

Q and A on Seton Associates

Q. Who are Seton Associates?

A. We are the lay affiliate of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth. We are women and men who seek deeper spirituality and engage in ministry by living the charism of charity.

Q. Is this something new?

A. The Associate Movement was inspired by the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) emphasized the “universal call to holiness” and that encouraged the laity to assume a role in the church along with clergy and religious. Religious were encouraged to support the laity and collaborate with them in their journey toward holiness.

Q. When did the Seton Associates begin?

A. The 1987 General Assembly of the Congregation endorsed a program of affiliates and the first commitment liturgy welcomed 16 women and two men on March 25, 1990. Today, 21 years later, there are 270 Seton Associates.

Q. Are the Seton Associates “unique?”

A. The North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR) reports that there are over 50,000 associates of religious congregations and orders in North America. That’s an impressive number of people living the call or charism of their congregations in service to others. It is all the more inspiring that the number of associates is growing at a time when the number of vowed sisters is declining.

Q. What is the charism of charity?

A. A charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We love others and provide for their needs, especially the needs of people who are poor. The Sisters and the Seton Associates embrace and live a charism of charity rooted in the 17th century ministry of Saint Vincent DePaul and Saint Louise de Marillac, who founded the Daughters of Charity, many of whom were lay women who cared for the poor. We follow in their footsteps and, in particular, those of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan and all of the Sisters of Charity who taught us, healed us and inspired us.

Q. What does it mean to have a Sponsor?

A. Each Seton Associates has a Sister Sponsor – a member of the Congregation who serves as a bridge between the Associates and the Sisters of Charity. Sponsors welcome candidates and assist them during the process of becoming an Associate through prayer and conversation. Often they attend meetings together and remain friends for life.

Q. What do Seton Associates do?

A. A recent poll of members shows we are an energetic force of goodness and charity extending from our hearts into the places where we serve in parishes, soup kitchens, nursing homes, hospices, hospitals and prisons. We teach CCD and RCIA and lead Bible study in parishes, nursing homes and prisons. We support disadvantaged children in Uganda, Haiti, El Salvador, Maryland, Mississippi, Texas and other places. We are members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Voice of the Faithful, interfaith groups, Habitat for Humanity, and Meals on Wheels to name but a few. We provide help to immigrants, homeless, unemployed, special needs children, disabled people, disenfranchised women, Native Americans and the military. We donate money, food, clothing and other goods. We make Linus quilts for sick children. We lend a hand to Josephine's Place, Hope House, Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless, and other Sister of Charity missions. We spend time with Sisters in the Villa. For those employed, our work is ministry. We pray. We don't stop – we are pressed forever in God's service because that's who we are.

Q. Is this a lifetime commitment?

A. Seton Associates make annual commitments and, after five years, may make a lifetime commitment during a special liturgy. We do not take vows.

Q. How do I learn more about becoming a Seton Associate?

A. Contact the director, Rosemary Carroll, at 973-290-5336 or by email at rcarroll@scnj.org.

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