

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why would someone be interested in becoming a Loretto 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.

- **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-members 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, neither does the community have a financial obligation to the co-member. Co-members are invited, however, to make a financial contribution on a yearly basis. Most co-member do make a pledge every year, but it is not a requirement for initial or continuing membership.

- **How is co-membership involved in Loretto 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 other 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 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 and continued friendship 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 further Loretto's spirit and values in following the gospel message that impels the community.

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

Yes.

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

At this time (January 2011) there are 213 co-members.

- **What is the length of the process for becoming a co-member?**

The usual amount of time to complete the co-membership process is about two years. It is recommended that it be completed at least within five years.

- **What are the steps in 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 writes and submits an autobiography. During the **Study Phase**, the candidate reads about Loretto history and discusses important literature with Loretto members. Within this phase, there is a behavioral assessment interview. During the **Commitment Phase**, the candidate completes the Request for Formal Acceptance as a Co-member and also the Mutual Commitment form. A request for membership prepared by the co-membership coordinator and accompanied by the application, mutual commitment statement and letters of affirmation goes to the community forum for recommendation and then to the president for acceptance.

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

A contact person accompanies the candidate throughout the process. It is the responsibility of the contact person to see that the candidate is invited to events and to help answer questions. Usually the contact person arranges for a discussion of the congregation's constitutions, *I Am the Way*, and the descriptive book, *Loretto Life*. The contact person and the candidate send 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 questions or concerns to the team and the coordinator.

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

There are not separate constitutions or specific guidelines. Co-members study and relate to *I Am the Way*, the constitutions of the congregation of the Sisters of Loretto. Along with the congregation, they also study and relate to *Loretto Life*, a descriptive book in a loose-leaf binder. There is not a specific list of obligations; each co-member formulates a statement of mutual commitment.

- **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 (all sisters) and additional co-members. The executive committee is the congregational advisory group to the president and a decision-

making group for the community. The community forum, which includes the executive committee, advises on decisions that pertain to the entire community. The co-members on the community forum are elected by the whole community.

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

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

Co-members serve on the coordinating team (including 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 as well.

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

Martha Alderson, Co-membership Coordinator
Loretto Staff Office
590 E. Lockwood Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63119
314/962-8112, ext. 103
malderson@lorettocommunity.org