

*We are the work of Your hands,
The glory of Your love, Your
living work of art,
You cherish us all,
creating us still...*

--- Monks of Weston Priority

In keeping with the first initiative of the Second Institute Chapter, we welcome experimentation with new forms of commitment between 1998-2005. [This was subsequently extended by the ILC in October 2004 to 2011.]

Since a new form of commitment is a public expression of a relationship with the Sisters of Mercy, the initiator(s) and Regional Leadership Team(s), in dialogue with one another, would shape the form of commitment to satisfy the following conditions:

1. be consistent with our Mercy charism and Constitutions;
2. be distinct from membership as defined in the Constitutions, i.e., represent something new/original with respect to the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas;
3. be defined to the extent that it could be replicated, i.e., inclusive of role responsibilities and accountability, legal and financial obligations, mechanism for sharing learnings and experiences periodically;
4. be approved and overseen by RLT(s) in consultation with the Institute Leadership Team.

Decisions about new forms of commitment will be made by the Institute Leadership Conference in consultation with the RLT(s) following the experimental period.

A Closer Look: Companions in Mercy

The History

Prior to the Founding Moment, presentations on new forms of commitment have been crafted. And at the First Institute Chapter of 1991, a proposal was presented to explore new forms of affiliation/alternative membership, which was then referred to the new ILT for action.

By May of 1996, Sister Doris Gottemoeller wrote to Chicago Regional Community president, Lucille McKillop, RSM, "The Leadership Team here agrees that this might be a good opportunity for us to implement the commitment expressed the the First Initiative from the Institute Chapter 'to address new forms of commitment to Mercy life.'" A Task Force is formed and presents its work to the ILC in January of 1997. By October of 1997 *New Forms of Commitment to Mercy Life Guidelines* are adopted by the ILC and published in the November issue of *Vita*. The Regional Community of Detroit spearheads efforts to support this experimentation in their Assembly and issues an invitation to individuals who have expressed interest in a new form of commitment within Mercy. By 2002 a small group of women, all approved by leadership of the regional communities they represent, which included the Regional Communities of Chicago, Connecticut, St. Louis, Detroit and Omaha, gathered in Farmington Hills, Michigan, to express their desire to be part of this new form of commitment.

It was during that meeting that the name Companions in Mercy was identified. At the same meeting, a statement of the groups' elements of identity, distinguishing features, nature of commitment, values, communication and accountability was drafted. The meeting also provided a framework that gave these women authority to call their own meetings, revise their draft statements and fund their own expenses. Following exhaustive consultation with leaderships from the five regional communities, as well as consultation with a canon lawyer, by March 2003 the group felt compelled to meet with Mercy Associates and Mercy Volunteer Corps for a discussion about what qualities made each of these groups unique entities within the structure of the Mercy community. At the end of that meeting, six women remained committed to continue their exploration. Both Linda Werthman, RSM (Detroit) and Eileen Dooling, RSM (Connecticut) serving as presidents in their respective regional communities, periodically brought updates to the Institute Leadership Conference.

The five regional leadership teams with representatives involved continued their consultations with the ILT and ILC regarding the Companions in Mercy. At the October 2004 Institute Leadership Conference an extension of the experimentation of new forms of commitment articulated in the Institute guidelines of October/November 1997 was made from 2005 to 2011. On Pentecost Eve, May 14, 2005 at Mercy Center Chapel, Farmington Hills, Michigan, where their journey had started, six women took private vows as Companions in Mercy. They include: Kathy Garbarino (Detroit), Kate Grant (Chicago), Sue Kamler (Omaha), Sue LaVoie (Connecticut), Connie McMurray (Connecticut) and Rita O'Dea (St. Louis).

The Companions

According to a 2004 article in The MAST Journal, "Expand the ropes of you tent . . . : Reflections on New Forms of Mercy Commitment" Mary Kathryn Grant and Katherine Ann Hill, RSM, stress that Companions are called to service, specifically to Mercy service and that the foundations of their call are simple: apostolic spirituality, mission and community. It is not a commitment to vowed evangelical life. Many ideas expressed in that article bring forth thoughtful yearnings and powerful statements for reflection. Such as:

- "Mission is the magnet, or in New Science language, the "strange attractor," drawing women and men to lives of service."
- "Companions seek inclusiveness within a community of Mercy. They seek no offices, no rights beyond that of belonging in spirit and action to the ministry of service expressed so well in the fourth vow."
- "Companions seek to be a part of and still apart from and to self-differentiate within the larger contest of the Mercy congregation."

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- "Both Mercy associates and companions seek not to destroy boundaries, but, in respecting them, seek to treat them as permeable when appropriate."
- "The most commonly heard negative comments about the call to deeper participation in the Mercy mission include: "You are trying to have your cake and eat it too," "You're just Sister-of-Mercy-wannabes."...The "wannabe" comments cut deeply. Companions do not want to be Sisters of Mercy. They do want to be part of a larger community of Mercy in a distinct and evolving form of committed life."
- "When the patterns of this new call are observed, insights emerge. Two of these are: 1) new forms of committed life are a unique, contemporary charism in the church and 2) mission is the essence of the call."

In order to understand what is at the very heart of these women, one can look to their specific ministries. Kathy Garbarino ministers in mission services, Kate Grant ministers with sponsorship of higher education, Sue Kamler serves as a social worker, Sue LaVoie ministers as a spiritual director, Connie McMurray teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) and Rita O'Dea is a spiritual director.

The Vow

"The vow is a permanent, non-canonical vow of Mercy service," explains Rita O'Dea (St. Louis), "although for this first time it will be made for the six year experimentation period, extending until 2011. We've experienced a great warmth of welcome for Companions in Mercy from Mercy Institute — the vowed community, associates and Mercy volunteers. That welcome itself has been a wonderful experience of the richness and diversity of the Mercy charism," Rita O'Dea.. " *For vow formula, see box on next page.*

The Formal Beliefs of the Companions in Mercy

Statement of Identity

- Companions in Mercy, responding to the call of the Gospel, choose to make a commitment to God inspired by the charism of Mercy,
 - following the example of Catherine McAuley,
 - manifested by a life of service and prayer and
 - sealed with a vow of Mercy.

Distinguishing Features

- Companions in Mercy seek to walk a path marked out by Jesus and by Catherine McAuley, striving to give a new form of expression to the charism which so richly blessed Catherine's life.
- Companions in Mercy consists of individuals affiliated with a variety of regional communities.
- Companions in Mercy relate to the regional community and to the Institute as described in the 1997 Guidelines for New Forms of Commitment, and as determined by ongoing dialogue with the Institute Leadership Conference.
- Companions in Mercy is inclusive in regard to race, culture, gender and lifestyle.
- Companions in Mercy welcome those who are comfortable living/praying/serving within the catholic Christian tradition.



L-R, Kate Grant (Chicago), Kathy Gabarino (Detroit), Connie McMurray (Connecticut), Sue LaVoie (Connecticut), Sue Kamler (Omaha) and Rita O'Dea (St. Louis) bask in delight following their vow service as Companions in Mercy.

I, _____,
as a Companion in
Mercy, responding to
the call of the Gospel
and the example of
Catherine McAuley,
vow to serve the poor,
the sick, and the unedu-
cated.

I, _____,
in living out this com-
mitment, I will seek a
life shaped by prayer,
community, and the
spiritual and corporal
works of mercy and
will offer my gifts, tal-
ents, energy, and vision
to extend God's mercy
to our world.

I, _____,
profess this vow for
a period of six years
before God, my Com-
panions, and all who
follow the path of
mercy on this, the 14th
day of May, 2005.

I, _____,
declare that I am
financially, legally, and
professionally indepen-
dent from the Sisters of
Mercy of the Americas
and from its Regional
Communities or Areas.

Signature

Witnesses

Nature of Commitment

- Companions in Mercy make a vow of Mercy expressing the intentional orienta-
tion of their life toward the mercy of God. This vow is a permanent, non-ca-
nonical vow of Mercy, received by the Companions in Mercy, in the presence of
others who share the charism of Mercy. This vow will initially be made for the
duration of a period of experimentation.
- This private vow establishes Companions in Mercy as a distinct form of Mercy life.
- Companions commit themselves to prayer, both personal and communal, which
roots them in ongoing discernment and transformation.
- Companions embrace the praxis/practice of mercy, which deepens in them the
spirit of Catherine McAuley.
- Companions commit to sharing life with other Companions in Mercy, with their
regional community and with the Institute.

Values

- Core values of Companions in Mercy are fidelity to the Mercy charism, apostolic
spirituality and mutuality in relationships.
- Companions embrace the values of living simply, loving faithfully and listening
attentively to the Spirit.
- Companions value the history and traditions of all other forms of expression of
the Mercy charism, and they celebrate the diversity of those expressions.

Relationships within Mercy

- Companions acknowledge responsibility to represent in words and actions the
spirit and direction of the Sisters of Mercy as indicated in current Institute docu-
ments.
- Companions participate in the following activities at the discretion of the Re-
gional Leadership Team (or the successive leadership structure of the Area ([now
Community]):
 - attending meetings, gatherings, celebrations, and events,
 - receiving community mailings and
 - serving on community committees.
- Companions remain legally and financially independent of the Sisters of Mercy and
have neither active nor passive voice in matters pertaining to the Sisters of Mercy.
- Companions consult with the Regional Leadership Team (or the successive lead-
ership structure of the Area ([now Community]) about acceptance, withdrawal or
dismissal of a Companion in Mercy.

Communication

- Companions in Mercy nurture communication within the group and within the
community of mercy.
- Companions gather annually, and more frequently when possible.
- Companions seek openness/dialogue/interaction/mutuality with other forms of
Mercy life: Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Mercy Volunteer Corps.
- Companions welcome ongoing evaluation and will continually report on devel-
opments as this new form evolves.

Membership

- A person interested in membership in the Companions in Mercy moves through
a process of inquiry outlined in written policies of the group.
- Companions in Mercy are responsible for acceptance and incorporation of new mem-
bers, for the ongoing formation of existing members and for dismissal of members.
- Since membership is established by a private vow, withdrawal from membership is
at the discretion of the individual Companion in consultation with the other Com-
panions.
- Dismissal from the group would be for serious reasons only, such as failure to
represent in words and actions the spirit and direction of either the Companions
in Mercy or the Sisters of Mercy as indicated in their current documents.