

# ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP OF THE ORDER OF SAINT JOHN OF GOD

## Preamble

Ever since its foundation, the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God has been operating and expanding as a result of the concerted efforts deployed by the Brothers jointly with the lay men and women who we know as the Order's Co-workers (professionals, volunteers, benefactors and friends of the Institution). From the very outset, St John of God relied on the presence of people who became associated with his work.

In recent years we have adopted the term "Hospitaller Family" to refer to this group of people who are connected with, and form part of the Order. When we speak about the Hospitaller Family we also include our guests, the people for whom we care in the Order, who we wish to consider as our brothers and sisters; after all, they make up the largest part of our Family, given that they are the whole *raison d'être* of our existence.

Within this wide-ranging group of people who make up our Order, there have always been some who have more clearly identified with the Order's Charism and have shared the vocation to the Hospitality of Saint John of God, side-by-side with the Brothers and Co-workers. People who explicitly demonstrate a desire to continue practising their hospitality by forging closer bonds with the Order of Saint John of God, above and beyond their working relations or their closeness to the Order.

Throughout history, and still today, in different Religious Provinces there have been a wide variety of initiatives in this regard. Some focus more on religious matters, others on our apostolic work, but all of them are initiatives that express their commitment to, and linkage with, the Order.

In the current climate in the Church and the Order, responding to the invitation to promote synodality, and listening to the concerns of Co-workers of the Order and Brothers, we are offering this way of creating a bond with the Order as a whole. We are offering the possibility for people to become "Associate Members" (MAs) throughout the Order, to enable those who wish to practise and share the Hospitality of Saint John of God to do so in an official, institutional form. It will be one more way of living and expressing the Charism of Hospitality.

## **What does it entail, and what is its purpose?**

Associate Membership signifies a personal commitment to the Order by those who intend to live their vocation of Hospitality and who identify with the mission, values, ethos and manner of the Order of Saint John of God.

(This is not exclusive and is not incompatible with any other forms of association that already exist in certain Provinces of the Order).

### **Why has this proposal been put forward?**

This idea was initially developed and then implemented:

- to offer a response to a need or concern we have noted in the Order, on the part of both Brothers and Co-workers, and also of other people who are close to us;
- to offer a response to people who feel a strong sense of identification with the Charism of Saint John of God;
- to offer a response to people who feel the need to share the Charism of Saint John of God with the Brothers and with others.

### **We are convinced that ITS PURPOSE IS:**

- to expand the presence of the Order's Hospitality throughout the world;
- to strengthen the interior, spiritual and life of faith of like-minded lay men and women;
- to welcome and encourage other ways of working together to make Hospitality one of commitments in everyday life;
- to spread and enhance the Order's specific mission, in order to respond to the diversity of its members.

### **We are convinced that IT IS NOT INTENDED:**

- to exclude anyone, or to compete with any other existing groups;
- to make up for the shortage of Brothers and vocations;
- to replace the Brothers with laypeople;
- to satisfy any desire by Brothers or laity to be the centre of attention;
- to be seen as a 'novelty' (as there are similar experiences in other movements and Religious Congregations).

### **It is based on the Documents of the Order**

We can see that it is not a "novelty" because this project has its basis in the Order's own documents, starting with the Constitutions:

*...and we are so imbued with our mission that those who work with us feel inspired to behave in the same way, Const. 23.*

and is consistent with the General Statutes:

*The Provinces can form, in a provisional or permanent way, Communities to share some aspects of their Hospitaller religious*

*life with the Co-workers. The Provincial Superior and his Council define the norms that must regulate these communities, GS 28.*

And in other documents, such as:

- *Brothers and Co-workers united to serve and promote life*, 116 and 128e, 1992;
- *The Charter of Hospitality*, 7.3.2.2., (1999) 2021;
- *The Path of Hospitality in the Manner of St John of God. The Spirituality of the Order*, 33, 2004.

### **The Mission of the Associate Members**

The main Mission of the Associate Members is to practise Hospitality, to spread and enhance the Order's mission through this form of membership of, and allegiance to, the Order.

### **Bonding with the Order**

The MAs are directly linked to the Brothers, and not to the Order's Centres, by virtue of their commitment to the Charism and to Hospitality.

Their bond is wholly independent of any type of relationship by employment, voluntary work, and remuneration that they may earn in any of the Order's facilities. It is important for any employment relationship they may have to be completely independent of their commitment as an Associate Member and that nothing should be done to benefit or prejudice their employment or associate relationship. (Under no circumstances may it be confused with any other type of relationship with the Order, be it as a professional or volunteer, or in any other capacity).

### **What does Associate Membership of the Order entail?**

Being a Hospitaller is a way of life. A personal hospitaller life project and commitment can be lived in different dimensions, on a complementary and not a mutually exclusive basis, according to each individual person, for example by sharing:

- 
- The faith and spiritual dimension;
- The relational dimension of support, accompaniment, and promotion of Hospitality;
- Specific projects within or outside the Order's facilities which have to do with Hospitality.

The bond that unites the Associate Members is their identification with, and personal intention to live the Hospitality of John of God (charism, values, ethos and manner) with a profound sense of belonging to the Order, independently of the life choices of each individual.

It implies a personal commitment, because it means living the spirit of Hospitality in the everyday situations of life with sensitivity, disseminating our values and ethos in our own environments.

It is a way of life practised every day through service, example, witness and readiness to contribute to the development and promotion of Hospitality, in the manner of St John of God.

It means being Hospitallers in each Member's own state of life.

#### The Associate Member's commitment to work with the Order:

Associate Members play an active part in the life and development of the Province in matters pertaining to them as such, organising any activities and events they deem necessary according to their own circumstances:

- in their own communities of Brothers,
- In the Order's facilities and centres,
- in any other entities and institutions in which the Order is jointly engaged in any way,
- with their own projects as Associate Members.

At the level of the Order, interprovincial and international MA meetings are organised to share experiences, mutually enriching each other, and reinforcing the sense of belonging to the Order.

#### Continuing Formation

The MA's Continuing Formation will be fostered by attending:

- the Provinces' Schools of Hospitality;
- joint formation courses with the Brothers;
- the formation events which the Associate Members need.

### **PROPOSED PROCEDURE:**

#### **Admission to Associate Membership**

Associate Members of the Order are men and women who are, and in some way feel that they have bonds with the Brothers of St John of God, through one of their communities or groups to which they refer.

We propose that anyone interested in becoming an Associate Member should apply in writing to the Provincial Superior, explaining their desire and

their motivations, and when and where possible, arrange for a personal meeting and dialogue.

It will fall to the Provincial Council to approve requests for Associate membership and the Provincial will accept the new Associate Member in writing.

Depending on the background, knowledge and skills of each person, a personalised programme of preparation prior to admission will be established.

Acceptance of the MA candidate will be based on their profile, hospitaller attitudes, familiarity with the Order, and experience.

### **Associate Member Profile**

We believe that Associate Members should possess such features as:

- the practice of welcoming hospitality;
- being open, friendly and ready to take the first step and to welcome others with kindness, respect and patience;
- being concerned with caring, peace, closeness and dialogue;
- being amenable, altruistic, generous, and believers in the value of freely giving and helping others,
- the sense of being bearers of the values of the Order of St John of God.

### **Associate Membership period**

A person joining the Order as an Associate Member makes a commitment for one year. It may be renewed every year for the first three years and thereafter it may be renewed every three years.

### **Termination of the commitment**

Affiliation as an Associate Member of the Order automatically ceases at the moment the commitment is not renewed.

At the express request not to renew their commitment, or by a decision of the Provincial and his Council when they consider it not to be advisable.

Ceasing to be as Associate Member of the Order shall have no effect whatsoever on any other relationship with or commitments to the Order, including employment, volunteering, or as a supplier.

### **The Life of the Associated Members' Movement**

Each Province of the Order constitutes and organises the Associate Members and is their point of reference.

The central core of Associate Membership is at the local level, operating in a specific area.

The Provincial Superior, in consultation with his Council, appoints a Brother of the Province to be directly responsible for the animation, accompaniment and supervision of the MAs of his Province.

He also appoints an MA to be responsible for the movement at the provincial level.

When there are several groups in a given Province, a Brother or Associate Member should be appointed as a contact or liaison person for each group or geographic area, in addition to the "provincial officials",

These contact or liaison persons should be appointed on the basis of:

- Their leadership skills.
- Their identification with the Order.
- Their way of living Hospitality in the manner of St John of God.

### **The duration of these responsibilities**

The duration will be four years with only one possibility of renewal. (The aim is to ensure that they do not represent specific individuals, but the Order and to Brothers as a whole).

### **Temporal goods**

Each Associate Member shall pay a small contribution, according to their means, to help cover the ordinary group costs (of meetings, formation etc), as suggested by the provincial officials. Obviously, inability to contribute shall not cause anyone to be excluded.

The Provinces, as far as they are able, contribute to developing and supporting the organisation of the MA group.

The goods and material resources of the MA group must always be placed at the service of the mission in relation to the actions proposed.

Upon dissolution of the MA group, its assets shall become the property of the Order, to be used for its mission.

### **Invitation (suggestions, guidelines) to the Provinces**

The Provincial could share the proposal to set up the MA groups with the Provincial Council and with the Communities of Brothers of his Province, in order to promote and support this initiative, as well as with the leaders of neighbouring areas and anyone more closely linked to the Brothers for whatever reason.

A Brother and Associate Member should be appointed to serve as leaders, and to launch and accompany the group. In larger Provinces this may be a small team of people.

Work must begin on designing and organising a work plan, with strategies and objectives to be pursued.

At the local level, local people who identify with the Order should be invited to join the group, drawing them closer to us:

- encouraging occasional or regular, informal or institutional contacts, fraternal meetings, moments of prayer;
- identifying in each Province the areas, activities and projects in which the MAs could be involved;
- notifying the Management Committees of all the Centres of all the MAs;
- developing familiarity with St John of God through continuing formation;
- hold meetings of the Associate Members, together with the Communities of Brothers, where appropriate.

We must learn about, and from, similar experiences of other Religious Congregations, or alliances and forms of collaboration with similar groups, in order to share best practices and activities.

### **Legal Status**

Initially, it is not planned to start by creating a legal entity and to wait and take stock of the initial steps and to share them.

We propose to set up groups in the Provinces, to see how they develop and later on we can discuss the legal framework.

Presumably, an "association" will eventually be required which will entail drawing up statutes. For the time being, it is proposed to leave this step to a later stage when the legal formalities will have to be finalised, providing a common base for the whole Order: Statutes, and bylaws.

Depending on how the MA groups evolve, a commission will set up to work on the most appropriate type of legal entity.

### **THE PROPOSAL**

We propose that some Provinces may start by following these guidelines. Some Provinces that already have people and groups of this kind could be constituted as "Associate Members" in order to begin to interacting with the Order from now on.

Two years after the MA groups have been constituted, a general evaluation will be conducted at the local, provincial and global levels of the Order.

We will offer all the help, guidance or support that may be needed in the initial stages.

Once the Provinces have set in their suggestions regarding this document, we shall draft an initial protocol to serve as a blueprint for rolling out the Movement.

We are most grateful for your kind attention and, looking ahead, we thank you for the interest you will be showing in this venture, which we modestly believe to be in the strategic interests of the future of our Order.

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