

The Sister Servant in the Company of the Daughters of Charity



Guide

Presentation

Paris, November 29, 2011

Dear Sisters,

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us forever!

This document, *The Sister Servant in the Company of the Daughters of Charity*, was developed by the General Council, which took into account the suggestions of the commission composed of Sisters from various Provinces. We thank them for their contributions.

Several phases of study and reflection were needed to adapt the 1981 *Directives* to the Constitutions of 2004. The present text was approved by the General Council at its meeting of August 31, 2011.

This Guide is intended as a tool to aid the Sister Servant in her mission as animator of the local community. The Constitutions and Statutes spell out clearly the mission confided to her: to animate and lead the local community, to maintain its unity, and to strengthen the bond of the community with the Company and with the Church.¹

The text of the Constitutions strongly emphasizes that the Sister Servant carries out her mission in union with the Sisters, with whom

¹ Cf. C. 82a.

she creates *“a joyful atmosphere of faith, prayer, cordiality, and apostolic zeal.”*²

Saint Louise encouraged the Sister Servants to live in great availability, to be open to the opinions of the Sisters and to listen to their advice. *“It is customary in Companies for the Sister Servant to receive all the necessary advice and then by her guidance to convey it to her sisters. In this way a spirit of unity is nourished in communities, and trust is firmly established in them for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. If we do not act thus, my dear Sisters, the kingdom of Jesus Christ cannot be established among us. On the other hand, if we act in this way, His peace and love will take full possession of us.”*³

It is the duty of the Sister Servant to maintain the spirit of the Company, which she herself strives to live, because *“those who are called to the office of Sister Servant must always be the first to humble themselves and to give others the example of what they are bound to do.”*⁴

The Guide is divided into seven chapters: the first gives the general framework of the mission of the Sister Servant in following Christ the Servant. It gives the broad outlines of her specific responsibilities in the local community. The six chapters that follow develop the various aspects of animation of the spiritual and apostolic life, formation, etc.

Each chapter has a similar structure, beginning with a heading, followed by a subheading, a specific call addressed to the Sister Servant and the Sisters of the local community. Next, a text from the Founders, the Constitutions, or a Church document introduces the

² C. 36a.

³ Saint Louise to Sister Cecile Angiboust, July 17, 1655, SW 394.

⁴ Saint Vincent, November 15, 1657, “Uniformity,” X, Conf.86.

content of the chapter that will be developed in the numbered paragraphs. Lastly, the contents of the chapter are summarized in a framed statement.

We ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Company and first animator of the Christian community, to accompany the Sister Servants each day in their mission of guiding and animating the Sisters of the local community.

May Saint Vincent and Saint Louise intercede for the Sister Servants of the Company so that they may remain faithful to the plan of God and bear witness to the Risen Christ, with the strength of the Holy Spirit.⁵

With my devoted affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Evelyne Franc". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

⁵ Cf. C. 17c.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

Introduction.....9

I. THE CALL TO SERVICE

1.1 Appointment of the Sister Servant.....11

1.2 Authority of the Sister Servant.....12

1.3 Specific responsibilities of the Sister Servant13

1.4 Service lived in co-responsibility.....15

II. ANIMATION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

2.1 Listening to the Holy Spirit17

2.2 Relationship with God18

Celebration of the Eucharist

Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick

Liturgy of the Hours

Prayer

Marian Prayer

Silence

2.3 Means of spiritual growth23

Spiritual Reading

Review of life

Community Review

Annual Retreat

Monthly day of reflection and prayer

Accompaniment and spiritual direction

Asceticism

III. The BUILDING OF COMMUNITY

3.1 Community relationships.....	28
3.2 Local Community Plan.....	30
3.3 Community Meetings	31
Times of Sharing	
Times of Relaxation	
3.4 Personal Meetings	32
Accompaniment linked to the mission entrusted to them	
Communication	
Renewal of Vows	
Information: Annual and Five Year	

IV. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMON MISSION

4.1 Sent to serve those who are poor.....	38
Attitudes of service	
Insertion into the diocese and the parish	
Means of social communication	
4.2 Collaboration	43
With the laity	
With members of the Vincentian Family	
With other Congregations	
4.3 Apostolic Reflection.....	44
Review of works	

V. COMMITMENT TO FORMATION

5.1 Initial Formation	48
Pre-Postulancy	
Postulancy	

Seminary	
Initial formation on mission	
5.2 Ongoing formation	52
5.3 Vocation Ministry	53

VI. THE WITNESS OF EVANGELICAL LIFE

6.1 Practice of the evangelical counsels	55
Chastity	
Poverty	
Obedience	
6.2 Evangelical Discernment	60
Domestic Council	
Preparation and procedure for the meetings	
6.3 Administration of temporal goods	64

VII. BELONGING TO THE CHURCH AND TO THE COMPANY

7.1 Participation in the mission of the Church	66
7.2 Belonging to the Company	67
7.3 Relationships in the Province	68
With the Visitatrix, the Councillors, the Provincial Director	
Regular Visitations and Pastoral Visits	
Information	
Provincial Meetings	
Availability	
Participation	
7.4 Domestic Assembly	71

APPENDICES

CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS75

MODELS OF DOCUMENTS77

Annual and five year information

ARCHIVES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY79

TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

Recommendations from the Founders83

Church Documents93

SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY99

The Sister Servant According to the Thinking of the Founders

The duty of Sister Servant has its origin in the beginning of the Company. On July 31, 1634, Saint Vincent de Paul, in a very simple manner, appointed the first four Sisters for this service: Sister Marie at Saint-Sauveur, Sister Michelle at Saint-Nicolas, Sister Marguerite at Saint-Paul, and Mademoiselle Le Gras at the Hôtel-Dieu, and he explained the reason:

*“Since obedience improves all our ministries, there must always be one among you who acts as the Superior. Sometimes it will be one Sister, sometimes another. That’s what we do on the missions. Don’t you think this is necessary?”*⁶

The title of Sister Servant was proposed in 1642 by Monsieur Vincent, who explains it in the following way:

*“The word ancelle, dear Sisters, comes from the word ancilla which means ‘servant,’ and that’s what the Blessed Virgin called herself when she gave her consent to the angel that God’s will be fulfilled in the mystery of His Son’s Incarnation. This has led me to think, dear Sisters, that, in [the] future, instead of calling the Sister in charge by the title of ‘Superior,’ we should use the expression ‘Sister Servant.’”*⁷

⁶ Saint Vincent, July 31, 1634, “Explanation of the Regulations,” IX, Conf.1.

⁷ Saint Vincent, June [20] 1642, “Obedience,” IX, Conf. 11.

Saint Louise reminded the Sister Servants that it is by following Christ the Servant that the Sisters respond to the call they have received to carry out this special service to others.

“...since it is the most holy will of God, I hope, my Sister, that you have willingly taken up the yoke which she left you with great humility... Enter upon this charge in the spirit of Him who said that He had come not to be served but to serve.”⁸

⁸ Saint Louise, September 9, 1644, “To the Sisters,” SW L. 125B

I. THE CALL TO SERVICE

Following Christ the Servant

“If there has to be a Superior—a Sister Servant—then she should be an example of virtue and humility to others: the first at every task, the first to throw herself at the feet of her Sister, the first to ask forgiveness, the first to set aside her own opinion to follow that of another... Oh! May God in His goodness be pleased to make it so.”⁹

1.1 Appointment of the Sister Servant

The Sister Servant is appointed by the Visitatrix with her Council for three years; she can be reappointed after consultation with the Sister herself and with the local community.¹⁰ At the time of her installation, she receives a patent, which makes her appointment official.

In a spirit of availability, the Sister Servant accepts, in faith and obedience, the call of the Company to a service of love in a local community, to carry out, with the Sisters, the common mission: the service of Christ in those who are Poor.

To fulfill her mission, the Sister Servant draws strength from the sacramental life and from prayer. She reads and meditates on the Word of God, Church documents, the Constitutions and Statutes, the writings of the Founders and of the Company, and avails herself of the means of formation offered by the Province.

⁹ Saint Vincent, June 19, 1647, “Council,” XIIIb, Conf. 159.

¹⁰ Cf. C. 82c.

The Sister Servant maintains the unity of the local community, strengthens its bonds with the Company and with the Church, encourages fidelity to the charism, and is conscious that she is responsible for the mission entrusted to her.¹¹ Each Daughter of Charity lives her vocation united with the Sisters of her local community, which is the living presence of the Company in a specific place where its spirit and purpose are incarnated and realized.

At the end of her mandate, the Sister Servant takes on a different service with serenity and availability. She sees that the Sister who will replace her is familiarized with the functioning of the local community, informing her, with discernment and discretion, of necessary information concerning the Sisters.

1.2 Authority of the Sister Servant

The authority of the Sister Servant has as its aim to maintain the spirit of the Company in the local community. It is carried out in love, truth, trust and dialogue, respecting the principles of co-responsibility, subsidiarity, and participation.¹²

“Persons in authority are called to keep the charism alive ... What is required of persons in authority is an adequate knowledge ... making it part of themselves, in order then better to see it in relation to community life and in relation to its place in ecclesial and social contexts.”¹³

The Sister Servant carries out her service, following the example of Christ the Good Shepherd: *“There is no greater love than to give one’s*

¹¹ Cf. C. 82a.

¹² Cf. C. 31b; C. 63b.

¹³ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 13e.

*life for one's friends;"*¹⁴ for *"we must have, continually before our eyes our model, which is the exemplary life of Jesus Christ which we are called to imitate..."*¹⁵

Before all else, the Sister Servant is a Daughter of Charity, given to God for the service of Christ in those who are poor. She is a servant with a twofold calling: as a Daughter of Charity and in view of the responsibility entrusted to her.

Aware that the Vincentian charism is a gift of the Spirit, the Sister Servant fosters in each Sister the desire to live consistently with the Constitutions and Statutes, to be imbued with the writings of the Founders, and to be updated in formation, always in view of the service of those who are poor.

The primary concern of the Sister Servant, together with the community, is *"to make God known, to proclaim the Gospel, and make the Kingdom present."*¹⁶ The mission of the local community is situated within the ecclesial mission of the Company.

The Sister Servant accepts, in faith, the duty and responsibility of guiding, accompanying, and making final decisions.¹⁷

1.3 Specific responsibilities of the Sister Servant

The exercise of authority of the Sister Servant, like all the other dimensions of her life, is based on faith and on the authenticity of her

¹⁴ Jn. 15:13.

¹⁵ Saint Louise, August 29, 1648, "To My Very Dear Sister Anne Hardemont," SW L.217.

¹⁶ Cf. C. 10a.

¹⁷ Cf. C. 31b; *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 13g.

total gift to God, in community for the service of Christ in those who are poor.

“The Sister Servant animates and leads the local community... together with her Sisters, she is responsible for the accomplishment of their common mission...The Sister Servant has certain powers in her own right, under the authority of Major Superiors, and the Sisters owe her obedience.”¹⁸

In her service of authority and animation, she has the obligation¹⁹:

- to give an account to the Visitatrix of the life of the local community and its ministry to those who are poor,
- to receive the Sisters’ request for renewal of the vows and to transmit it to the Visitatrix,
- to accompany her Sisters in living their vocation and mission, (Today, the expression “accompaniment” is used, in the Company, to describe this daily responsibility of the Sister Servant.)²⁰,
- to communicate information regarding the Company, the Province, and the local community and its ministries,
- to prepare, with the Sisters, the Local Community Plan and the budget, submitting them to the Visitatrix for approval, and to be attentive regarding their application in the Community,
- to make decisions which are within her competency, after having dialogued with the Sisters or consulted the Domestic Council, according to the matters being treated,

¹⁸ C. 82a, d.

¹⁹ Cf. C. 82; C. 83; C. 85 ; S. 64b to S. 67.

²⁰ Cf. C. 31b; C. 36a, b; *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 13g.

- to give the Sisters the necessary permissions for their personal needs and ministries,²¹
- to give the Sisters permission to use personal goods for the cases specified at Provincial level,
- to promote initial and ongoing formation of the Sisters,
- to administer the goods of the local community, in accordance with the Constitutions and Statutes, giving the Visitatrix an account of the financial management and necessary permissions,
- to convoke and preside over the Domestic Assembly,
- to assure the upkeep of the local community Archives and of the ministry entrusted to the Community, if it belongs to the Province or has been confided to it.

1.4 Service lived in co-responsibility

Co-responsibility requires that each person assume her part of responsibility for the common good. To live authority and obedience in co-responsibility presupposes the participation of the Sisters in a common seeking of the will of God.²²

In her service, the Sister Servant is assisted by a Domestic Council²³ and, when necessary and possible, by a local Assistant and a local Treasurer.²⁴

The local Assistant is appointed by the Visitatrix with her Council, at the request of the Sister Servant, after consultation of the local

²¹ Cf. C. 30a, b,c.

²² Cf. C. 31b.

²³ Cf. C. 82f.

²⁴ Cf. S. 66a, b.

community. Her role is determined together with the Sister Servant, who delegates to her certain tasks, according to the needs of the Community.

The local Treasurer is appointed by the Sister Servant after consultation of the local community. This appointment is transmitted to the Visitatrix by the Sister Servant.²⁵ The local Treasurer administers the temporal goods of the local community in conformity with the Constitutions and Statutes, according to Provincial guidelines and under the direction of the Sister Servant.

For goods of the local community or of those who are poor, the Sisters ask permissions of the Sister Servant and give her an account. These permissions are renewable.

In view of the Mission,
the Sister Servant commits herself humbly
to the service of the Community
in respect, discretion, and attentive listening to each Sister.

²⁵ Cf. S. 66b.

II. ANIMATION OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

**Together with the Community,
the Sister Servant is called to live rooted in Jesus Christ,
the source and model of all charity.**

“The persons in authority are called to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer, looking after the community's daily faithfulness to prayer, in the awareness that the community approaches God with small but constant steps.”²⁶

2.1 Listening to the Holy Spirit

The Sister Servant asks for the help of the Holy Spirit to live:

- the total gift of herself, in an attitude of a humble, simple, charitable servant,
- accepting her limitations and need for conversion,
- with transparency and consistency in her words and manner of acting,
- attentive to the Sisters, respecting the mystery of God in each one.

These attitudes reveal the evangelical face of authority which is at the service of the spiritual growth of each member and the building up of community life.²⁷

²⁶ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 13b.

²⁷ Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 49.

By listening to the Word of God, the Sister Servant opens her heart to the action the Holy Spirit wishes to accomplish in and through her. For this reason, she must ask his help and have trust in him. To live faithfully the mission entrusted to her, the Sister Servant takes Mary as the model and teacher of the spiritual life.²⁸ Following her example, she learns to ponder the Word and to be attentive to the Sisters and to the needs of those who are poor.

Together with the Sisters, the Sister Servant seeks to build a Community deeply rooted in Jesus Christ. Their relationship with the Lord is nourished daily by listening to and meditating on the Word of God, their sacramental life, etc.

As animator of the local community, the Sister Servant strives to be attentive to the quality of its spiritual life, creating with the Sisters an atmosphere of charity, faith, and prayer.²⁹

2.2 Relationship with God

The prayer of the Daughters of Charity is a prayer of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication; it is united to the prayer of the Church and extended to all the dimensions of mission. From the quality of this relationship with God flows the quality of all human relationships.

Each local community determines, in its Local Community Plan, ways of praying in common. In their prayer, the Sisters are attentive to the Word of God; they present the needs of the world and are in solidarity with those who poor; *“They consider it their responsibility to pray with and for those who are poor, and in their name.”*³⁰

²⁸ Cf. C. 23.

²⁹ Cf. C. 36a.

³⁰ C. 24f.

The Sister Servant and the Sisters take care to preserve the sacred character of the place of prayer, by an attitude of respect and silence. They consider the times of prayer they have chosen together indispensable to a balanced life. They participate fully in the liturgical seasons and the great feasts of the Church and of the Company.

Celebration of the Eucharist

The Eucharist, “a privileged place for encountering the Lord,”³¹ is the “center of their life and mission...”³² This spiritual treasure of the Church sustains each Sister in the continuous memory of Christ, a memory which is expressed in true communion with all our brothers and sisters.

In the Eucharistic sacrifice, all creation is presented to the Father through the death and resurrection of Christ. The Daughters of Charity offer themselves with Christ in this memorial, including in their praise and intercession, the hopes and sufferings of those who are poor and of all humanity.³³

Sufficient time should be devoted to preparing for a meaningful participation in the Eucharist.

When participation in the Eucharist is not possible, the Sisters celebrate the Liturgy of the Word, nourished by the readings of the day and a time of meditation in preparation for Communion. This is

³¹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 26.

³² C. 19b.

³³ Cf. C. 19c; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1359.

followed by a time of thanksgiving.³⁴ This celebration should be faithful to diocesan directives.

The local community gives great importance to Sunday, the Lord's day, which recalls the resurrection of Christ. It is the day on which we remember the first day of the world in adoration and gratitude, and at the same time, the final day, when Christ will come in glory.³⁵ The Sisters participate in the Sunday Eucharist preferably in the parish.

Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick

Reconciliation³⁶ is an essential dimension of the Christian faith. The sacrament of Reconciliation brings with it true spiritual resurrection, restoring the graces of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God.

The grace of forgiveness enables us to be renewed in fidelity to God and in loving relationship with others. It provides growth in spiritual strength. For this reason, the Sisters receive the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, according to the directives of the Church.³⁷

The Sister Servant is attentive to providing the elderly Sisters with the possibility of receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation periodically.

³⁴ Cf. S. 1.

³⁵ Cf. *Dies Domini*, 1.

³⁶ Cf. C. 20a.

³⁷ Cf. C. 20a; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1440-1498.

Those who are experiencing illness and suffering need to feel supported and to receive God's strength. The Sacrament of the Sick is a sign that witnesses to the concern of Christ and of his Church. The Sister Servant takes care to assure that the elderly and sick Sisters receive the grace of this sacrament at the appropriate time.

Liturgy of the Hours

In union with the universal Church, the Community celebrates Morning and Evening Prayer of the people of God.³⁸

Careful preparation of the Liturgy of the Hours and active participation in it help the Sisters experience more intensely this prayer in common. This becomes a Gospel witness.

The Sisters welcome others who wish to pray with them. If the Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated in the parish, the Sisters participate there if possible.

Prayer

The Community gathers for prayer,³⁹ a special time of closeness with the Lord. Prayer continually strengthens union with God, supporting and revitalizing spiritual life, community life, and service. *"A Daughter of Charity can not survive if she doesn't pray."*⁴⁰

³⁸ Cf. C. 19d.

³⁹ Cf. C. 21a, b.

⁴⁰ Cf. C. 21b ; Saint Vincent, May 31, 1648, "Mental Prayer," IX, Conf.37.

The Sisters prepare the next day's prayer by reading the Word of God; at a later time, they may share their thoughts on it.⁴¹

The sharing of prayer, as experienced by the Founders and the first Sisters, is a special time of dialogue and mutual enrichment, which contributes to deepening communion among the Sisters.

Convinced of the importance of this sharing, the Sister Servant encourages the Sisters to do so regularly, using a variety of forms. *"Take care to give an account of your prayer as soon as possible after making it. You can't imagine how useful this will be."*⁴²

Marian Prayer

The Sister Servant and the Sisters contemplate Mary, intimately united to her Son, the perfect example of the spiritual and apostolic life,⁴³ to make of their lives an act of worship of God, and to make their worship a commitment of their life.⁴⁴

They learn from Mary humility, simplicity, and charity, which constitute the spirit of their vocation. *"By daily meditation on the Rosary, the prayer of those who are poor ... and on the prayer of the Angelus, they contemplate the mystery of salvation."*⁴⁵

⁴¹ Cf. S. 3b.

⁴² Saint Vincent, July 31, 1634, "Explanation of the Regulations," IX, Conf.1.

⁴³ Cf. *Apostolate of the Laity*, 4.

⁴⁴ Cf. C. 23; *Devotion to Mary*, 21.

⁴⁵ S.7b,d.

Silence

Silence fosters listening to God,⁴⁶ to the Sisters, and to those who are poor, for *“it is in silence that we can hear God speaking to our hearts.”*⁴⁷ It precedes and is an extension of prayer, gives depth to our life, and is a preparation for dialogue and community sharing. The Sister Servant and the Sisters determine together the times and places of silence in their Community.

2.3 Means of spiritual growth

To support and revitalize the spiritual life of the Sisters, the Constitutions and Statutes propose various means of growth. The Sister Servant sees that importance is attached to them, and encourages the Sisters to experience them together. Ways and times of doing this are determined with the Sisters, and spelled out in the Community Plan: *“It is not enough to place material goods in common, but... still more fundamental, and to be promoted, is the sharing of spiritual goods, of listening to the Word of God, of faith...”*⁴⁸

Spiritual Reading

The Sister Servant fosters and encourages the reading of Holy Scripture, Church documents, the writings of the Founders, other documents of the Company and the writings of spiritual authors. Personal reflection and sharing in common facilitates comprehension and assimilation.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Cf. C. 21c.

⁴⁷ Saint Vincent, June 14, 1643, “Explanation of the Regulations,” IX, Conf.15.

⁴⁸ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 20c.

⁴⁹ Cf. S. 6a.

*“Through spiritual reading, the Daughters of Charity nourish the gift of their life given to God. In reading and meditating Holy Scripture... they deepen their knowledge of the person of Christ and His attitude towards those who are lowly and oppressed.”*⁵⁰

The calendar of the Company reminds them to read the Rules of the Company⁵¹ (Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity) around March 15 and September 27, and to celebrate significant feast days (feasts of the Vincentian Family, memorials).

Review of life

Review of life is an indispensable means of conversion and of spiritual growth. It consists in examining our lives each day with faith and confidence, in order to discover the action of the Spirit, to give thanks to God and to acknowledge our lack of consistency with the Word of God and the Constitutions and Statutes.⁵²

Community Review

The Constitutions and Statutes remind us that community review is an occasion to evaluate and discern the way we live and act.⁵³ The Sister Servant helps the Sisters to be faithful to asking pardon, seeking reconciliation, spiritual charity, and mutual correction, in an evangelical spirit.

⁵⁰ C. 22a.

⁵¹ Cf. S. 6b.

⁵² Cf. S. 4.

⁵³ Cf. C.32b; S. 11b; S. 16a.

She is always ready to acknowledge her faults and to ask pardon for them. In the same way, she encourages the Sisters to ask, to give, and to be open to another Sister's asking pardon in a spontaneous or prepared manner.

Community review,⁵⁴ a time of grace, helps us to grow together in the spirit of the Company. Each Sister takes part in this exercise. She prepares carefully for it and participates in it in truth and love.

Mutual reconciliation repairs breaches in charity and enables us to overcome obstacles.

Spiritual charity,⁵⁵ given in community with respect and discretion, is received humbly with a view to spiritual growth. It can be shared individually or as a community.

Mutual correction,⁵⁶ offered in an evangelical spirit, helps a Sister to improve her behavior and attitude.

Annual Retreat

According to Constitution 21d, the annual retreat is a privileged time of grace and blessing from the Lord, and provides an opportunity to examine our lives. Communal and Vincentian in character, it takes place in an atmosphere of recollection and in silence.

⁵⁴ Cf. C. C. 32b; Glossary of the Constitutions, p.196.

⁵⁵ Cf. C. C. 32b; Glossary of the Constitutions, p.203.

⁵⁶ Cf. C. C. 32b; Glossary of the Constitutions, p.198.

The Sisters discuss the best time for their retreat, taking into account the needs of ministry to those who are poor and the needs of the Community.

The Sister Servant is available for communication with each Sister before or after the annual retreat.

Monthly day of reflection and prayer

The Monthly day of reflection and prayer is a way of revitalizing⁵⁷ and reviewing our lives and of being renewed in our vocation. It frees the Sisters to be open daily to the Spirit.

Well-prepared and experienced, the monthly retreat is a favorable time of personal intimacy of being with the Lord and a support for the spiritual life of each Sister. It can be made personally or communally, according to possibilities.

For certain events, such as the Renewal of Vows and at the end of the year, it is recommended to make this day of retreat in common.

Accompaniment and spiritual direction

The Sister Servant recognizes the importance of the means proposed in Constitution 20b for vocational growth and development. She helps the Sisters, particularly those in initial formation, to find someone who knows the spirit of the Company and is qualified to direct the Sisters.

⁵⁷ Cf. C. 21d.

Asceticism

The Sister Servant and the Sisters are convinced that asceticism⁵⁸ is indispensable in order to remain faithful to their vocation.⁵⁹ True asceticism is lived in humility, vigilance and love. It fosters interior freedom, acceptance of God's Will, and availability for service and sharing.

Together, they choose and practice in solidarity appropriate forms of community penance. These are practiced during the major liturgical seasons, in solidarity with those who are poor.⁶⁰

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
are responsible for creating a Community of faith.

⁵⁸ Cf. C. 20c ; S. 2.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

⁶⁰ Cf. S. 2.

III. THE BUILDING OF COMMUNITY

**Together, with the Community
the Sister Servant is called
to build community life, day after day.**

“Communion is a gift offered which also requires a response, a patient learning experience and struggle, in order to overcome the excesses of spontaneity and the fickleness of desires. The highest ideal of community necessarily brings with it conversion from every attitude contrary to communion.... Communion originates precisely in sharing the Spirit's gifts.”⁶¹

3.1 Community relationships

Called to a service of animation, the Sister Servant assumes her responsibility with serenity within the local community. Before all else, she should love the Sisters who are confided to her and create with them an atmosphere of faith, cordiality, and apostolic zeal.⁶²

In order to facilitate mutual communication, she sets up times to bring the Sisters together to share the joys and difficulties of their ministries; she also encourages personal and communal reflection to prepare for the decisions she must make.

The Sister Servant exercises authority as a service and shows each Sister the same kindly attention. Animation of the local community and her availability for listening to the Sisters are her priorities.

⁶¹ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 23 ; 32.

⁶² Cf. C. 36a.

With a spirit of faith and openness of heart, she:

- accepts each Sister as she is, without making distinctions, and, in an atmosphere of listening and respect, encourages the Sister to share her life and mission,
- takes an interest in the Sister's spiritual growth and development, her service, her difficulties, her needs, her health, her family, etc.,
- helps each Sister to be available when she is called to another service,
- warmly welcomes the Sister on her arrival in the local community, and facilitates her integration into the group, making her feel she is an active member of the Community, whatever her age, her health, etc.,
- gives special attention to Sisters in initial formation,
- is very attentive to the elderly and sick Sisters who are part of the mission,
- accompanies, in a special way, Sisters who live in a difficult situation, as well as those who have permission to live outside of a house of the Company,
- is attentive to the Sisters of the Annex, if the Visitatrix has confided one to her.

The local Community, a place of coming together for mission, is united in faith and centered on the person of Christ, in order to serve Him and to find Him in the life and heart of those who are poor. It is also the setting from which the Sisters draw apostolic energy for living their relationships in charity, unity and joy.

It is good "to remember that in the spirit of the Gospel, a conflict of ideas never becomes a conflict of persons; to recall that a plurality of perspectives fosters a deepening of the question...to understand that the

*ideal is not that of having a community without conflicts but instead a community that is willing to confront its own tensions in order to resolve them positively.”*⁶³

3.2 The Local Community Plan

Each local community works out its plan for the good of those who are poor.⁶⁴ This plan is drawn up with reference to the Constitutions and Statutes, the pastoral plan of the Diocese, and the priorities and objectives of the Provincial Plan.

The Local Community Plan should foster a balance between spiritual life, community life, and ministry. The Sisters determine, for each of these aspects, the goals to be achieved progressively, and indicate appropriate ways of attaining them. The plan also includes details pertaining to formation and vocation ministry.

It must be real, specific, and flexible, and take into account the characteristics proper to the Community: the persons who compose it, the diversity of ministries, the ecclesial, social, and cultural context, etc. of the local community.

The horarium of the local Community (day, week, month) can be given in an appendix.

The Sister Servant promotes the active participation of all the Sisters in working out the Plan, which necessitates a time of discernment, an attitude of conversion, and requires prayer, dialogue, and charity.

⁶³ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 25b.

⁶⁴ Cf. C. 83.

The Local Community Plan is submitted to the Visitatrix with her Council for approval.⁶⁵

In order to be a tool for revitalization, it needs to be reviewed periodically—at least once a year.

3.3 Community Meetings

Community meetings are occasions of sharing and mutual enrichment for mutual growth. They may include topics such as formation, discernment on particular questions, preparation for decisions, etc.

In faith and joy, the Sisters prepare and celebrate with Vincentian simplicity the feasts of the Company and of the local community, jubilees, and various community events.

Times of Sharing

Times of sharing are moments of reciprocal communication which call for trust, openness, and acceptance.

The Sister Servant may encourage reflection and dialogue on a Biblical theme, a Church document, a text of the Constitutions, events of life, etc., with the help of appropriate means. These gatherings are prepared by the Sister Servant herself or by other Sisters; their frequency is determined in the Local Community Plan.

⁶⁵ Cf. S. 67.

Times of Relaxation

The Sister Servant and the Sisters appreciate various forms of relaxation, as one of the means contributing to balance in the life of each Sister and of the entire Community.⁶⁶ These occasions are determined in the Local Community Plan.

3.4 Personal Meetings

Accompaniment

The Sister Servant accompanies each Sister of the local community, having frequent recourse to the Holy Spirit, in constant, trusting prayer. This service of accompaniment flows from her authority, her mission, and her specific responsibility. Conscious that it is confided to her by the Company, both she and the Sisters accept it in faith.

This service is a journey together, a growth and development in the life of each Sister, with the help of attentive listening, a charitable view of each Sister, and encouragement. All of these enable them to advance together in fidelity to their vocation, and to be joyful witnesses to the Charity of the Risen Christ.

Communication

Communication is a privileged means, a special time for accompaniment.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Cf. S. 19.

⁶⁷ Cf. 36 b; S. 21.

On February 13, 1658, Saint Louise de Marillac encouraged Sister Claude Carré in Angers to be attentive to the Sisters, receiving them cordially, particularly at the time of communication, in order to help them to correct their little faults and to acquire the virtues that help them to serve better.⁶⁸

The Sister Servant encourages contacts with the Sisters, and welcomes them with respectful listening and trust.

“Listening is one of the principal ministries of superiors for which they must always be available, above all for those who feel isolated and in need of attention. In fact, listening means accepting the other unconditionally, giving him or her space in one’s own heart. For this listening conveys affection and understanding, declares that the other is appreciated, and that his or her presence and opinion are taken into consideration.

*Whoever presides must remember that the one who does not listen to his brother or sister does not know how to listen to God either, that an attentive listening allows one to better coordinate the energy and gifts that the Spirit gives to the community and also, when making decisions, to keep in mind the limits and the difficulties of some members. Time spent in listening is never time wasted, and listening can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels”.*⁶⁹

The quality of daily dialogue disposes the Sisters to experience the communication which *“is prepared in prayer and in an attitude of interior poverty favorable to the reception of the Spirit.”*⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cf. Saint Louise, February 13, 1658, “To Sister Claude Carre at Angers,” SW.564.

⁶⁹ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 20a.

⁷⁰ C. 36b.

This means of growth is shared in charity and sincerity. *“Together, in a spirit of discernment, the Sister Servant and the Sister examine themselves on their efforts to be faithful to the demands of the life and mission of a Daughter of Charity.”*⁷¹

The Sister Servant welcomes each Sister and dialogues with her in trust and simplicity and encourages her to grow in her vocation.

Fidelity to *“this meeting, an important element of community living, a spiritual and apostolic sharing, and a source of community dynamism,”*⁷² assists the local community to live closely united in a sisterly spirit, and fosters growth in the spirit of the Company.

The Constitutions indicate that this communication takes place *“several times a year in an atmosphere of mutual trust and discretion.”*⁷³ However, after being sent on mission, in preparation for vows for the first time and until ten years vocation, the Sisters meet for communication more frequently (at least once a month).

Renewal of Vows

The communication to request Renewal of Vows⁷⁴ is a very important time, in which the Sister Servant carries out most particularly her role as spiritual animator.

In an atmosphere of prayer, humility, and charity, the Sister Servant and the Sister seek, in sincere dialogue:

⁷¹ C. 36b.

⁷² C. 36b.

⁷³ S. 21b.

⁷⁴ Cf. C. 28d; C.36, S.21, S. 64b.

- to examine their lives as Daughters of Charity,
- to acknowledge the demands of the vows and of their vocation of servant of Christ in those who are poor,
- to live in ever-renewed fidelity.

After the request to renew the vows, the Sister Servant writes a letter to the Visitatrix, containing the names of the Sisters who have asked to renew their vows, and expressing her own request. She makes known her availability for her service and asks permission to use the goods of the Company.

The Sister Servant shares with the Visitatrix the situation of any Sister who did not ask to renew her vows.

During the Eucharist on the Feast of the Annunciation, the Sisters renew their vows at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, after the Gospel or homily. The renewal of vows is followed by the Creed and the Prayers of the Faithful.⁷⁵

After renewing their vows, the Sisters sign the required attestation, which they put in an individual envelope. These documents are sent by the Sister Servant to the Visitatrix as soon as possible.

Information: Annual and Five Year

From the time of a Sister's admission into the Company, a personal data sheet is compiled at general and provincial levels.

⁷⁵ Cf. Instruction on the Vows of the Daughters of Charity, p. 35.

This document (personal data) of belonging to the Company is very significant and reflects the vocational journey of the Sister. Because it is a means of information very useful to Superiors in view of decisions to be made (placement, appointment to responsibility, or other situations concerning the Sister), it is important to update it regularly.

This information, especially during the first ten years of vocation, facilitates an assessment of the Sister's growth in the spirit of the Company. This practice has existed since the time of the Founders. Saint Louise wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre, Sister Servant at Nantes:

*"I would ask you, my dear Sister, to take note of the dispositions and capabilities of all the sisters in your little family, and to tell me which of them you think would most suitably replace Sister Anne at Hennebont... Please send me the names and birthplaces of all our sisters."*⁷⁶

The Sister Servant helps the Sisters to understand the importance of this information and dialogues with each of them in faith and humility during her preparation of the document. This sharing is a good opportunity to review one's life, and is a time of grace.

The Sister Servant sends this document⁷⁷ to the Visitatrix annually for Sisters in initial formation, and every five years for Sisters over ten years of vocation.

⁷⁶ Saint Louise, November (1651), "To My Very Dear Sister Jeanne Lepintre," SW, L.332.

⁷⁷ Cf. S. 64b.

Information concerning the Sister Servant is compiled with the Visitatrix or with a designated Councillor at an opportune time (regular visitation, annual retreat, etc).

See models (Appendix, pages 77-78)

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
help each other advance toward the Lord.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMON MISSION

**With the Community,
the Sister Servant is called to continue the mission of Christ.**

“To be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth. And what did He do mainly? ... He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation. How fortunate you are, Sisters, to be called to a state of life so pleasing to God!”⁷⁸

4.1 Sent to serve those who are poor

The Daughters of Charity give themselves to God in community for the service of those who are poor. This service guides and unifies all of their existence. *“They commit themselves by a specific vow to serve, corporally and spiritually, those who are poor.”⁷⁹*

The Charity of Jesus crucified, which animates the heart of the Daughter of Charity, urges her to hasten to the relief of every type of human misery, giving priority to the “truly poor.”⁸⁰ Saint Vincent and Saint Louise opted for the service of all forms of poverty.

The Sisters unite corporal and spiritual service; they are concerned with proclaiming the Gospel through service of those who are poor,

⁷⁸ Saint Vincent, July 5, 1640, “On the Vocation of the Daughter of Charity,” IX, Conf.2.

⁷⁹ C. 24a.

⁸⁰ Cf. Introduction to the Constitutions, p. 15; C. 11b.

explicitly whenever possible, but always through the witness of their lives:⁸¹

“That’s your main concern - to make God known by the spiritual service you owe to poor persons while serving them corporally ...”⁸²

The Sister Servant, together with the Sisters, is responsible for the mission confided to the Community.⁸³ Regardless of age or duty, every Sister contributes to the mission of the Company,⁸⁴ convinced that all are called to make known the charism.

Each Sister is aware that she is sent by the Company and acts in its name.⁸⁵ That is why she gives an account to the Sister Servant of the ministry entrusted to her, and shares her experiences with the local community. In this way, the Sisters show an interest in each one’s ministries.

Together, they seek to render quality service and to ensure that those who are poor are served with respect. They contribute to the integral promotion of persons, especially the most disadvantaged, and to the defense of their rights.

Convinced that the missionary spirit animates every Daughter of Charity,⁸⁶ the Sisters make themselves available, broadening their outlook to the dimensions of the universal Church and the world:

⁸¹ Cf. C. 24b.

⁸² Saint Vincent, May 1658, “To Two Sisters Being Sent to Ussel,” X, Conf.94.

⁸³ Cf. C. 82a.

⁸⁴ Cf. C. 35a.

⁸⁵ Cf. C. 5c.

⁸⁶ Cf. C. 25b.

“Indeed, more than in external works, the mission consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge...The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all.”⁸⁷

Attitudes of service

The vocation of Daughter of Charity calls them to serve poor persons in the same spirit that animated Christ the Servant and Mary the Servant of the Lord: *“Whatever their particular type of work and level of professional competence, the Sisters maintain toward persons who are poor an attitude of servant, which implies the practice of the virtues of their state: humility, simplicity, and charity.”⁸⁸*

Saint Louise said to the first Sisters:

“Be very gentle and courteous toward your poor. You know that they are our masters and that we must love them tenderly and respect them deeply.”⁸⁹

In faith and love, the Sisters serve those who are poor, who represent Jesus Christ to them. Following the example of their Founders, they look upon those who are poor as *“their lords and masters,”* and allow themselves to be evangelized by them.⁹⁰

Service rooted in Vincentian mysticism is expressed through human relationships and lived in gratitude. In order to discover the basic needs of poor persons, the Sisters give poor persons, especially the

⁸⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 72.

⁸⁸ C. 24d.

⁸⁹ Sainte Louise, May 4, 1650, “To My Very Dear Sister Cecile Agnes,” SW, L284B.

⁹⁰ Cf. Mt. 25:40; Cf. C. 16c; C. 24b.

most deprived, individual attention, taking time to be with them and to alleviate their solitude.

In an effort to respond to new challenges, the Sisters strive to be available and, in faith, to accept changes, by moving from:

- a mentality of ownership of ministries to an attitude of collaboration with the laity,
- certain positions in management and administration to other services (accompaniment, support, pastoral ministry).

These changes lead to greater Gospel witness. ⁹¹

Insertion into the diocese and the parish

The local community participates in the Pastoral Plan of the Diocese according to the charism of the Founders. ⁹² *“We have the double happiness of being Daughters of the holy Church and, being admitted in this manner, will this not be a new obligation for us to live and to act as children of such a Mother?”* ⁹³

The Sister Servant, with the Sisters, is attentive to the guidelines of the Church and the Pastoral Plan of the Diocese. They study possibilities of collaboration in parish ministry (visiting the sick, catechesis, liturgy, etc.).

⁹¹ Cf. S. 9a.

⁹² Cf. C. 1a, d.

⁹³ Sainte Louise, June 21, 1647, “To Monsieur Portail,” SW L.179.

As part of their mission, they participate in meetings organized by the Diocese or the Conference of Religious.

Means of social communication

Forms of media and modern technology are tools for our service. They are means of formation, as well as ways of proclaiming the Gospel.

These means provide knowledge of the realities of the world and of the Church, which is essential in order to give those who are poor a quality service adapted to their manner of life.

“The media, thanks to impressive developments in technology, have reached every corner of the earth.... Nevertheless, it is necessary to be vigilant with regard to the distorted use of the media, especially given their extraordinary power of persuasion.”⁹⁴

The Sister Servant and the Sisters reflect personally and in Community on the use of modern technology and mass-media.⁹⁵ They establish criteria permitting them to preserve balance in their life (work time, use of electronic devices, respect for the common life, times and places of prayer, etc.). The technological aids available to the Sisters belong to the Community and are financed by it.

⁹⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 99.

⁹⁵ Cf. S. 12; S. 24.

4.2 Collaboration

With the laity

The Founders had the intuition to organize the service of those who are poor always in collaboration with other people. In the same spirit, the Sister Servant and the Sisters maintain good relationships with laity, staff, benefactors, and other collaborators.

They foster their human, Christian and Vincentian formation, offering them means of broadening their knowledge of the charism and giving them access to the formation offered by the Province.

“Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ ...”⁹⁶

The Sisters are open to the ideas and suggestions of their collaborators. They meet with them and keep them regularly informed, working with them in a fair manner, *“...in a spirit of sharing, living the values that the Company professes.”⁹⁷*

The Sister Servant sees to it that the laws of the country and the directives of the social doctrines of the Church are respected regarding the staff.

⁹⁶ *Deus Caritas est*, 31a.

⁹⁷ S. 9a.

All the Sisters maintain good, honest relationships, with lay administrations and civil authorities. They try to establish active collaboration with public or private agencies.⁹⁸

With the members of the Vincentian Family

The Sister Servant, with the Sisters, spells out in the Local Community Plan ways of collaborating with the different branches of the Vincentian Family with whom they are working, or who are present in places where the Community is serving.

If these branches of the Vincentian Family do not yet exist, the Sisters foster their establishment, with the agreement of the local Ordinary.

With other Congregations

The Sister Servant and the Sisters are open to collaboration with members of other Congregations, participating with them in different service projects for those who are poor, while always respecting the particular character of each Institute.

4.3 Apostolic Reflection

In a world that is diversified and in constant change, the Sisters are called to be:

⁹⁸ Cf. S. 9a.

- attentive to the presence of God in events,
- open to the realities around them, with an awareness of the values and counter-values of these realities, which have an impact on Community living and the service of those who are poor,
- faithful to the spirit of the Founders in seeking out the truly poor, whom they serve with *“compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect and devotion.”*⁹⁹

All should take care that the service of Christ in those who are poor is continually updated, after evangelical discernment.

To do this, the Sisters practice apostolic reflection,¹⁰⁰ sharing, in dialogue and respect, their experiences of ministry. This allows them to discover what God is asking of them.

Apostolic reflection makes the Sisters more attentive, helps to bring about a new way of looking at life, and moves them beyond appearances. It requires openness of heart to welcome and respond to calls in the light of faith.

In apostolic reflection a Sister may recount an event or particular situation which affects the life of those who are poor. She may also refer to a Gospel passage, a Church document, a text of the writings of the Founders, the Constitutions and Statutes, etc.

The process may follow several steps:

⁹⁹ C.10b; Saint Vincent, November 11, 1657, “Service of the Sick, and Care of One’s Own Health,” X, Conf. 85.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. S. 11a.

- to look at an event with the eyes of faith and listening to God; if working with a text, to reflect more deeply on it and to receive in a new way the message which gives a new insight to life,
- to allow oneself to be challenged by it: discerning the standard of living or standard of service for those who are poor, asking what needs to be retained or redirected,
- to make specific commitments to respond personally and communally to these calls.

And to conclude the apostolic reflection:

- to thank God for what has been experienced,
- to confide to Him those who are poor and the people concerned,
- to ask for light and strength to carry out the commitments made.

Review of works

In accord with Constitution 36a, the Sister Servant promotes communal reflection on the needs of those who are poor, and on appeals and commitments; this is done in order to give specific responses in line with Provincial guidelines.

Statute 11b asks for periodic reviews to verify if a work continues to be at the service of those who are poor and if the way of serving corresponds to the Vincentian charism. This requires, on the part of the Sister Servant and the Community, clear, prudent discernment and the courage to make necessary changes.

When this revision is proposed by the Visitatrix and her Council, the Sister Servant sends to the Visitatrix the results of the communal reflection. In a spirit of faith and obedience, she and the Sisters are ready to accept the final decision, which might include modifying the work, handing over the ministry, closure, or withdrawal of the Community, etc.

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
are available to respond to the challenges of the mission,
according to the spirit of the Company.

V. COMMITMENT TO FORMATION

**With the Community, the Sister Servant
is called to live formation
moving progressively towards Christ**

“The privileged place in which this experience is lived is the local community, where all the Sisters are aware of their responsibility for formation.”¹⁰¹

5.1 Initial Formation

The Sister Servant and the local community are prepared to receive persons in formation and to assume their role as a formative community, referring to the objectives of the different stages indicated in the Constitutions and Statutes, the *Guide for Initial Formation* and the Formation Plan of the Province.

Pre-Postulancy

The Sister Servant and the Sisters welcome the candidate for an initial discernment of her vocation, according to the Formation Plan of the Province.¹⁰² They help her to learn about the charism of the Company.

¹⁰¹ C. 51c.

¹⁰² Cf. S. 35a; Guide for Initial Formation, p. 69.

Postulancy

In coordination with the Sisters in charge of Postulancy, the Sister Servant is particularly responsible for the postulant who has in the Community a progressive experience of spiritual, communal, and apostolic life, and discerns her vocation with a view to giving a free response to the call of the Lord.¹⁰³

Before the postulant's admission to the Seminary, the Sister Servant prepares an assessment which reflects *"a community evaluation in which the postulant participates."*¹⁰⁴

In case of doubt and/or difficulty in the vocational journey of the postulant, the Sister Servant, before making that assessment, dialogues with the Visitatrix.

Seminary

The Sister Servant with the local community should be prepared to welcome a Seminary Sister for her apostolic experience.¹⁰⁵

The Visitatrix gives precise directives to the Sister Servant and helps the Sisters of the Community of welcome to understand its role during the apostolic experience. *"If possible the Seminary Directress meets with the local community, or at least with the Sister Servant, to share the formation plan, the objectives of the apostolic experience and the particular needs of the Sister."*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Cf. C. 54.

¹⁰⁴ S. 35c.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, p. 91 et ff.

¹⁰⁶ Guide for Initial Formation, p. 93.

This experience is an integral part of Seminary formation, focused on seeking unity of life and on evaluating the Sister's ability to serve those who are poor in a given community.

During the apostolic experience, the Sister Servant is primarily responsible for the Seminary Sister and remains in contact with the Directress. She assures that the Sister performs a balanced service, corresponding to this stage of formation.

At the end of the apostolic experience, the Seminary Sister, the Sister Servant, and the local community prepare an evaluation.¹⁰⁷

Initial Formation on mission

The Sister Servant helps the Sister in Initial Formation on mission to assume progressively all the demands of her vocation by actively sharing the apostolic mission of the local community in which she is inserted.¹⁰⁸

The Sister Servant also helps her to discern and evaluate her growth in understanding and living the spirit of the Company and her manner of living the evangelical counsels.

At four years of vocation, she writes to the Superioress General and the Visitatrix to express her *"disposition with regard to her commitment in the Company."* The Sister Servant attaches her report to the letters of the Sister.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, p. 93.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, p.97 et ff.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. S. 15a.

The Sister Servant gives particular attention to the Sister who is preparing to make vows for the first time, and encourages her to reflect on their demands. She guides her through Instructions on the Vows of the Daughters of Charity, according to the Formation Plan of the Province.

Three months before the date envisioned for making vows, the Sister expresses, in writing, her request to the Visitatrix. The Sister Servant, after asking the opinion of each Sister in the local community, prepares an evaluation, which she sends to the Visitatrix.

The celebration of vows for the first time should be preceded by a time of immediate preparation. According to the directives of the Company the vows are celebrated with simplicity, generally in the local community.¹¹⁰

Before the Sister begins professional studies, it is recommended that she be allowed sufficient time to be firmly grounded in her vocation and to have a lived experience in the service of those who are poor.

In order to achieve unity of life the Sister Servant makes sure that the Sister who is studying maintains a balance between prayer, community life, professional formation, and rest, and that, as much as possible, she remains in contact with those who are poor.¹¹¹

The Sister Servant gives particular support to the Sister in initial formation on mission, until she is ten years of vocation.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Guide for Initial Formation, p. 101.

¹¹¹ Cf. C. 57.

5.2 On-going formation

The Sister Servant is aware of the need for formation and seeks to develop her own natural and spiritual gifts. Through her role she also contributes to the formation of the Sisters. Saint Vincent certainly had this concern: *“The Daughters of Charity must teach poor persons the things necessary for their salvation; therefore, the Sisters themselves have to be instructed first before being able to teach others.”*¹¹²

Each Sister should desire to continue to be formed in order to respond ever more fully to her vocation as servant of those who are poor. She tries to experience the events of daily life and community life as a means of formation.

*“Thus it will be important that all consecrated persons be formed in the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture open to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them. But above all they must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death.”*¹¹³

The Sister Servant and the Sisters specify in the Local Community Plan the objectives of formation, the means to attain them, and the frequency of their meetings. These provide the opportunity to reflect

¹¹² Saint Vincent, March 16, 1659, “Order of the Day,” X, Conf.108.

¹¹³ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 15.

more deeply on the Word of God, the writings of the Founders, the documents of the Company and of the Church, etc.

The Sisters take advantage of the means placed at their disposal by the Company and the Province: formation sessions, meetings, conferences, etc. They show an interest in them and devote to them the necessary time. In what concerns ministry, the Sisters take care to acquire professional competence, to familiarize themselves with legislation, and to act according to justice inspired by charity.¹¹⁴

For a specialized formation, always in reference to the service of those who are poor, the authorization of the Visitatrix is necessary.

The Sister Servant, in line with Provincial guidelines, seeks means to assure ongoing formation for the elderly Sisters in order to help them live the mission of the Company according to their capabilities.¹¹⁵

5.3 Vocation Ministry

The Sister Servant and the Sisters are attentive to Vocation Ministry as marked out in the Diocesan Plan and the Provincial guidelines.

“Every community and all the members of the Institute are called to take on the tasks of contact with youth, of an evangelical teaching of the following of Christ and of handing on the charism.... Young people are searching for others who are able to propose styles of authentic evangelical life and ways of arriving at the great spiritual values of human and Christian life...As they accompany others on the

¹¹⁴ Cf. C. 52a; S. 8b.

¹¹⁵ Cf. C. 35b; S. 41.

path of vocational discernment, consecrated persons will be forced to share the source of their identity.”¹¹⁶

Each local community is called to pray for vocations, following the recommendation of the Lord, and to live in a way that one can say, “*Come and see.*”¹¹⁷ The Gospel witness of the local community constitutes for the young a call to open themselves to the call of Christ.¹¹⁸

The Sisters welcome young people who desire to share prayer or ministry with them. When a young woman who is discerning her vocation is sent by the Visitatrix to a local community, it has the mission to help her:

- to grow in her human and Christian formation,
- to know the Vincentian charism and discover the service of those who are poor,
- to discern the signs of a vocation and to direct her toward a free and motivated choice.

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
take advantage of diverse means of formation
to grow in their vocation and to live the mission.

¹¹⁶ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Jn. 1:39.

¹¹⁸ Cf. C. 59.

VI. THE WITNESS OF EVANGELICAL LIFE

**With the Community, the Sister Servant
is called to be a witness of the love of God in the world.**

“A life transformed by the evangelical counsels becomes a prophetic and silent witness and at the same time an eloquent protest against an inhuman world. It calls for the promotion of the individual and for a new creativity of charity. We have seen it in the holy founders. It is manifested not only in the effectiveness of their service but especially in their ability to identify with those who suffer in such a way that the helping hand is experienced as heartfelt sharing. This kind of evangelization, realized through works characterized by love and dedication, ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words.”¹¹⁹

6.1. Practice of the evangelical counsels

The Sisters commit themselves to live their baptismal consecration by the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, making them available for the purpose of the Company: the service of Christ in persons who are poor.¹²⁰ Each Sister confirms her total gift to God by the vows defined by the Constitutions.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 33.

¹²⁰ Cf. C. 8b; C. 27.

¹²¹ Cf. C. 8c.

The Sister Servant and the Sisters live their vows in a spirit of gratitude and joy. They seek to deepen their understanding of them with the help of the Constitutions and Statutes, Instructions on the Vows of the Daughters of Charity and other documents of the Company.

Chastity

Chastity, a source of spiritual fecundity,¹²² is a gift of God which frees and opens the heart of the Daughter of Charity to be totally available for the service of those who are poor. By the vow of chastity, the Sisters embrace celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.¹²³

As a help to live chastity, the Sisters are supported by the Word of God, prayer, and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.¹²⁴

The Daughter of Charity lives chastity in the world as a servant. This presupposes human and spiritual maturity and self-control. Asceticism strengthens the will in order to oppose anything that can tarnish the chastity vowed to God: egoism, desire for power and possessions, self-seeking pleasures, activism, over-dependence on the media and modern technology, etc.

The Sister Servant gives the same attention to each Sister, to her concerns, her joys, her sorrows, etc. She ensures that there is a balance of prayer and service in the Sisters' common life. In the heart of the Community, chastity finds a favourable atmosphere for its development in friendship and charity.

¹²² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

¹²³ Cf. C. 29a.

¹²⁴ Cf. C. 29d.

It may happen that a Sister experiences certain difficulties in this area. At the time of the communication, the Sister Servant helps the Sister to seek means to overcome these difficulties.

To obtain the grace of chastity, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise recommended to the Sisters devotion to the Blessed Virgin, who is perfectly pure because she belongs to God in a perfect manner.¹²⁵

Poverty

Poverty opens the heart of the Daughter of Charity to the Holy Spirit, who enables her to enter into the filial attitude of Christ the Servant.

By the vow of poverty, the Sisters commit themselves to total dependence in the use and disposal of the goods of the Company, as well as in the use of personal goods.¹²⁶ As part of this same vow, the Sister Servant gives an account to the Visitatrix of the management of the goods of the local community.

The Sister Servant can give permission to use personal goods for good works,¹²⁷ within the limits authorized by the Provincial Director, and in agreement with the Visitatrix.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Cf. Saint Vincent, January 22, 1645, "Observance of the Rule," IX, Conf.21.

¹²⁶ Cf. C. 30a.

¹²⁷ Cf. Glossary of the Constitutions, p. 200.

¹²⁸ Cf. C. 30d; Guide for the Provincial Director, n. 47.

The Sister Servant helps the Sisters to live poverty in actual fact, on the personal and communal levels. Consistent with the condition of servant, the Sisters adopt a simple life style, close to those who are poor. They live in great confidence in the Providence of God and give visible witness to evangelical detachment and gratitude.¹²⁹

Like the first Christians, they put everything in common -- salaries, pensions, gifts, retirement benefits, etc. This putting all things in common is a requirement of poverty.¹³⁰

Together, they reflect on how they are living poverty, to see what is superfluous and what is necessary in their life. *“The Sisters often make a personal and community review in which they discern their real needs, their use of goods and of the earth’s resources...”*¹³¹

The Sister Servant keeps the Sisters informed of the accounts of the local community. They prepare the budget together, which is then sent to the Visitatrix for approval.¹³²

They review the budget annually, in an effort to live authentically the personal and communal practice of poverty. A duty of justice and charity, it also fosters sharing with the Province and with the Company.

The Sister Servant and the Sisters are conscious of their obligation to give an account of the use of the goods placed at the disposition of the local community as they also do for the management of the works. *“Sisters who are engaged in works outside the Company keep the*

¹²⁹ Cf. C. 30b.

¹³⁰ Cf. C. 30c.

¹³¹ S. 16a.

¹³² Cf. S. 75b, c.

*Sister Servant informed regularly in a general way of their manner of managing the goods entrusted to them.*¹³³

Gifts for those who are poor may be accepted with the permission of the Sister Servant. They should *use them co-responsibly as a community*,¹³⁴ according to the intention of the donors.

The Founders invite the Sisters to contemplate the Virgin Mary, *“the humble, faithful servant of the Father’s plan, and model of the poor in spirit.”*¹³⁵

Obedience

The obedience of the Daughters of Charity has its source in the obedience of Christ. Following Him and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they offer God their freedom and live obedience through the mediation of others. By this vow, they obey their Superiors in faith, according to the Constitutions and Statutes.¹³⁶

In an attitude of obedience and service, the Sister Servant is called to animate and lead the local community. In order to do this, she encourages reflection and dialogue with all the Sisters.

¹³³ C. 95c.

¹³⁴ S. 16b.

¹³⁵ Cf. C. 15b.

¹³⁶ Cf. C. 31a.

Together with the Sisters, she seeks the will of God. *“To obey, we need the grace of God; God has to be involved in it.”*¹³⁷ In faith and after discernment, all commit themselves to respond to the calls of the Church, the Company, and those who are poor in *“their common Mission.”*¹³⁸

A thorough understanding of obedience, which encompasses the entire life of servants of the poor, is made concrete through a certain number of practices such as communication with Superiors, consultation and reciprocal information, asking permissions, accountability, etc.

In the same way, with human and spiritual maturity and in fidelity to the Constitutions, the Sister Servant and the Sisters live the commitments expressed in the Local Community Plan.

They contemplate the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, obedient and faithful even standing at the foot of the cross.

6.2 Evangelical Discernment

In simple and honest dialogue, the Sister Servant asks the opinion of the Sisters with regard to decisions she is responsible to make and which the local community will assume.

“...persons in authority cannot ignore that the community is the best place in which to recognize and accept the will of God... discernment is one of the peak moments in a consecrated community where the centrality of God, that ultimate end of everyone’s search, ...as well as

¹³⁷ Saint Vincent, December 19, 1659, “Obedience,” XII, Conf.222.

¹³⁸ C. 82a.

*the responsibility and the contribution of each one in the journey of all towards the Truth stand out with particular clarity.”*¹³⁹

Domestic Council

The Sister Servant is assisted by a Domestic Council, composed of the entire local community, to discern and prepare the decisions she has to make on particular matters.¹⁴⁰

The goal of the Domestic Council is to help the Sister Servant in her role as animator and as administrator of the temporal goods of the local community.

In a large local community, the Sister Servant may have a smaller Domestic Council, which she appoints herself, after consultation with each Sister of the community. This appointment is communicated to the Visitatrix. The Domestic Council is appointed for a specific period of time and, in any case, not beyond the term of office of the Sister Servant.¹⁴¹

After having consulted the community, the Sister Servant appoints the Secretary of the Domestic Council. In the case of a limited or smaller Domestic Council, the Secretary is chosen from among the members of the Council.

¹³⁹Cf. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 20e.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. C. 82f.

¹⁴¹ Cf. S. 66c.

Preparation and procedure for the meetings

Like other community meetings, the meeting of the Domestic Council must be well prepared by the Sister Servant, with a written agenda, to be given to the members of the Council at least one day in advance.

All the Sisters must have the opportunity to express themselves: they give their opinion and suggestions, but the Sister Servant makes the decision. If some business needs more information or discernment, the Sister Servant can postpone the decision.

After the meeting of the Domestic Council, the Secretary prepares the minutes, which must be approved by the Council at the beginning of the next session.

In the case of a limited or smaller Council, the Sister Servant will take care to consult all the Sisters before the Council meeting and will inform them afterward of the decisions taken.

Matters to be studied:

a. Regarding the Community:

- administration of the goods of the local community,
- preparing the budget and justification of expenses, etc.,
- coordination of services rendered by the Community,
- works and maintenance of the buildings.

When the Domestic Council consists of the entire local community, any question concerning organization of the Community may be treated:

- calendar and times of various activities of the local community,
- preparation for retreats, monthly days of reflection and prayer,
- formation session, etc.
- coordination of dates for home visits, according to the frequency and length determined at Provincial level,¹⁴²
- acceptance and use of goods for persons who are poor,¹⁴³
- other activities of the local Community.

b. Regarding ministry :

- functioning of the ministry,
- works and maintenance of the buildings,
- management of staff, contracts, schedules,
- administration of goods for operation of the ministry,
- preparation of the budget and justification of expenses, etc.,
- other business (Vincentian animation, legal questions, etc.).

It is recommended that the Council meet at least twice a year.

Personal issues are not a topic for discussion during the Domestic Council meeting.

¹⁴² Cf. S. 23b.

¹⁴³ Cf. S. 16b.

6.3 Administration of temporal goods

The Sister Servant is responsible for the goods of the local community, which are managed in an evangelical spirit and in accord with the requirements of poverty in the Company, and in line with Provincial guidelines. She gives an account of this management to the Visitatrix. She may not dispose of the patrimony of the house simply according to her own desires, but must ask the Visitatrix for permission for any alienation or for other matters of importance.

In this administration and management, the Sister Servant is assisted by the Provincial Treasurer, ¹⁴⁴ and, as far as possible, by the local Treasurer.

The local Treasurer always fulfils her duties under the responsibility of the Sister Servant. She gives her a monthly report of receipts and expenditures, as well as a balance sheet at the end of the year.

With regard to the expenses of the local community, the local Treasurer must stay within the budget. If an unforeseen expense arises, she must inform the Sister Servant.

The budget and accounts of the local community are separate from those of the ministry of which it has charge.

If the Community is responsible for a ministry, the Sister Servant, in accord with the Visitatrix, may confide its administration to the local Treasurer or to a lay person.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Guide for the Provincial Treasurer, p. 19.

The Sister Servant is responsible for saving documents which concern temporal goods (contracts, insurance, titles to property, etc.), all of which must be kept. She oversees the updating of the inventory, at least every year, following Provincial guidelines.

At the time of closure of a local community, the Sister Servant sends to the Visitatrix:

- Community books,
- account books of the local community,
- money and objects of value,
- documents and records concerning the staff employed by the Community,
- property deeds, insurance policies, etc.,
- local community Archives.

According to the updated inventory, the Visitatrix gives the necessary authorization for disposal of goods belonging to the local community.

If the organization which succeeds the Daughters of Charity has the authorization of the Bishop to keep the chapel, items necessary for the liturgical celebration may be left for their use. The Sister Servant will send the Visitatrix a list of items that will be left there.

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
try to live radically the Gospel.

VII. BELONGING TO THE CHURCH AND TO THE COMPANY

**With the Community, the Sister Servant
is called to participate in the mission of the Church,
according to the charism of the Company.**

“The local community, a living cell of the Church, renders the Company present wherever a Daughter of Charity, united with her Sisters, lives out her vocation.”¹⁴⁵

7.1 Participation in the mission of the Church

The Company of the Daughters of Charity is sent by the Church to be a witness of the love of God to those who are poor. It is also from the Church that it receives the richness of Christ in order to be faithful to the charism.¹⁴⁶

The Sister Servant and the Sisters maintain an attitude of respect toward the Sovereign Pontiff; they are attentive to his teachings and, in particular, to his appeals on behalf of those who are poor.¹⁴⁷

The Sisters make an effort to familiarize themselves with the documents and guidelines of the Church in order to understand them better. They study Church teachings in order to deal appropriately with the socio-cultural situations and ethical problems they encounter.

¹⁴⁵ C. 81.

¹⁴⁶ Cf.C.1.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. C. 60.

They are faithful to diocesan directives relative to ministry, and maintain good relationships with the Pastor and priests of the parish, as well as with religious and members of Christian organizations.

"They collaborate with all those actively engaged in the pastoral plan of the area"¹⁴⁸ in fidelity to their specific charism.

7.2 Belonging to the Company

In order to intensify their sense of belonging to the Company, the Sisters are called to keep alive the flame of the charism, and to live their vocation and mission according to the spirit of the Founders, with humility, simplicity and charity.

Each Daughter of Charity always acts in the name of the Company which she has the responsibility to make visible and which she commits to in her actions.

Community witness: "this shows the perennial value of unity, a gift left by the Lord Jesus. This becomes particularly evident in international and intercultural communities that demand high levels of welcoming and dialogue."¹⁴⁹

The Sister Servant and the Sisters affirm their sense of belonging to the Company by prayer, by all that contributes to communion, by continuing assimilation of the teachings of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, and by the celebration of the Saints and Blesseds of the Vincentian Family.

¹⁴⁸ S. 9b.

¹⁴⁹ *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 19.

They value the letters of Superiors and all their directives. They show an interest in the events of the Company and are alert to information, publications, etc. which help them to broaden their view.

In this same perspective, they keep the missionary spirit alive and indicate their availability to answer the calls of the Company in response to the urgent needs of those who are poor. This implies the courage to abandon the security of the “already known” in order to go beyond it. The Sisters are amenable to learning another language.

The diverse possibilities of communication enable the Sister Servant to express to Superiors her fidelity to the Company (see Appendix pages 75-76).

Every Sister is free to communicate with Superiors. The Sister Servant is respectful, sensitive, and discreet in this regard.

7.3 Relationships in the Province

With the Visitatrix, the Councillors, the Provincial Director

The Sister Servant forms a good relationship with the Visitatrix, collaborating with her and keeping her updated on the progress of the local community and the ministries confided to her.

Generally, the Sister Servant meets with the Visitatrix during the annual retreat, at the time of the request for the Renovation, during the regular visitations, and whenever an important question arises for either the Visitatrix or the Sister Servant.

She maintains a relationship of respect and trust with the Councillors and the Provincial Director.

Regular Visitations and Pastoral Visits

The regular visitation, made to the local community by the Visitatrix or a delegated Councillor, is an opportunity for the Sisters to review their apostolic, spiritual, and community life.¹⁵⁰ It is also a time to express gratitude and to highlight any areas of conversion necessary for the revitalization of their vocation and that of the mission.

The purpose of the pastoral visit of the Provincial Director is spiritual, liturgical, ecclesial and Vincentian animation.¹⁵¹ It can also be an opportunity to reflect on the teachings of the Founders and on Church documents.

These visits are prepared in prayer and reflection, and lived in faith and truth.

The Sister Servant will review carefully with the Sisters the recommendations given at the end of these visits.

Information

Keeping the Sisters informed contributes to a good Community spirit, reinforces apostolic commitment, and helps to clarify matters.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. C. 73f; S. 54 f.

¹⁵¹ Cf. C. 75b; Directory for the Provincial Director, n.31-38.

The Sister Servant informs the Visitatrix of the life and events of the local community, and is careful to transmit to all the Sisters the information she receives.

Provincial Meetings

The Sister Servant encourages the Sisters to participate in the various meetings organized by the Visitatrix and her Council. With the Sisters, she arranges for someone to replace them so that the service of those who are poor is assured.

These meetings promote belonging to the Company, participating in formation, and getting to know the Sisters. They are also enriching for the service of those who are poor.

Availability

The Sister Servant, attentive to the will of God, is always available, in a spirit of faith, to respond to the requests of the Visitatrix.

In the same way, she helps the Sisters to be available to the needs of the Company and of the Province, beyond the local community, whether for an appointment, or to participate on a commission, or for any other service.

Together, they take responsibility for assuming the consequences involved (replacement, change of the schedule, etc).

Participation

In the spirit of communion, the Sister Servant encourages the participation of each Sister in the government of the Province, in conformity with the Constitutions and Statutes.¹⁵²

Following the directives of the Visitatrix, the Sister Servant helps the Sisters to participate in the times of Provincial consultations in a spirit of faith, discretion and prudence, seeking the will of God. This implies that they refrain from seeking, directly or indirectly, support for a particular Sister. The Sister Servant is careful to be respectful of each Sister's right to freely express herself.

She encourages the Sisters to participate actively in the preparation of the Provincial Plan and Norms, always following the directives of the Visitatrix.¹⁵³

7.4 Domestic Assembly

According to the guidelines of the Company, a Domestic Assembly takes place in each lawfully constituted local community in preparation for the Provincial Assembly.

All the Sisters prepare themselves for the Domestic Assembly in a spirit of faith and communion. The Sister Servant convokes and presides over it, according to the indications of the Directory.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Cf. C. 63a.

¹⁵³ Cf. C. 63c ; S. 61; S. 62.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. C. 85a, b, d; S. 65a, S. 69.

She assures that the Sisters are able to be present on the dates planned for the sessions of the Assembly, within the times fixed. It is necessary to plan several meetings of the Domestic Assembly for adequate study of the documents sent by the Company and by the Province.

If there is an annex to the community, the Sister Servant makes sure that the Sisters of the annex participate in all of the sessions of the Domestic Assembly.¹⁵⁵

The Secretary prepares the minutes of the Domestic Assembly which will be approved by its members. The Sister Servant sends the minutes to the Visitatrix with all the required documents, following the indications of the Directory and the guidelines received.

Together,
the Sister Servant and the Sisters
commit themselves to fully live their belonging to the Company,
in the Church and in the world.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. C.65 a.

APPENDICES

CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Correspondence and other types of communication are an expression of communion with the entire Company.

- ❖ At the general level, the Sister Servant writes:
 - to the Superior General and the Director General
 - for their feasts,
 - for Christmas.
 - to the Superioress General:
 - for August 15,
 - for Christmas,
 - to accompany the letter from a Sister four years of vocation.

- ❖ At the Provincial level, the Sister Servant writes to the Visitatrix:
 - According to the Constitutions and Statutes:
 - to present a postulant,
 - to accompany the letter from a Sister four years of vocation,
 - to present an evaluation of a Sister who requests to make her vows for the first time,
 - to request the renewal of vows, listing the names of the Sisters, and the annual renewal of poverty permissions regarding community goods.

- For permissions:
 - for trips, according to the guidelines of the Province,
 - for extraordinary health care,
 - for expenses over the authorized amount.

- The Sister Servant informs her immediately by telephone or mail:
 - if a Sister makes her vows for the first time “in articulo mortis,”
 - if a Sister has not renewed her vows,
 - if a Sister leaves the Community illegitimately,
 - regarding other situations of major importance (serious illness, the death of a Sister, etc.).

Note: Each document that the Sister Servant sends to the Visitatrix must be accompanied by a letter, a copy of which will remain in the local community.

- The Sister Servant writes to the Provincial Director
 - for his feast,
 - for Christmas,
 - for the request of poverty permissions which concern personal goods.

- ❖ Regarding correspondence with Church and civil authorities, the Sister Servant follows the directives of the Visitatrix.

MODELS OF DOCUMENTS

ANNUAL INFORMATION (see pages 35-37)
(for the Sisters until ten years of vocation)

- Province of:
- Sister (Christian names and surname):
- Name of local Community:
- Date and place of birth:
- Nationality:
- Vocation Date:
- Name of the house:
- Address:

INFORMATION FOR THE PERIOD OF 20... TO 20...

- Cultural/background:
- Education (degrees or diplomas).....
- Activities
- Health (illnesses, operations, general condition).....
-

“Sisters, the spirit of your Company consists in the love of our Lord, love of persons who are poor, love of one another, humility and simplicity.”

(St. Vincent, February 2, 1653)

- I - Positive aspects of the Sister’s growth in the spirit of the Company (spiritual life, community life, service)
- II - Principal difficulties
- III - Other Comments

Signature of the Sister Servant:

Signature of the Sister:

FIVE YEAR INFORMATION (Statute 64b)

Year 20....

Province:

Sister:

Local Community:

Date of birth:

Date of vocation:

Formation received in the last five years:

Health (operations, illnesses):

Positive aspects of the Sister's growth in the spirit of the Company
(spiritual life, community life, life of service...)

Principal difficulties:

Other Comments:

Signature of the Sister Servant:

Signature of the Sister:

ARCHIVES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Archives contain important documents concerning the local community and its ministries.

The Sister Servant is responsible for maintaining these Archives. The ministries must have their own archives. The Visitatrix, or the Provincial Archivist, gives guidelines for their classification and management.

These archives contain:

- Files of the foundation:
 - history,
 - important phases: evolution of the works, restructuring,
 - closings, reopenings...

- Community files:
 - documents concerning the Sisters (copy of identification information, insurance, wills...),
 - list of the Sisters and Sister Servants in successive order,
 - circular letters of Superiors,
 - a copy of letters and documents sent to the Visitatrix,
 - Local Community Plan and its periodic revision,
 - minutes of regular visitations and pastoral visits,
 - minutes of the Domestic Assemblies.

- Records of financial matters of the Community:
 - files of the ministries,
 - various permissions – particular cases,

- administrative correspondence,
 - a copy of letters sent to the Visitatrix concerning financial matters,
 - records of accounts,
 - inventories.
-
- Legal records with notes:
 - property deeds,
 - records of changes in lay staff,
 - records of salaries for lay staff.

TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FOUNDERS

⇒ Spirit of faith

- “Again, Sisters, although you may all be equal and alike in everything, the Rule states, nevertheless, that where two or three of you are together, one should be appointed Sister Servant. You must submit humbly and willingly to that Sister, regarding her in God and God in her. It will be very easy for you to submit if you reflect that she represents the presence of God for you and if you regard her in God, for it’s by the guidance of Divine Providence that you are together; you should, consequently, respect her. On her part, the Sister Servant must avoid being overbearing or authoritative with her Sister but should act gently and affably, reflecting that charity is gentle, kind, patient, and endures all things.⁶ Now, a Sister wouldn’t be a true Daughter of Charity if she didn’t imitate her mother.”

(Saint Vincent, June 14, 1643, “Explanation of the Regulations,” IX, Conf. 15.)

⇒ Humility and respect

- “In the first place, I think that to do this well they should live in such a way that no one ever knows which one is the Sister companion and which is the Sister Servant. The latter should never seek to be first, to be better dressed, or to take the best place. They should always go just as they happen to come; in that way it will sometimes be one, sometimes the other, who is first, and outsiders will never know which one is in charge.

“They must also have great respect for one another. Therefore, the Sister Servant must be convinced that her Sister is much better than herself, and far more capable of occupying the position she holds. That, Sisters, should be our aim, namely, always to consider that someone else is worth much

more than we are. And no truly good person thinks otherwise; no, a man isn't really a good man unless he thinks he's the most wicked man alive and that every other person is more worthy than he is. Believe me, Sisters, if we don't think this of ourselves, we are in great danger. I tell you, Sisters, that as soon as a Sister imagines that she's more important than her Sister, she's no longer anything in the sight of God; and, as imperfect as her Sister may be, she's better than she is. If anyone thinks she has a better presence, a nicer manner, a sharper mind, that's the spirit of pride slipping into her, the spirit of the devil, and the spirit of hell because pride is the cause of hell.

Never say, 'This Sister is troublesome and bad-tempered; she has no virtue.' When such a thought crosses your mind, Sisters, look at yourselves and you'll soon say, '*Mon Dieu*, she's far better than I am, who can't do anything worthwhile. All I do is spoil things; I don't know how people can stand me.' That's the point we have to reach, Sisters. It's not enough to say this, you must really believe it for, I repeat, it's impossible for a good man to look at himself before God and not see that he's the most wicked man alive. So, Sisters, the Sister Servant must always think that her Sister is better than she is and far more qualified to occupy the position she holds. To do things right, there isn't a single Sister Servant who shouldn't ask permission at least every six months to be relieved of her office."

(Saint Vincent, February 2, 1647, "Relations Among the Sisters and with Persons Outside the Company," IX, Conf.29.)

⇒ Mutual support

- "The third thing, dear Sisters, and I recommend it above all, is mutual support; yes, Sisters, great support. Never do anything to displease one another, Sisters, never; and for that purpose,

acquiesce to one another and ask each another's advice. The Sister Servant must consult her Sister: 'Shall we go there, Sister? Shall we do that?' And if the Sister replies, 'I think that would be a good idea, Sister,' then do it.

But, you'll say to me, 'must the Sister Servant consult and give in to her Sister?' Yes, she certainly must; yes, she has to do it; she must yield in everything and be the most humble, but she has to hold her own if her Sister should want to do anything contrary to God and the Rules; she must stand fast. The Sister Servant must also do nothing without informing her Sister, and have great respect for her.

"So bear with one another, dear Sisters, when any slight misunderstandings arise among you--for they will arise. Give yourselves to God for that intention, beginning right now, for there's no one who doesn't commit some fault. What seems to us to be a fault in our Sister may not always be one. Sometimes we are the ones who aren't in the right mood to agree with what our Sister is doing; it's not what we expected, and that annoys us. Let's not be surprised at finding it hard to bear with others, Sisters, since at times we can't stand ourselves. What pleases us today displeases us tomorrow; we are never in the same state; we want something and then we don't want it. We are disagreeable to ourselves. If something happens to annoy you, Sisters, excuse one another and think, 'It's because I'm not in a good mood. It's not that my Sister has done anything wrong; I'm the one who isn't humble and can't even stand myself.'

Lastly, Sisters, if you have given one another any cause for displeasure, ask forgiveness for it as soon as possible, and both of you kneel down and say, '*Mon Dieu!* Sister, I have given you some reason for being displeased; I ask your pardon for it.' The

other Sister should reply, 'Sister, I'm the one who asks yours.' By so doing, you'll preserve union among you. Please don't fail in this, Sisters." (Saint Vincent, October 22, 1650, "To Some Sisters Being Sent to the Country," IX, Conf. 45.)

⇒ **Saint Vincent to a Superior**

Leading people to God

- "How great – how very great – do you think is the duty of direction of souls to which God is calling you?? That was the work of the Son of God on earth; certainly it's not the work of a man, it's the work of God; Jesus Christ must be involved in this with us—or we with Him. You must empty yourself of self in order to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ.

"If a Superior is filled with God and with the maxims of Our Lord, all his words will be efficacious; virtue will go out of him that will edify others, and all his actions will be so many beneficial instructions that will bring about good in those who are aware of them. "To reach that point, Monsieur, Our Lord himself has to imprint firmly on you His stamp and His character.

"Our Lord imprints His own character on us, and gives us, so to speak, the sap of His Spirit and grace, uniting us to Him like the vine branches to the vine stock, we do the same as He did on earth—I mean we carry out divine actions and, like Saint Paul, filled with this Spirit, beget children to Our Lord.

Prayer

“An important point, and one to which you should carefully devote yourself, is to establish a close union between yourself and our Lord in prayer. That is the reservoir in which you will receive the instructions you need to fulfil the duties which you have...

“Moreover, you should have recourse to God in prayer that you may preserve your soul in His fear and love. You should also have recourse to prayer in order to beseech our Lord to provide for the needs of those entrusted to your charge.

Humility

“Another thing I recommend to you is the humility of Our Lord. Above all, don’t feel that you have to appear as the Superior or master. In addition, we should always refer to God the good that’s done through us, and, on the contrary, attribute to ourselves all the harm that’s done in the Community.

“For this purpose, give yourself to God so that you’ll speak in the humble spirit of Jesus Christ, acknowledging that your doctrine isn’t your own, nor coming from you but from the Gospel. Imitate especially simplicity...

Imitation of Our Lord

“Something else to which you must pay very close attention is to be very dependent on the guidance of the Son of God; I mean that, when you have to take action, you should make

this reflection: 'Is this in conformity with the maxims of the Son of God?' If you see that it is, then say, 'Fine, let's do it.' If it isn't, then say, 'I'll do nothing of the sort.'

"Furthermore, when there's question of doing some good work, say to the Son of God, 'Lord, if You were in my place, how would you act on this occasion? I also ask you to take care not to try to distinguish yourself in your leadership.

"Be not only faithful to observing the Rules, but also exact in having them observed; for otherwise everything will go badly. In addition, since you hold the place of Our Lord, in imitation of Him you must also be a light that enlightens and warms.... you must be filled with grace, light, and good works, just as we see that the sun communicates the fullness of its brightness to the other stars ...

"... you must know from this that it's up to the Superior to provide not only for spiritual matters but also to extend his concern to temporal matters; for, since those whom he has to guide are composed of body and soul, he has to provide for the needs of both, after the example of God, so, give yourself to God to procure the temporal good of the house to which you're going. I ask Our Lord to bless your leadership..."

(Saint Vincent, [1656], "Advice to Antoine Durand, named Superior of the AGDE Seminary," XI, 310 Conf. 153.)

⇒ **Attitude of servant**

- "Divine Providence has at last led us to recall our dear sister for a time. Do not be upset by this, I beg of you, since it is the most holy will of God. I hope, my Sister, that you have willingly

taken up the yoke which she left you because it is Monsieur Vincent who has ordered us to leave you there. Take it up anew then with great humility and distrust of yourself, recalling the instruction which the Son of God gave us when He told us to learn of Him to be gentle and humble of heart. Enter upon this charge in the spirit of Him who said that He had come not to be served but to serve. Listen to Him willingly when He tells us that those who humble themselves shall be exalted, and that the one who would be the greatest must begin by becoming the least so as to be great in the sight of God. Finally, my dear Sister, look upon yourself as the beast of burden of the house, the one who must carry the entire load. This you will be when you treat all our sisters with great forbearance and gentleness, often overlooking their faults so as to keep your own before your eyes, warning them charitably of their failings when it will be most beneficial for them. Never manifest a particular affection for any of them but treat all of them in such a way that they will believe that you love and support each of them.”

(Saint Louise, September 9, 1644, “To the Sisters at Angers,” SW, L. 125B.)

⇒ ***Advancement in perfection***

- It has been a very long time since I have allowed myself the consolation of writing to you. Nevertheless, I assume that you have had news of us from the letter I wrote to Sister Marie from Beauvais. I took the liberty of sending it to Monsieur the Abbe de Vaux and in it I told him that Monsieur Vincent had decided to send one of his priests' to your region shortly. I desire this with all my heart because I must avow to you and to all our dear sisters that I am distressed to learn of the little progress your community is making in the way of perfection. When I experience some slight dissatisfaction with one or other of our sisters and I examine the matter to discover the

cause, I must acknowledge quite simply that I often realize that the fault lies with me, either because I have failed in cordiality or because I have not given them the example I owe them. We must realize, my dear Sister, that the title which Divine Providence has conferred upon us of Servants of our Sisters obliges us to be the first in the practice of the true and solid virtues of humility, forbearance, hard work and the faithful observance of our Rules and of the practices of the Company. We must be convinced that we are accountable to all of them and are obliged to serve them in order to assist them spiritually and materially. We must also acknowledge that prudence requires us to trust them for their needs, without showing partiality toward any of them. I beg Our Lord to grant you this ability for His glory and for the well-being of our sisters. (Saint Louise, May 12, 1657, "To My Very Dear Sister Cécile," SW, L. 523.)

⇒ **Service of spiritual animation**

- I am sure that you are very busy and also that you take great care to help our sisters to strive for holiness. Nevertheless, I beg you to send me news of yourselves. Above all, let me know if, while they are occupied with exterior service, the sisters' minds are directed toward vigilance over themselves so that, for the love of Our Lord, they can overcome and control their passions by refusing their senses anything that might cause them to offend God. You realize that, without this, external actions, although they are for the service of the poor, cannot be very pleasing to God, nor can they merit a recompense for us because they are not united to those of Jesus Christ who always worked in the sight of God His Father. You are well-rooted in this practice, my dear Sister, and thus you experience the peace of a soul that is dependent upon her Beloved.

(Saint Louise, February 2, 1660, "To My Very Dear Sister Jeanne Delacroix," SW, L. 656.)

- I also urge you to correct the sisters in private; to be a good example of gentleness and submission for them; and to be a consolation for them in their little trials by your cordiality and support. Be very patient in giving them their little remedies, the greatest of which is to comfort them in their suffering and to show them the importance of never deviating from the accomplishment of the will of God who never changes His plans. Sometimes you must also take care to change a sister's duty when you see that she has become weary of it, without waiting for her to ask. Finally, you must condescend in many things, such as foreseeing their needs without appearing to notice them. You must realize that authority is not to be wielded absolutely but charitably and that we are Sister Servants which means that we must bear the greatest burdens of body and mind. In so far as we are able, we must console our dear sisters who will always have sufficient difficulty in putting up with us, sometimes because of our moods and at other times because nature or the evil spirit makes us repugnant to them. I beg Our Lord to be your strength and consolation and I remain in His most holy love . . .

(Saint Louise, September 20, 1650, "To Sister Cécile Angiboust," SW, L. 290B.)

⇒ **Listening to the Sisters**

- The Sister Servant shall seek advice from her sisters, particularly... It is necessary for the Sister Servant to make this act of submission with cordiality, gentleness and true humility, occasionally foregoing her personal judgment, except in matters of importance. Likewise, it is necessary that the sister do the same, always acquiescing to the opinions of the Sister Servant when she sees no notable interest in her opinions either for the glory of God or for the service of her neighbor. All the sisters shall always strive for

true union, being on guard to avoid appearances to the contrary when habits, naturally bad dispositions and bad moods contribute to opposing frames of mind. They shall always remember to honor the union of the Blessed Trinity, by which all order in the world has been made and is conserved, and to which, as they should recall, they submit themselves.

(Saint Louise, (1645), "Manner In Which They Are to Treat the Sick of the Hôtel-Dieu of Saint-Denis," SW, A. 84.)

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

⇒ The gift of communion

- From the gift of communion arises the duty to build fraternity, in other words, to become brothers and sisters in a given community where all are called to live together. From accepting with wonder and gratitude the reality of divine communion shared with mere creatures, there also arises conviction of the need to make it always more visible by building communities "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52).
(*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 11).

⇒ Fraternal life in love

- Consecrated persons, who become "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:5), experience an interior call *to share everything in common*: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service: "In community life, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual passes at the same time to all. [...] each [can] enjoy his own gift, but makes it abound by sharing it with others; and each one enjoys the fruits of the other's gift as if they were his own".
(*Vita consecrata*, no. 42).

⇒ The effort of building fraternal communities

- It is generally agreed that the evolution of recent years has contributed to the maturity of fraternal life in communities. In

many communities, the climate of life in common has improved: there is more space for the active participation of all; there has been a move from a common life based too much on observance to a life that is more attentive to individual needs, that is better attended to on the human level. The effort to build communities that are less formalistic, less authoritarian, more fraternal and participatory, is generally considered to be one of the more visible fruits of these recent years.

These positive developments in some places have risked being compromised by a distrust of authority.

The desire for deeper communion among the members and an understandable reaction against structures felt as being too rigid and authoritarian have contributed to a lack of understanding of the full scope of the role of authority; indeed, some consider it to be altogether unnecessary to community life, and others have reduced it to the simple role of coordinating the initiatives of the members. As a result, a certain number of communities have been led to live with no one in charge while other communities make all decisions collegially.

All of this brings with it the danger, not merely hypothetical, of a complete breakdown of community life; it tends to give priority to individual paths, and simultaneously to blur the function of authority -- a function which is both necessary for the growth of fraternal life in community and for the spiritual journey of the consecrated person.

However, the results of these experiments are gradually leading back to the rediscovery of the need for and the role of

personal authority, in continuity with the entire tradition of religious life.

If a widespread democratic climate has encouraged the growth of co-responsibility and of participation by all in the decision-making process, even within the religious community, nevertheless, we must not forget that fraternity is not only a fruit of human effort but also and above all a gift of God. It is a gift that comes from obedience to the Word of God, and also, in religious life, to the authority who reminds us of that Word and relates it to specific situations, in accordance with the spirit of the institute.

“But we beseech you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). The Christian community is not an anonymous collective, but it is endowed, from the beginning, with leaders, for whom the Apostle asks consideration, respect and charity.

(Fraternal Life in Community, no. 47-48).

⇒ **Authority according to the Gospel is always a service**

- The renewal of recent years has led to highlighting some aspects of authority:

Spiritual authority

“If consecrated persons have dedicated themselves to the total service of God, authority promotes and sustains their consecration. In a certain sense, authority can be seen as “servant of the servants of God”. Authority has as its main task building in unity the brothers and sisters of “a fraternal

community, in which God is sought and loved above all". A superior must therefore be, above all, a spiritual person, convinced of the primacy of the spiritual, both with respect to personal life and for the development of fraternal life; in other words, he or she must know that the more the love of God increases in each individual heart, the more unity there will be between hearts.

"Thus, the superior's main task will be the spiritual, community and apostolic animation of his or her community.

Authority conducive to unity

"An authority conducive to unity is one concerned to create a climate favourable to sharing and co-responsibility; to encourage all to contribute to the affairs of all; to encourage members to assume and to respect responsibility; to promote, by their respect for the human person, voluntary obedience; to listen willingly to the members, promoting their harmonious collaboration for the good of the institute and the Church; to engage in dialogue and offer timely opportunities for encounter; to give courage and hope in times of difficulty; to look ahead and point to new horizons for mission. Still more: an authority which seeks to maintain a balance among the various aspects of community life -- between prayer and work, apostolate and formation, work and rest.

The authority of a superior works so that the religious house is not merely a place of residence, a collection of subjects each of whom live an individual history, but a "fraternal community in Christ".

Authority capable of making final decisions and assuring their implementation

"*Community discernment* is a rather useful process, even if not easy or automatic, for involving human competence, spiritual wisdom and personal detachment. Where it is practised with

faith and seriousness, it can provide superiors with optimal conditions for making necessary decisions in the best interests of fraternal life and of mission.

“When a decision has been made in accordance with the procedures established by proper law, superiors need perseverance and strength to ensure that what has been decided not remain mere words on paper.

“It is also necessary that the proper law of each institute be as precise as possible in determining the respective competence of the community, the various councils, departmental coordinators and the superior. A lack of clarity in this area is a source of confusion and conflict.

“Community projects”, which can help increase participation in community life and in its mission in various contexts, should also take care to define clearly the role and competence of authority, in line with the constitutions.

“Fraternal and united communities are increasingly called to be an important and eloquent element of the Gospel counter-culture, salt of the earth and light of the world.

“Thus, for example, if in Western society where individualism is rampant a religious community is called to be a prophetic sign of the possibility of achieving in Christ fraternity and solidarity, in cultures where authoritarianism or ‘communitarianism’ is rampant it is called to be a sign of respect for and promotion of the human person and also an exercise of authority in agreement with the will of God.

“While religious communities must take on the culture of their place, they are also called to purify and elevate it, through the salt and light of the Gospel, offering through their existing communities a concrete synthesis of what is not only an evangelization of culture but also an evangelising inculturation and an inculturated evangelization.

“Finally, we must never forget in this delicate, complex and often painful issue that faith plays a decisive role which allows us to understand the saving mystery of obedience. Just as from the disobedience of one man came the disintegration of the human family and from the obedience of the New Man began its reconstitution (cf. Rom. 5:19), so an obedient attitude will always be an essential force for all family life.”
(*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 50-53).

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