

SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROCESS

“Loving God and Neighbor Without Distinction”

Welcome to our Spiritual Formation Process!

We rejoice in the fact that you have felt the call to grow closer to God, and to learn more about living in this world as a committed Christian. What follows is an outline of the path by which we, as Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine, Florida, move always toward that goal, one step at a time.

The special gift, or charism, given to us as a congregation is one so vital to the world's people today: union and reconciliation. You may be the next in a long line of strong, enthusiastic women who came from LePuy, France, to give themselves for the "salvation and perfection" of their neighbors in Florida.

Your interest in seeking information is a living reminder that God is with us and continually challenging us to share our charism in our lives of prayer and ministry throughout the state!

FOUNDATIONAL VALUES

Our spiritual formation process is one of obediently listening for the voice of God. Sisters who work with our spiritual formation process will help each woman discern what God is saying in her and in the community. We believe that each of us, Inquirers and Sisters, are called to give and receive from each other in love, in justice and in charity. We model a life of personal responsibility, balanced with interdependence, and look for that model within Inquirers.

STAGES OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

INQUIRER	Unlimited time
AFFILIATE	7 months – 3 years
POSTULANT	1 – 2 years
NOVICE	2 years
Canonical	1 year
Constitutional	1 year
INITIALLY-PROFESSED	3 years
FINALLY-PROFESSED	A lifetime of generous and joyful commitment

INQUIRER: A woman who is seeking information about the meaning and practice of religious life today. She prays for God's guidance, seeks help and feedback from spiritual persons, her family, and friends. She reads about religious life, attends

discernment retreats, if possible, and endeavors to visit with religious of various communities. Most importantly, she practices spiritual poverty, remaining totally open to whatever may come of her searching. She is a practicing Catholic who fulfills the basic criteria of age (18 – 45), and good health, both physical and mental. Her desires often include a more intimate love of God, a vibrant life of prayer in community, a simple life style, and the opportunity to use her gifts to serve others, especially the poor.

SSJ AFFILIATE: A woman who has expressed interest in becoming a member of our congregation and been accepted as an Affiliate.

Purposes Of Our Affiliate Process

The purposes of our process are

- To assist each woman in her desire to grow in intimacy with God.**
- To provide opportunities for her to begin to know us as a Congregation and as individuals, for us to come to know her and her gifts, and to work with her to discover whether or not God is calling her to live in community as a Sister of St. Joseph of St. Augustine.**
- To assess her readiness to live in community as a Postulant.**

The Program

As an Affiliate a woman will be asked to

- Meet regularly with our Affiliate Director for vocational direction concerning prayer, personal growth, ministry, social life and relatedness to the community.**
- Grow spiritually through daily prayer, Eucharist, regular spiritual direction.**
- Continue to update herself in theology, spirituality and scripture through reading, workshops, classes, etc.**
- If possible, collaborate in some apostolic activity of our community while continuing to participate in her parish.**
- Share in some informal times of community relaxation, as well as celebrations and days of prayer.**

- **Participate in community-sponsored events for Affiliates.**
- **Continue the life of a single person professionally, and ordinarily not reside in a SSJ Community.**

Our community, through our Affiliate Director, will

- **Invite each Affiliate to activities specifically designed for Affiliates.**
- **Invite her to participate in appropriate regional community days of prayer, assembly and celebration.**
- **Introduce her to the regional community.**
- **Facilitate her visits with our local communities.**
- **Provide her with appropriate congregational communications.**
- **Assist her through regular meetings to assess her affinity with the congregation and her readiness for Postulancy.**

Financial Guidelines

Financial resources are not criteria for admittance.

Congregational Financial Commitment: Our congregation finances the various activities that are normally sponsored for an Affiliate. She will be asked to finance any additional programs or activities in which she may choose to participate.

Affiliate Financial Commitment: If an Affiliate and her director decide that she is ready to apply for Postulancy, she will be asked to cover the costs of the steps required for entrance: medical, eye, and dental examinations, psychological testing, as well as room/board, and insurance coverage for her first year of Postulancy. Our congregation will bear half the cost of the psychological testing.

Evaluation

Each Affiliate and her Affiliate Director together will evaluate

- **How well our mutual expectations have been met.**
- **Her growth and readiness for Postulancy.**

Ordinarily, Affiliateship will be a minimum of 7 – 8 months and no longer than three years. If mutual discernment reveals her desire and readiness, she will be invited to move into Postulancy in the congregation.

SSJ POSTULANT: A woman who has completed her 7 – 8 months of Affiliateship, and been accepted into our Postulancy process.

As a Postulant, a woman comes ready to give of herself and ready to receive from the Congregation an initiation into our way of living the gospel in community. As the Lord told Jeremiah, “Get up and make your way down to the potter’s house; there I shall let you hear what I have to say, “ (Jer. 18:1). A Postulant comes to believe that it is here, in this congregation, that the Lord will reveal God’s plan for her life, day by day.

A Postulant is introduced gradually to the interdependence of community living; she is encouraged to discover in a deeper way her own unique “self” graced by God’s gifts. As she grows in acceptance of her own integrity and personal freedom, increasingly dependent upon the Lord, she begins to grow in her ability to live as a mature community member.

A Postulant is a pilgrim, a searcher. In the words of our founder, Fr. Jean Pierre Medaille, SJ, “they cannot become holy all at once, nor practice immediately the sublime Maxims of virtue” (Primitive Constitutions, p. 21).

Each Postulant is given the time and leisure to grow into human and spiritual maturity by taking responsibility for her own life in a reflective way. With guidance she comes to a deeper consciousness of her call by God, and of her ability to make a response in freedom.

Her instructions include the basic dynamics of spiritual living, prayer, discernment, Scripture, spiritual reading, Church doctrine, use of leisure, solitude, silence, work, and the fullness of Christian womanhood. She is involved, on a part-time basis, in some phase of the ministry for which she is prepared.

The purposes of our Postulancy process are

- To help a Postulant appreciate reflection and solitude in order that she may discover God’s personal and loving movement in her own life in a deeper way.**
- To provide her with the means of deepening self-awareness.**
- To provide her the means to deepen her relationship with God.**
- To help her come to know and love our Sisters living in community and**

enrich her experience of our life of prayer and ministry.

- **To assist her to make the transition from a secular lifestyle to the religious lifestyle.**

Our community will provide

- **Opportunities for solitude and leisure, encouragement for creativity, and the integration of each of these elements.**
- **Courses in spiritual living, workshops, and regular spiritual direction opportunities to enable her to grow in the awareness of the presence of God in all the events of her life.**
- **Experiences of part-time ministry and/or opportunities to further her education, when necessary.**
- **A realistic community-living situation in which she may experience the interdependency and the joys and sorrow which are part of our lifestyle as women religious.**

SSJ NOVICE: A woman who has completed her Postulancy experience and been accepted for the Novitiate experience.

Primarily, while a Novice continues her spiritual formation, she begins an immediate preparation for vows. During the first year of her novitiate experience, her canonical year, she is given more time for solitude, for leisure, and for recollection so that she may grow in intimacy with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Her instruction centers on the meaning of a life of religious vows, the spirituality of the Congregation, liturgy, sacraments, prayer, community, and spiritual reading. She begins an in-depth preparation for the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. She continues to receive direction and to actively participate in the formation community. She may be involved in some aspect of ministry but involvement is limited.

In her second year of Novitiate, her constitutional year, she resumes a more active involvement in ministry in order to begin the integration of her ministry and her spiritual growth. She is given the opportunity to live the experience of community life in a local house. If possible, she is also exposed to the ministry of the Church in areas in which she has not had experience. Special efforts are made to allow her to work with the poor or minorities.

Goals of the Formation Process for Novices

- To assist each Novice to recognize and move beyond mere functional and emotional perceptions of herself to an experience of self that goes beyond family and cultural ties, and to admit and accept fundamental limitations.
- To guide her to a loving, personal knowledge of God that moves beyond a merely intellectual understanding and to help her recognize her responsibility to follow the Lord's loving movement in her life through regular direction, conferences, example, and sharing.
- To provide instruction in the areas of the charism of the Congregation, liturgical spirituality, sacramental spirituality, vowed living, spiritual reading, prayer, and the personal integration of these aspect which is encouraged through various reflective processes.
- To evaluate a Novice's gradual growth in openness with her directress and willingness to receive direction and admonishment, when necessary; to assess her good sense, concern, and generosity in contributing to the contentment of her Sisters in the formation community.
- To provide formative ministry experiences that may enable each Novice to integrate ministry with her continuing spiritual growth and to know herself as a woman religious ministering in the Church. Such experiences are designed to evoke and foster generosity of heart, self-sacrificing love, forgetfulness of self, patient endurance, and the experience of her own humility before God and others, which creates a deep dependence upon God.
- To provide the opportunity for a second-year novice to live in local communities during her formative ministry experiences in order that she may further experience the lived charism of the Congregation.
- To provide opportunities through classes or workshops for learning about and/or experiencing the various ministries of the Church.
- To provide direction which will encourage a second-year novice toward total commitment to religious life and the profession of temporary vows as further preparation for perpetual profession in the Congregation.

INITIALLY-PROFESSED SISTER: A woman who has completed her Novitiate experience and has professed her first vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

As a professed Sister, the woman becomes a fully participative member in our congregational ministries; she begins to share both responsibilities and joys. With guidance, she undertakes a ministry in which the gifts granted to her by

the Holy Spirit will be best used and through which she can experience growth as an apostle of unity.

She continues spiritual direction on a regular basis and meets regularly with the director of initial profession for input, discussion and assistance in this new phase of her religious life. During a three to six year period, she moves toward perpetual vows under the guidance of the director of sisters in initial vows.

Hopefully, she will find burning within her the constant movement toward excellence and never find her satisfaction in the permanent settling-down of attachments to her own will, her own way, people, or possessions. Her growing love of God and of all others will keep her heart ever-free and turned always toward the Holy Spirit of Love. With spiritual direction, a Sister in initial vows makes a decision for total commitment of herself to God through perpetual vows in community.

Goals of the Formation Program for Sisters in Initial Vows

- To assist a Sister in the transition from living with her formation community to full participation in community in her local house.**
- To lead her, with God's grace, to strengthen and enjoy her vowed life through further interiorization of the religious values awakened in her during her initial formation.**
- To challenge her to grow in her identity as a woman religious ministering in the Church.**
- To aid her in integrating ministry, community life responsibilities and the spiritual life.**

Our community will encourage and help a Sister to

- Adjust to the local community.**
- Realize the importance of her participation and acceptance of responsibilities in the local community and to urge her to demonstrate patience and good humor with herself as she makes the transition from novitiate living to living on mission.**
- Seek spiritual direction.**
- Participate in the Congregation's program of on-going formation as well as programs provided for Sisters in initial vows.**
- Develop and sustain a whole hearted devotion to her ministry.**

- **Access programs or courses of study in theology as a means of becoming the spiritual leader she will need to be in her ministry to God's people.**
- **Grow more and more deeply attached to Jesus in every phase of her life as a Sister of St. Joseph.**
- **Integrate the essentials for developing a spiritual life into a life of ministry and community living.**