

Frequently Asked Questions about Co-membership

- **Why would someone be interested in becoming a co-member?**

Persons interested in the peace and justice commitments of the Loretto Community find a formal relationship through co-membership a way to share ideals, goals, and challenges. They find co-membership an opportunity to nourish their own spirituality and to contribute their support and skills to the ongoing gospel mission of the community in its commitment to peace and justice.

- **What obligations do co-members have?**

Co-members make a *mutual commitment* with the community, and the co-member reviews, updates, and renews the commitment every five years. Co-member do not have canonical vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Co-members are expected to participate in Community Groups (the basic organizational structure of the community) and gatherings as possible for them. They are expected to read community literature and respond to issues.

- **What is the financial relationship with the community?**

Co-members do not have a financial obligation to the community, and the community has no financial obligation to the co-member. Co-members are invited, however, to make a financial contribution on a yearly basis. Most co-members do make a pledge every year, but it is not a requirement for initial or continuing membership.

- **How is co-membership involved in Loretto's mission?**

In their private lives co-members participate in many of the same areas of mission as the vowed members do. In many cases co-members work with vowed members in such areas as social agencies, on behalf of Loretto on committees, and in other vocations. Also each person in the community supports others' work by virtue of being a Loretto member. Many co-members as well as vowed members contribute to such Loretto projects as the Loretto Hunger Fund and funds that continue Loretto's presence internally and in society.

- **How long has co-membership been in existence?**

Co-membership began in 1970 by decision of the Chapter (now referred to as the General Assembly). It began because of a request of former vowed members to retain their close relationship with the community and to have a way to participate in the mission of the community without having canonical vows.

- **Are there restrictions on religious affiliation?**

No. There are co-members from several faith traditions. The important characteristic is a desire to believe in Loretto's spirit and values in following the gospel message that impels the community.

- **Are men eligible for co-membership?**

Yes.

- **What is the length of the process?**

The usual amount of time to become a co-member is about two years. There is not a defined length of time, however.

- **What are the phases of the process?**

There are three phases: Acquaintance, Study, and Commitment. During the **Acquaintance Phase** (usually about a year), the candidate attends events, including Community Group meetings, and learns about Loretto through meeting members and participating in activities. The candidate also writes and submits an autobiography. During the **Study Phase**, the candidate reads about Loretto history and discusses important literature with Loretto members. The candidate has a behavioral assessment interview. During the **Commitment Phase**, the candidate completes a formal application and makes a written mutual commitment. A request for membership, accompanied by the application, mutual commitment, and letters of affirmations, goes to the Community Forum for approval and then to the President for acceptance.

- **What support is there during the process?**

The candidate for co-membership has a contact person who accompanies the candidate throughout the process. It is the job of the contact person to make sure the candidate is invited to events and to help to answer any questions that arise. Usually the contact person arranges for a discussion of *I Am the Way*, which is the Loretto constitution, and of *Loretto Life*, a descriptive book for the community. The contact person sends in an update report twice a year.

A member of the Co-membership Team is a liaison for the contact person and is available to answer or relay any questions and concerns to the team.

- **Are there constitutions/guidelines for co-members?**

There are not separate constitutions or guidelines. Co-members study and relate to *I Am the Way*, which is the constitution of the Congregation of the Sisters of Loretto. They also study and relate to *Loretto Life*, which is a descriptive piece for the whole community. The process for becoming a co-member is described in a brochure on co-membership. (See **What are the phases of the process?**) There is not a specific list of obligations.

- **What is the possibility of participation in elected leadership?**

Co-members can be elected to the Community Forum, which is made up of the Executive Committee plus four co-members. The Executive Committee, which includes the Loretto President, is the congregational advisory group to the President and a decision-making group for the community. The Community Forum advises on decisions that pertain to the entire community.

Co-members may be coordinators of networks and committees and serve in any other capacity within the community that is not restricted by canonical concerns. These positions are not usually elected but are chosen by the networks and committees and by the Community Forum and President.

- **How many co-members are there?**

There are 221 co-members as of February 2008.

- **What are some examples of services within the community that co-members are involved in?**

Co-members serve on the Coordinating Team and the staff, providing research, planning, and other services to groups and individuals and to the community as a whole. They also serve on committees and as coordinators of networks; in many ad hoc capacities, such as on planning committees for events; and in other ways.

- **Who is the person to contact about more information?**

Contact the Co-membership Coordinator through email, telephone, or regular mail:

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