

# The Sisters of Charity - Halifax Associate Manual

July 2018

# Moving Forward Together Committee

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## Introduction

Associates are companions on a spiritual journey with vowed members and Associates, as well as individuals they encounter in their daily lives. The Associate Relationship provides an opportunity, not only for companionship and support, but also for sharing our gifts of life and ministry.

As an Associate, the commitment is a continuous interplay between personal development, nurturing relationships and commitment to living one's baptismal call in association with the Sisters of Charity - Halifax.

If we believe the Holy Spirit brought us together, then we must believe that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us into the future.

To that end, an Associate Manual has been developed based on knowledge and experience, and organized in such a manner as to be informative for Associates. It will serve as an educational tool and will help to answer those questions you may have as we move forward.

This document replaces the *Guidelines* from 2003 and is meant to provide a framework which has been compiled for our benefit as we continue our association together.

# History of Association

Some form of association with religious congregations has been part of the fabric of the Church since the time of the Desert Fathers. Lay people, who felt called to learn from the lives of the hermits, wanted to be in association with them.

The first Associates began as oblates and third orders, with Benedictines in the fourth century and Franciscans in the thirteenth. Frequently it was the Associates who carried out the apostolic works in the world, while the Religious lived the life of prayer. As these two came to be more integrated in the apostolic congregations starting in the 1500's, the need for Associates lessened. However, some continued and became formalized in Church Law.

The Vatican Council's focus on the "universal call to holiness" gave new impetus to this kind of a relationship between religious congregations and the laity. Women and men seeking an adult spirituality, a sense of community and an involvement in service began to desire an association with a religious congregation they knew and whose spirit they admired and felt they shared.

Many congregations began to form associate groups in the 70's and 80's. At our General Chapter in 1980, provinces were invited to develop structures for exploring association. As a result, various attempts were made. In New York, a community developed a group of people who met together for prayer and socializing, but a formal association did not result. A start was made in Halifax, but it did not continue. A second attempt in New

York, in 1988, resulted in the *first established Associate program* in the Congregation. In 1991, in New York, the *first Associate of the Halifax Congregation of the Sisters of Charity* was received.

The 90's saw tremendous growth in this movement, particularly in North America. The General Chapter of 1996 gave an impetus to our Congregation to further explore the topic, and it was then that the Associate Relationship took firm hold among us. *In the 90's, groups were established in Halifax, Boston, Montreal, British Columbia, Edmonton, Cape Breton, Bermuda, and Peru.*

Since that time, there have been significant steps in the growth of the Associate Relationship in our Congregation. The *first meeting of sisters involved with associate groups*, in May 2001, produced a draft of common guidelines for the Associate Relationship in all parts of the Congregation. In 2003, after input from the whole Congregation at the General Chapter of 2002, the first *Guidelines for Associates of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax* was approved. In 2005, a recognized need for some common formation materials resulted in the development of a *Handbook*.

Some key points in the history of the Associate Relationship in our Congregation include: 2007, *an Associate as well as a Sister from each area attends a planning meeting*; 2010, *Associates are invited to attend the Congregation Assembly*; 2014, *Associates are invited to attend General Chapter*; 2016, *the first general meeting of Associates of the Congregation*; 2018 *publication of the first Associate Manual*.

# Relationship of Associates and the Congregation

“We share the gift of a call to give joyful witness to love: the love of God, of one another and of all persons. We strive to show forth the love of God by serving those in need in a spirit of humility, simplicity and charity, according to the circumstances of the times. By living this charism in the Church, we share in the saving mission of Jesus who is the love of God made visible.” (Constitution, Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Halifax)

This charism of charity is not the exclusive possession of any person or group. It is God’s gift to the Church through our founders, through the Sisters in the Congregation in each generation, and through women and men in other walks of life in whom the charism of charity is alive, among them our Associates. Sisters and Associates are called to share in the charism and mission in mutually enriching ways.

Associates are those women and men who share the charism of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax and are called by the Spirit of God to recognize this charism of charity in themselves. They have the desire to commit themselves with the Congregation to community, prayer and the mission of loving service and care of our common home. In view of the reciprocal nature of the association, Sisters and Associates are encouraged to value the richness this collaboration brings to both.

Sisters are invited to support Associates by praying for them; by welcoming them to

gatherings where both groups are present; by attending commitment ceremonies held in their local area; and by including Associates as members of committees whose purpose is of interest to them.

Associates are called to embrace the values and goals of the Congregation; to pray for the Sisters; to participate with them in such special events as jubilees, celebrations of the founders, days of prayer and retreat; to join them in ongoing formation opportunities; to work with them in moving the directional statements forward; and to contribute to the Sisters’ understanding of the Associate vocation through articles for the Congregation newsletter.

Associates are invited to attend Congregational Assemblies and General Chapter when the topics to be considered are appropriate, e.g., charism, spirituality, mission and ministry, justice. They receive selected material related to Chapter themes, and are invited to pray for the Chapter and those discerning leadership.

As the Associate Relationship within the Congregation continues to expand, both Sisters and Associates will continue to clarify who they are, what they share in common, and how their commitments are evolving. As this relationship deepens, we will face situations for which there is no precedent. The Congregation in collaboration with the Associate Leadership Team has the responsibility to determine an appropriate course of action in such situations.



# Becoming an Associate

A candidate will usually come to association via an Associate or Sister. She/he will journey with the Congregation for at least one year but no more than two years prior to applying to make a commitment. The Associate or Sister who invited the candidate will act as mentor, meeting the candidate frequently and guiding her/his development in learning about Saints Elizabeth Ann Seton, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Many books and knowledgeable people are available to help with this endeavour. We recognize and accept that occasionally a candidate may wish to journey with a single Sister or Associate and aspire to become an Associate.

## *Qualifications for Becoming an Associate*

- A person must be 18 years of age
- A person must be interested in learning about the lives of Saints Elizabeth, Vincent and Louise
- A person must be financially independent of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax
- A person must be committed to a spiritual life
- A person must be engaged in a service ministry of her/his choice

## *Responsibilities of Candidates*

- To continue to discern their call to the Associate Relationship
- To participate in regular meetings where possible
- To attend retreats and other opportunities of spiritual growth
- To continue in service ministries of their choice

## *Formation*

This is the time when the candidate learns about the Congregation and its charism. It will include:

- A description of what an Associate is
- A basic introduction to the founders of the Congregation, i.e., Saints Elizabeth, Vincent and Louise
- A knowledge and understanding of the charism of the Sisters of Charity and how the Sisters and the Associates live it out in their ministries
- Discussion and reflection on how an Associate expresses the Charity charism in her/his own life and endeavors
- The importance of prayer and reflection in all our activities
- Participation in regular meetings where possible
- Use of the Handbook and Manual as well as any other pertinent materials, e.g., those found on [www.schalifax.ca/associates](http://www.schalifax.ca/associates)

## *Commitment as an Associate*

The initial commitment is understood to be an ongoing commitment and includes such words as “for as long as God continues to call me and the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity affirms this call.”

The process for application for commitment as an Associate includes:

- An agreement between the potential Associate and mentor concerning the former’s readiness to make a commitment
- A letter from the potential Associate to the mentor indicating the candidate’s understanding of the Associate commitment and stating her/his reasons for wishing to make the commitment
- An interview with a member of the Associate Leadership Team, where possible, or with an appropriate person other than the mentor
- An agreement between the mentor and the interviewer concerning the candidate’s readiness to make the commitment as an Associate; this affirmation of readiness is the act of acceptance
- A copy of the candidate’s letter sent to the designated member of the Congregational Leadership Team, who welcomes her/him to the Associate Relationship in the name of the Congregation
- A ceremony of acceptance and commitment
- A signed record of the commitment is kept on file

## Associates

Associates are called to live the charism of charity, a charism shared with many other congregations, each with its unique call.

As Associates of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, we are called to develop and sustain right relationships with all creation. We have a special invitation to enhance our commitment by developing and supporting relationships with other Associates and vowed members of the Congregation. We are also called to develop and embrace right relationships with larger communities of Associates and Religious: Sisters of Charity Federation; Vincentian Family; NACAR (North American Conference of Associates and Religious); ARCAN (Atlantic Religious Congregations Associates Network); Long Island Associates; and other local associations of Sisters and Associates.

Living in right relationships has always been a goal of Christian discipleship. “Right relationships” refers to relationships of justice and charity, perhaps best described in Micah’s words: “to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6), thus inviting us to move deeply into the experience of God, to make God’s heart visible.

## *Ongoing Formation*

This is the ongoing process of deepening the Associate's prayer life and the expression of the Charity charism in her/his life and involvements. To achieve these ends we encourage and support one another by:

- Attendance at regular Associate meetings where and when accessible
- Delving more deeply into the spirit and mission of our Vincentian history
- Helping to develop and attend retreat days and days of general gatherings of Associates
- Attendance at Congregation events when invited
- Learning more of the history of the Congregation through the years to the present
- Making a retreat whenever possible
- Having guest speakers to broaden our knowledge of outreach possibilities
- Being open to development of leadership capabilities by participating in and leading local meetings
- Regular sharing by members of the group of personal ministries

## *Responsibilities of Associates*

- To actively embrace the values and goals of the Congregation

- To integrate the mission and spirit of the Congregation into their lives
- To keep informed regarding Congregation and Associate events and projects
- To respond to communication from the Sisters of Charity Centre and the Associate Office
- To participate in regular meetings where possible
- To attend retreats and other opportunities for spiritual growth
- To renew their commitment annually
- To continue in service ministries of their choice

## *Special Situations*

### **Prayer Associates**

Associates who, by reason of age, health, or other circumstances, are unable to continue their active participation, continue to be valued Associates. They receive all communications that others receive unless they request otherwise. They are invited to attend programs and celebrations whenever they are able. While their way of living their commitment changes, the commitment remains, and also their ministry of prayer for the Congregation and the Associates.

### **Associates Living at a Distance**

Associates who move to areas where they are not near Sisters or Associates of the Halifax Congregation are encouraged to remain



connected via telephone, e-mail, Zoom, Skype, etc., and to attend retreats and other special events when possible. Where there are other Federation Associates in their area, they are invited to connect with them.

### **Withdrawal**

Life changes sometimes make it impossible to continue a relationship. For this reason, an Associate may withdraw at any time. This usually happens only after discussion with a member of the Associate Leadership Team. A withdrawal form is signed and kept on file.

### **Discontinuation**

Associates who stop maintaining connections and fail to respond to efforts to reach out to them for more than a year, should be asked formally by letter what their intentions are regarding journeying with the Associates. If there is no response, a “letter of discontinuation of the Associate agreement” will be sent from the Associate Coordinator, stating that s/he will be removed from the list of Associates of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax. A record of this communication is kept on file.

## Communications

Communication is not an easy task but it is an important one! Associates are located throughout North America, including Bermuda, Canada and the United States; they are also in Peru. Within our local groups we meet face-to-face and make sure those members who are unable to meet are contacted and kept informed. Associates who live in areas that do not have others nearby are connected to a group.

To help the groups stay connected, communication is maintained in varied ways—through the congregational newsletter, through e-mail, phone calls, phone conferences, the congregational Facebook page and the congregational website, <http://schalifax.ca> and through a Google Group.

The congregational newsletter is sent to all Associates. Articles highlighting Sisters’ activities, ministries and celebrations are shared. Associates are encouraged

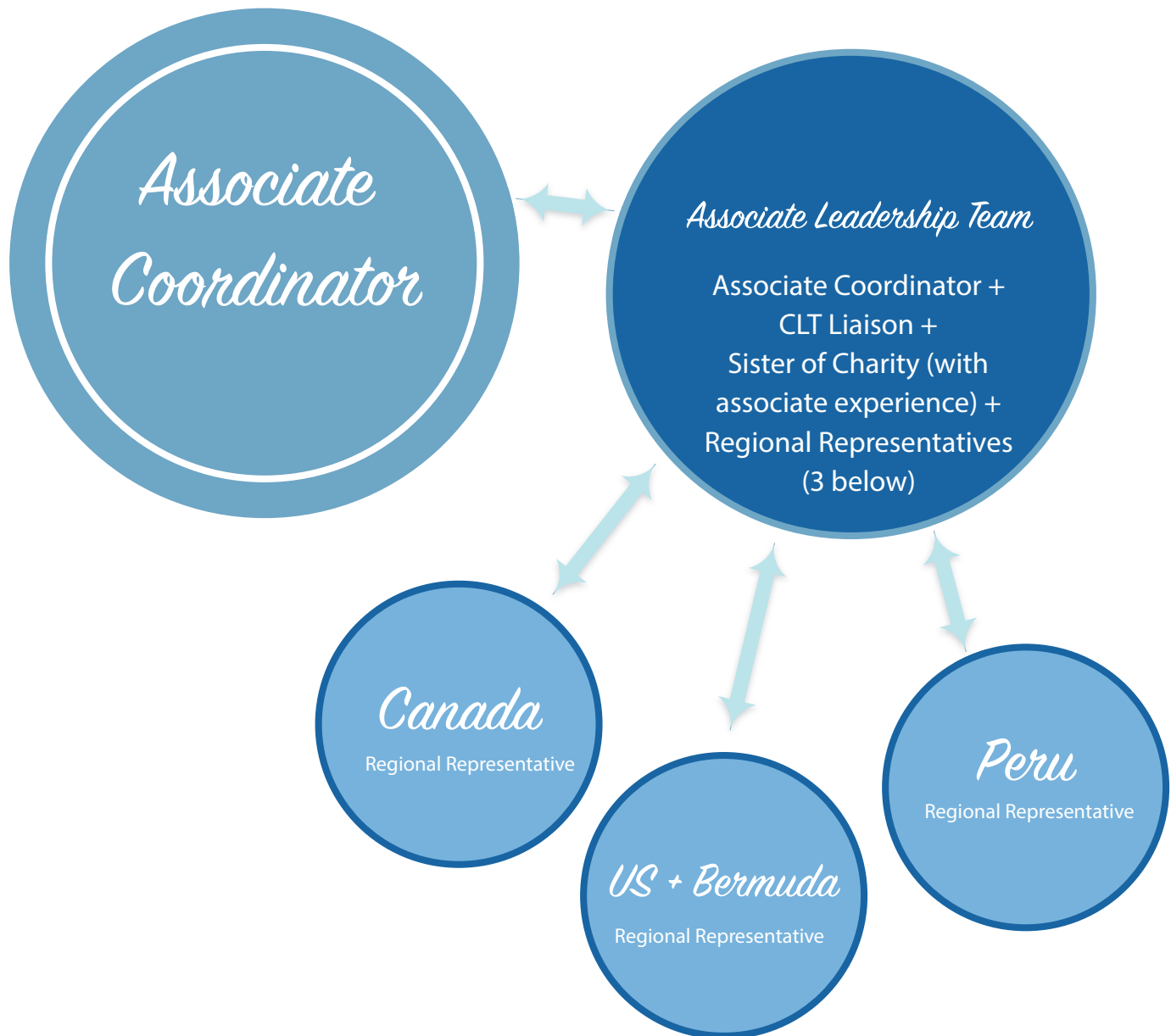
to contribute to this newsletter sharing information about their events and sending photos.

The congregational Facebook page and website provide current information and photos about Sisters, Associates and the way the mission is carried out. Associates are included in the annual Congregational Directory.

There is a Google Group set up for Associates—all Associates who have email addresses in the Directory are included in the group. This provides an opportunity for sharing ideas, books, prayers, and thoughts with each other. The address is [schalifaxassociates@googlegroups.com](mailto:schalifaxassociates@googlegroups.com) and it operates like e-mail, except the mail goes to everyone in the group; replies also go to everyone.

E-mail is sent through the congregational and regional offices to inform Associates about events and prayer requests.

# Associate Coordination



Regional organization differs from region to region. Associates not in a particular group are welcomed into an existing group.

## *Associate Coordinator*

The Associate Coordinator will honor the charism of the Sisters of Charity and their history, encouraging that their legacy is carried on in every way possible. This person will be a good listener and communicator and is responsible for the overall coordination of the Associate Relationship in consultation with the Sisters of Charity.

The Associate Coordinator is responsible to the Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) via the CLT Liaison.

The areas of responsibility, guided by the principles of respect, collaboration, cooperation and trust include the following:

1. Develop and chair the Associate Leadership Team
2. Ensure that the relationship between the vowed members and Associates will continue to “foster a creative mutuality which is enriching and supportive”
3. Facilitate the understanding and implementation of the Associate Manual
4. Understand and respect the diverse history of the Associate membership and regions
5. Ensure that required documentation is provided in a timely manner
6. Maintain accurate congregational records of Associates
7. Participate in developing a sustainable financial plan for the future
8. Be available for consultation regarding any unresolved regional issues that may arise
9. Implement a communication plan that may include all methodologies available and suitable for Associates
10. Foster relationships within and beyond the Congregation (i.e., NACAR, the Federation, Famvin, etc.)



## *Congregational Leadership Team Liaison*

The Congregational Leadership Team member acts as liaison between the Associate Relationship throughout the Congregation and the CLT. She receives a copy of the candidate's application for commitment, affirms the acceptance of Associates by letter or phone call and is present at commitment ceremonies whenever possible.

## *Regional Associate Representative*

The Volunteer Regional Associate Representatives are members of the Associate Leadership Team, which is guided by the Associate Coordinator. Consensus, consultation and trust guide their work and common sense prevails given the geographic challenges of their roles.

The areas of responsibility include:

1. To participate in the work of the Associate Leadership Team
2. To develop a regional plan of communication that will include various suitable methodologies among all groups/Associates in the region
3. To ensure that all documentation required by the Congregation is provided

## *Local Area*

In areas where there are several groups of Associates, a local coordinating team, in cooperation with the Regional Representative, provides area retreats and other opportunities for ongoing development, encourages participation in congregational and regional Associate activities and assumes financial responsibility for Associate activities in conjunction with the branch office treasurers.

# Appendix A

## *Finances*

- Associates are expected, whenever possible, to pay the costs of retreats, workshops, etc.
- Local groups assume the costs of such expenses as food for regular meetings; get well, sympathy, congratulations cards; flowers, etc.
- Annually, the contact person for each group sends a mailing fee for each Associate, with a list of names, clearly labelled “Associate Fees for Mailing Costs,” to the Regional Finance Office. This fee assists with the cost of mailing congregational materials to Associates.
- Annually each group sends to the Associate Coordinator a budget for the following year to cover congregational expenses for the Associate Relationship. These include costs for commitment ceremonies, including medals; partial costs of Associate retreats and assistance, if necessary, with costs of local meetings.
- The congregational Associate budget includes a sum of money to assist, when necessary, with the costs of attendance at congregational meetings, e.g., General Chapter, Annual Assembly, Federation events, national conferences, e.g., NACAR, and special workshops.

# Appendix B

The following questions are designed as a tool/checklist to further enhance the ongoing growth of the Associate Relationship. They may be revisited from time to time either individually and/or in group gatherings.

- How are you/your Associate group connected with Associate groups in other geographical areas?
- How do you/members of your Associate group build and maintain connections that are supportive of each other?
- What resources do you use to maintain connections with one another?
- What do you want to share with others to enable us to be supportive of those who live at a distance?
- “Relationship with Religious and Associates appears to be the key to sustaining Associate Relationship.” How do you/your Associate group maintain relationships with Associates who are unable to actively participate?
- In what way does your relationship with Associates/Religious enhance your sense of commitment to the charism and mission? Adapted: (NACAR Study)



# Glossary

## **ARCAN**

Atlantic Religious Congregations Associate Network ([arcantheleadingedge.blogspot.ca](http://arcantheleadingedge.blogspot.ca))

## **Assembly**

A yearly meeting of Sisters, to which Associates may be invited

## **Chapter**

A meeting of Sisters every six years to elect a congregational leader and councillors and set directions for the next years

## **Charity Federation**

A group of women religious congregations who recognize their particular charism and spirit in the tradition of Saints Elizabeth Ann Seton, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac ([sistersofcharityfederation.org](http://sistersofcharityfederation.org))

## **Contact Person**

A person selected from each Associate group whose role is to receive Associate messages and communicate these with group members, particularly those who live at a distance or have no e-mail, to ensure that they are kept informed of the latest news which relates to them, or the group.

## **FAMVIN**

A website that explains in detail the work of the Vincentian family ([famvin.org](http://famvin.org))

## **Mentor**

A Sister or Associate who walks with a person interested in becoming an Associate during her/his orientation sessions to the Associate/Sister Relationship. She/he journeys with the candidate and assists in preparing the candidate for commitment.

## **NACAR**

North American Conference of Associates and Religious ([nacar.org](http://nacar.org))



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