personal mission statement going to be?

## **Amici Cordis and Employment by the Sisters of Divine Providence**

The Amici Cordis share in the life of Community of Divine Providence. They are united to the community through a vow of fidelity. There are opportunities for the Amici Cordis to share directly in the life of the community through direct employment by the Divine Providence Community. The supervision of the Amici Cordis who have a dual relationship as employees and as the Amici Cordis, no matter the positives, can at times be difficult. There is a need to consider how best to navigate the dual role the Amici Cordis have as non-canonical members of the community and employees. A healthy and fruitful process will allow for mutual dialogue between the community leadership and the Amici Cordis.

A good and fair performance review will be based on a person's job description. This job description helps to define mutual expectations. The Amici Cordis who work for the community must learn to balance the dual role of Amici Cordis and employee. The difficulty comes when one relationship leaks into the other. Negotiating more than one set of roles and responsibilities is part of life. It is important to recognize which hat one is wearing. Interpersonal boundaries can become ambiguous because of multiple relationships. Gaining clarity around boundaries when navigating these issues can avoid ambiguity and tension. A clear understanding of one's job description is an invaluable tool in navigating this terrain.

The Amici Cordis is subjected to the same performance reviews and personnel policies as all other employees. Every employee has a direct supervisor or manager who makes the decisions about hiring and firing. The Amici Cordis must respect their supervisor and act accordingly. This includes being subjected to termination, if the performance appraisal leads to dismissal. When grievances occur and a resolution is not forthcoming, the manager and the community will seek additional assistance and will make every effort to pursue reconciliation when conflict or division occurs.

There are times because of finances or the decision to close a particular ministry that employment would be terminated. This is not intended to reflect on the status of the person who is a member of the Amici Cordis.

## **Vow and Ring Ceremony for the Amici Cordis**

### **Introduction of those making a Vow of Fidelity by a Member of the Formation Team**

I present to our community \_\_\_\_\_(Names)\_\_\_\_\_ who have/has completed the Formation Program for the Amici Cordis. They/he/she have/has come to know the charism of Providence, The Way of Life for the Amici Cordis and wish to unite themselves/her/himself to the community through a Vow of Fidelity.

### **Vow Proclamation:**

Do you wish to unite yourself with the Community of Divine Providence as an Amici Cordis through a Vow of Fidelity, sharing your talents, gifts, and vision of Providence with us in our life and Mission?

**Candidate:** I do.

### **Sisters, Current Amici Cordis and Associates:**

The Community of Divine Providence, striving to be faithful to the presence of God, and responding to the spirit of our times, welcomes you: (Insert names) as Amici Cordis. We view this time of your life with us as an opportunity for mutual growth and sharing in our prayer, community and corporate commitment to promote a consistent ethic of life, especially through trust in and openness to the Providence of God.

### **Vow Formula**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, as a member of the Amici Cordis of the Marie de la Roche Province of the Congregation of Divine Providence commit myself through a Vow of Fidelity to “putting on the mind of Christ” and to live the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience. I understand and will abide by the Way of Life of the Amici Cordis to further the mission and goals of the community.

I believe I have been called to offer my life in the service of God’s people. This commitment is made in love, kept in faith and lived in hope. May the God of Providence who allows and invites me to make this commitment strengthen and protect me to be faithful to it.

When writing your own vow formula, these elements must be included:

- Vow of Fidelity made to the Community
- The Virtues of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience
- Following The Way of Life of the Amici Cordis

### **Blessing of the Symbols:**

**Presider:** God of Providence, we ask your blessing today on these symbols, which \_\_\_\_\_ will wear as a sign of her/his Vow of Fidelity to the Marie de la Roche Province of the Congregation of Divine Providence. Grant her/him your grace that she/he is and what she/he does gives testimony of your love, your compassion and your truth all the days of your life.

**All:** Amen

**Presider or Person chosen to give the symbol:** \_\_\_\_\_, receive this community symbol and ring as a sign of your commitment as a vowed member of the Amici Cordis.

### ***Receive the symbols.***

**Presider:** May you wear these symbols as a visible sign of your wholehearted commitment to Christ within this religious community. May you always be attentive and alert to God's coming in your life.

### **Lighting of the Community Candles**

#### ***Lighting of the Ketteler Candle***

That through the intercession of Bishop Ketteler we may become people with a vision of justice, we pray,

**All:** Provident God, hear our prayer.

#### ***Lighting of the Mother Marie Candle***

Through the intercession of Mother Marie we may be women and men of courage and compassion, we pray,

**All:** Provident God, hear our prayer.

#### ***Lighting of the Providence Candle***

That the memory of all the Sisters, Amici Cordis and Associates who have gone before us will inspire us to lives of continuing conversion in response to God's call, we pray,

**All:** Provident God, hear our prayer.

**Presider:** Let us pray.

**All:** God, giver of all good gifts, we praise You for the gift of vision that enables us to "see in all things the wonderful Providence of God." We ask of you the wisdom to be able to exercise

creatively and justly, this gift for future generations, so that we may contribute to the re-creation of this world in Jesus Christ. Amen

We Exalt Your Providence, O Lord .....Sr. Dolores Kohout