

# NEW SPONSORSHIP MODEL RESPONDS TO NEEDS

*Preparing for the Future, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange Follow Their Tradition*

*In the last issue of Health Progress, representatives of St. Joseph Health System, Orange, CA, described innovative programs and policies that have prepared the organization for the future (Judy Cassidy, "A Moment of Grace," November-December, pp. 6-10). The congregation is ready to fully include the laity in sponsorship through a public juridic person (PJP) model. In this article, the sponsoring congregation's general superior explains how the congregation's past has shaped its approaches to sponsorship and what the new model will mean for the congregation.*

Since the first Sisters of St. Joseph came together in Le Puy, France, in 1650, we have been impelled by the desire to respond to the spiritual and physical needs of people. Our founder, Fr. Jean-Pierre Medaille, SJ, called us to go out into the community, divide the city, and assess and address the needs there. Some of our early sisters were lace makers. They used lace making to support themselves, and taught the craft to girls and women. Lace has become a symbol for us of relationships and patterns in our congregational history. In our activities, we see two related patterns: the pattern of responding to needs and the pattern of bringing people together in ministry.

In response to the need for health care following the great 1918 influenza epidemic, we founded our first hospital, in Eureka, CA, in 1920. We established St. Joseph Health System in 1981 to better coordinate our then eight-hospital health ministry, structure our influence, and include additional laypeople in ministry leadership. We drew inspiration from the Second Vatican Council, which affirmed the responsibility of the laity for the church's ministries.

## SPONSORSHIP DEFINED

Shortly after founding St. Joseph Health System, we began using the term "sponsorship" to describe the relationship between the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange and their health care system. As a sponsor, the congregation publicly identifies itself with and bears responsibility and moral accountability for supporting and influencing a project, program, or entity that furthers its goals. The congregation exercises sponsorship through a variety of relationships and structures:

- The general council is the corporate member and exercises reserved rights.
- The general superior, or her designee, chairs the system's board.
- A majority of the system's board members are Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange.
- The system board reports directly to the general council.
- Sisters serve on the boards of system entities.
- The system's vice president of sponsorship is a Sister of St. Joseph of Orange.
- At the local level, vice presidents for sponsorship have responsibility for mission, vision, and values.

## MEETING NEW NEEDS

We are again responding to needs as fewer sisters become available for ministry and governance roles. We have applied to the Vatican for permission to establish a new public juridic person (PJP) that would formally share with the laity the sponsorship responsibilities that the congregation has held and exercised through its general council. With the new model, our goal is to ensure that the ministry is carried on by people who understand the sisters' charism and values.

We began preparing for this moment more than 20 years ago, when we began a series of efforts to form the laity. Today a good number of

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laypersons are well prepared to assume these new responsibilities for the ministry (see Richard J. Statuto, "Words, Actions, Beliefs: The Mission at Work," *Health Progress*, November-December 2004, pp. 10-11).

#### CHOOSING A MODEL

In July 2002, we saw that it was time to begin actively exploring an alternative model of sponsorship for St. Joseph Health System. Toward this end, we convened a "design team," made up of sisters and system lay leaders, and a "reflectors' group," whose members were all sisters. The design team worked with the general council and a facilitator, Sr. Joyce DeShano, SSJ, to design the processes and materials to involve the congregation. The reflectors' group reacted to the materials and processes and gave feedback to the design team about how other members of the congregation received them.

The design team held regional sessions for congregational members with Fr. David Nygren, CM, PhD, a consultant who presented various sponsorship models: single sponsor, multisponsor, foundation, and PJP. The team also engaged Fr. Francis Morrisey, OMI, JCD, PhD, a canon lawyer, to clarify canonical issues. Throughout the process, the design team—communicating through notes, videos, and other means—invited feedback and questions from congregation members. It kept the health care system's senior man-

agers and board informed through board and leadership team meetings.

In May 2003, sisters and lay colleagues from the system and its local entities were asked to review the four sponsorship models and identify which was most consistent with the values and culture of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. Overwhelmingly, they favored the PJP model. Noting that the system has many structures in place for lay formation, they supported the PJP model because it:

- Provides for a continuing role of the sisters
- Sustains the ministry
- Provides stability for the health care system
- Enlarges the role of co-ministers (both laypeople and sisters)

#### THE PJP STRUCTURE

The PJP, a pontifical structure, will assume the major portion of the sponsorship role now held by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange and exercised by the general council. The general council will hold a few reserved rights, but the majority of reserved rights currently exercised by the general council will be held by the PJP. The PJP will have at least five members—religious and lay—all Catholic.

The sisters retain important roles under the PJP. The general council will appoint the first PJP members, influence the lay formation program, and exercise some reserved rights. At least one member of the PJP will be a Sister of St. Joseph, as long as there is a sister with interest and capability. Sisters will continue to have the opportunity to assume ministry positions and to participate on local boards.

The system's relationship with local entities and boards will not be radically altered by the new structure. However, everyone in the system will assume a greatly expanded responsibility for carrying out the organization's mission and maintaining its Catholic identity.

#### CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

Partnership with others is integral to how our congregation lives its charism. The PJP structure will formalize the sharing of sponsorship responsibilities that has existed for many years. We are confident the PJP structure will strengthen our health care ministry, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange face the future with great hope. □

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