

## ASSOCIATE RELATIONSHIP: A Journey of Faith

In 1976, the first associate program in North America was initiated by the then St. Louis Province. The following year, six women were accepted as the first associates of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America. From those first six women, the associates have grown to more than 400 women and men in the Atlantic-Midwest and the Central Pacific provinces.

In 2011, **S. Susan Renner** wrote an excellent explanation in *NAMA News* about the associate relationship that has grown over the past 40 years. We would like to share this again for your reflection.

*S. Guadalupe Valdez, Co-director of Associates Program, Central Pacific Province*

### **What does it mean to be an associate with School Sisters of Notre Dame?**

An understanding of the answer to this question has emerged and crystallized over the years. To be an associate is to be in relationship with others and to walk a journey of faith together in the spirit of Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger.

Primarily, the associate relationship is a spiritual relationship with the School Sisters of Notre Dame that is grounded in a common spirituality and mission.

Associates are women and men in whom the School Sisters of Notre Dame charism has found a home. It is the charism embodied in Blessed Theresa, which gives focus to their life and mission.

Associates “strive to live the values and ideals as seen in Blessed Theresa: desiring union with God by doing God’s will; longing for oneness of all in God; love of Eucharist; devotion to Mary, the Mother of God; prayer and sacrifice; love for and commitment to those in need, especially youth, women and persons who are poor; empowering others to reach the fullness of their potential.” (*Together In Mission*)

Associates proclaim a covenant promising to intensify their living of the Gospel and to embrace the mission of School Sisters of Notre Dame as a way of deepening and responding to the call to mission entrusted to them at the moment of Baptism.

The mission of School Sisters of Notre Dame is to proclaim the good news by directing their entire lives toward the oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent. Associates, like School Sisters of Notre Dame,



**Associate Loretta Hopgood, one of the first six associates in North America, with S. Susan Renner.**

are called to bring all things together in God where all is one. They are sent to use their gifts in ministry for this mission.

This journey of faith, begun at baptism, is a life-long journey.

Associates choose to walk this journey with each other and with the School Sisters of Notre Dame for the sake of the mission. This faith journey is rooted in and nurtured through personal and shared prayer, reflection, and living a life of discernment.

Through this special relationship, associates and sisters, together, discover and discern what embracing and living this mission of oneness means in their lives today. Through mutual sharing, associates and sisters enrich and challenge one another to discern the critical needs of the world, the church, and all creation and to respond to these needs within their particular lifestyle.

Walking this journey of faith together, associates and sisters are called to “trust God and one another enough to dare to risk all that God’s kingdom be proclaimed more effectively...We can trust that God wants to use us to accomplish this goal. Wherever we are, whatever our work and lifestyle, there is more that we can dare, can be, and do...In Mother Theresa’s spirit...let us trust our God and one another and dare all for the kingdom, trusting that the world can and will be transformed.” (**S. Mary Margaret Johanning**, from the forward to *Trust and Dare*, May 9, 1985) □

