

Seton Associates

The movement to have lay associates of Religious Congregations received impetus in the renewal of the Church inspired by the Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) emphasized the “universal call to holiness” which encouraged the laity to assume their role in the church along with clergy and religious. At the same time, religious were encouraged to support the laity and collaborate with them in their journey toward holiness.

The Seton Associates program of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth of Convent Station, New Jersey had its beginnings in the late 1980s. The 1987 General Assembly of the Congregation endorsed a congregational program of lay affiliates for those women and men who wished to share in the mission and charism of the Sisters of Charity. The Council later chose March 25, the day Elizabeth Seton made her vows, as the official beginning of the Associate Program, and in 1990, on that date, the Program was officially inaugurated. In 1990, sixteen women and two men were accepted as Seton Associates and that number has grown to about 300. Throughout the United States and Canada, the Associate movement includes over 60,000 members of various congregations and orders.

This brochure is intended to be a guideline from the time of initial inquiry through acceptance to fully living the life of a Seton Associate. The Associate Program is open to women and men, married or single, 20 years of age or older.

Prerequisites:

- Have contact with the Congregation prior to completion of application as an Associate;
- Have a desire to share in the mission and the spirit of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth;
- Be physically and emotionally stable;
- Be financially independent from the Congregation.

Procedures for Becoming a Seton Associate:

A. Application Process:

- Request and submit an application form.
- Initial interview with the Director.
- Selection of a sponsor from the Congregation.
- Acceptance by the Congregation as a prospective candidate.

B. Preparation Period:

- Become familiar with the Vincentian/Setonian tradition through the lives of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Elizabeth Ann Seton, and Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan.

- Become familiar with excerpts from Toward Boundless Charity: the Constitution of the Sisters of Charity. These excerpts reflect the charism of the Congregation.
- Probe more deeply to understand and practice of the charism of charity; and reflect on the Mission, Vision and Direction Statements.
- Meet with sponsor periodically for reflection and prayer.
- Have an Associate companion assigned to the Candidate by the Director.
- Have a second interview with a team of Seton Associates.
- Pray through a discernment process with the Director or her representative to determine your readiness to become a Seton Associate.
- Take part in an orientation day at Convent Station devoted to the history and heritage of the Congregation and its founder, Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan.
- Write a letter to the Director requesting acceptance as a Seton Associate and indicating how you will live out the charism of charity.
- Have a final interview with the Director who will recommend the candidate to the Council for acceptance.
- Sign a Commitment Form for one year.
- Attend Congregational and Associate events.
- Preparation period is usually about a year.

Reception/Ceremony:

- The formal Reception will usually take place at The Feast of Elizabeth Ann Seton Liturgy in January at which the Candidate participates, and to which her or his Sponsor, family members and friends are invited.
- The Candidate will be received as an Associate by the General Superior of the Sisters of Charity or by her delegate.

Living the Associate Relationship:

- Prayer life in union with and for the intentions of the Congregation;
- Live out the Charism of Charity through participation in full, part-time or occasional ministry, for example: parish work, visiting the sick or elderly, volunteering at a homeless, shelter, soup kitchen, nursing home or hospital, youth work;
- Attend Seton Associate gatherings and participate in local area gatherings as much as possible. At local area gatherings, Associates meet one another and with local Sisters of Charity several times a year to pray together, study and discuss the mission of the Congregation, sometimes with guest speakers, and frequently take on a group project to participate more fully in the Charism of Charity of the Congregation. The Seton Associate Office will provide information about whether there is a group in your area.
- Attend Sisters of Charity social events, celebrations, liturgies and prayer experiences when appropriate;
- Maintain contact with Sponsor;

- Make an annual renewal of commitment. This may lead eventually to a lifetime commitment.

Note: Some Associates, because of age or health conditions, may not be able to participate fully in all of the activities mentioned above. They may be able to participate only by their prayers or in very limited activities. We recognize prayer as an essential part of carrying on the mission. These members are still complete and valued Associates.

Congregational Support for Associates:

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth will:

- Pray for the intentions of the Seton Associates;
- Provide a preparation period during which the Associate candidate becomes familiar with the spirit of the founder and founders of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, deepens her/his prayer life, and grows in understanding of the charism of charity;
- Send communications periodically to the Associates;
- Provide opportunity for direct involvement in ministry according to the Associate's time and talents and the needs of the Congregation;
- Invite Associates to Eucharistic liturgies, prayer experiences, social events, enrichment programs, and appropriate Congregational meetings.

What Now?

Read and ponder the preceding material. Pray about the wisdom of moving ahead with this relationship with the Sisters of Charity and the Seton Associates. Consider all the implications of taking this step. If you still have a desire to pursue this, contact the Director of Seton Associates for an appointment.

Phone: 973-290-5336

FAX: 973-290-5337

E-mail: setonassociates@scnj.org

Mail: Office of Seton Associates
Convent of Saint Elizabeth
Convent Station, NJ 07961-0476

*May the prayers of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton
and Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan be with you
as you discern this step.*