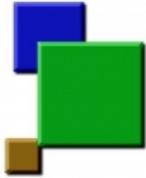


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## Religious Law and Consultation Newsletter



### Upcoming Webcasts

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#### Associates of Religious Institutes

November 17

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#### Taxation of Religious

February 21, 2016

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#### Covenant Project - 4 Sessions

April 2016

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#### Canon Law 101 - 4 Sessions

4 Sessions - On Demand

Time: Tuesdays, 2:00 pm ET, 11:00 am  
PT

[Registration](#)

Format: Live, On-Demand, USB or  
CD-ROM

Past programs are available [here](#).

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### Contact

Amy Hereford, CSJ, JD, JCD  
Attorney Canonist  
6400 Minnesota Ave.  
St. Louis, MO 63111-2807

## Associates of Religious Institutes

### Background

Throughout the history of religious life, from the early centuries of Christianity, there have been men and women who have associated to religious orders. In the Egyptian deserts, individuals would go out to converse with the hermits living there, receiving their guidance and blessing. In medieval monasteries, individuals sought to live in close association with the monasteries, without joining as vowed members. Some of these were formally organized into tertiaries or oblates who made a specific commitment and took on certain obligations and spiritual practices, receiving in exchange the pastoral care of the orders. In many of the apostolic communities beginning in the 17th century assistance and involvement of lay men and women was part of the history of the institutes.

### Developments

While association with institutes has a long history, in the last several decades, there has been a new interest in associates, particularly among women's institutes. The number of associates has grown from a few thousand in the 1980s to tens of thousands by the year 2000 and the numbers continue to grow. Many religious institutes have associates, though the level of organization and clarity of roles and responsibilities vary from one institute to another. It is clear that the programs respond to the need of many people to grow in spirituality and to share in the mission of the religious institutes.

Phone: 314-266-1814  
 Fax: 815-550-1329  
 amyhereford @ gmail.com

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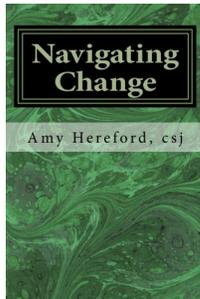
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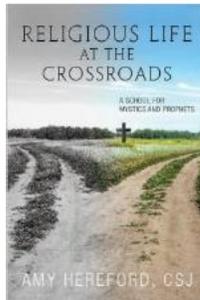
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Continued development of the associate movement is occurring at the same time that many religious institutes are undergoing profound transitions. This phenomenon will call for careful attention to the identity, the purpose and the organization of the sisters and of the associates. As this matures, many recognize the need to clarify roles and relationships and to develop an organized structure that responds to the needs of both groups.

## Participation

The more recent growth of the associate movement builds on the long history of association and brings some new elements to the movement as well. Throughout history, the most common form of association with religious institutes has been sharing in the spirituality of the institute, and receiving guidance in the particular spiritual insights of its founders. This instinct for seeking spiritual guidance goes back to the Egyptian deserts, is repeated through the history of monasticism, and is even found in the non-Christian tradition.

Another common mode of participation has been sharing in the apostolic works of the institute, working or volunteering in institutions run by the sisters or brothers. Along side the religious who built schools and hospitals are countless lay collaborators, without whose time, expertise and resources these projects could never have succeeded.

In recent decades, there has been an effort by some to involve associates in the life of the community, sharing in its celebrations, receiving its publications and joining in assemblies, gatherings and meetings. Some associates have served on committees, attended chapters and some are wondering whether and how associates might participate in governance of the institute itself. These developments can blur boundaries and raise concerns for both members and associates.

Today, however, many sisters and associates are seeing a shift in the focus of these movements. Increasingly, associates are seeking to establish their own structures and governance, while maintaining close ties and relationships with their founding religious communities.

## Legal Issues

The Code of Canon Law has some provisions relevant to associations of the faithful (303-310), as well as a canon on associations aggregated to religious life (677.2), but these do not seem to address the reality of associates of religious institutes as they have evolved today. This is because in many institutes, people associate with the institute as individuals. Often, they did not form a separate association with separate membership, organization and governance. The reason for this is probably historical. Associates came in small numbers in the 1980s when the programs were first started. At that time, informal organization seemed in order and met the needs of the fledgling movement. The number of associates grew somewhat slowly at first, and a practice developed of inviting associates to participate in more and more functions of the religious institute. In time, the associates were embedded in the life of the institutes. In an effort to be inclusive, some institutes have come to a point of including associates in nearly all meetings and communications of the institute, so that it is only by exception that the members ever gather for prayer and discussions of their particular life as vowed members.

The ongoing presence of the associates at meetings of the religious community changes both the associates and the members. It should be a blessing for both as they share the two distinct ways of living the charism of an institute. Increasingly, Sisters and associates are discovering the value of distinct structures, for the two groups while continuing to nourish their relationship together in important ways.

As Institutes and Associates clarify roles and relationships and develop alternative models, they seek to ensure a future for both the vowed life and for associates. Such a model should foster a clarification of the identity and purpose of the associates, as well as fostering more clarity for the specific identity of the vowed religious.

\* \* \*

For more information on this topic, November's webcast will examine Association in Religious Institutes and will explore the development of the movement and its current challenges and it will seek to discover a way forward, both for the religious institutes and for the associate movements: [www.ahereford.org/registration](http://www.ahereford.org/registration)

I may meet you in person in Florida in October where I will be speaking at **RCRI** about Practical Guidelines for Aging Religious Institutes. Please let me know if I can be of assistance to you or your organization.

Sincerely,  
*Amy Hereford*

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