

## A Charism of Spiritual Maternity

**The Women's Apostolate to Youth** takes as its Sponsor Mary, Mother of the One who is our Way to the Father. We believe that this Apostolate owes its origins to her gracious intercession on behalf of Christ's little ones, and we look to her for inspiration and guidance in our practice of spiritual maternity. As the "New Eve," the Mother of Christ is also the "Mother of all living." In her Immaculate Conception we see the original divine intention in the creation of woman, as one destined for union and fruitfulness--for love and for the future. In her Fiat we learn the meaning of unconditional surrender to the operation of grace in the soul. In her Assumption we behold an icon of total human integrity.

The specific shape of woman's destiny can only be fully understood in terms of woman's origin as it has been revealed in Sacred Scripture. The essential longing of woman to give and receive love is rooted in her vocation as companion, spouse and nurturer of new life. If she is to be both happy and faithful to her own destiny, then woman's persistent need for loving union must always be for the sake of "all living." The capacity to offer spiritual nurture to those who are most impressionable, and therefore most vulnerable, rests on our own vulnerability to God. In the Mother of Our Lord we see this vulnerability perfectly exemplified as a generous and trusting receptivity to the initiatives of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. He alone can welcome and make fruitful our total surrender. Recognizing that a full surrender to the Spirit is the work of a lifetime and that spiritual fruitfulness is as much the call of the single as it is the married woman, our Apostolate seeks to nurture a deep devotion to and trust in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in each individual soul.

Just as the natural maternal function requires a safe haven for developing life in woman's own body, so the spiritual formation of the young requires a sheltered space in which the transforming action of grace may proceed unimpeded. Our Apostolate recognizes the strong desire women have to provide a wholesome and sustaining formation in the Faith for children and youth. We encourage, first of all in ourselves and then in our charges, a thorough knowledge of the riches of Catholic teaching, a vital prayer life and sacramental practice, and a generous spirit of service. We recognize that ultimately it is the character and conviction of the formator that exercises the most convincing and lasting influence on the young. For this reason, attention to our own spiritual growth will always comprise an essential aspect of our common life and mission.

The work of the Spirit on those in whom the maternal impulse has been implanted by nature results in the purification and enlargement of that impulse. While it is natural to want to protect and prosper one's own, the woman who receives a call to provide spiritual nurture will find the borders of her heart constantly enlarged to receive an increasing number of Christ's little ones. Our Apostolate encourages a widening concern for the suffering of all of the world's children, not merely those with whom we have

personal contact. This concern seeks many avenues of fulfillment, including various forms of service, almsgiving and intercessory prayer.

Woman's original encounter with Evil has resulted in a particular form of moral responsibility--that of protecting the developing soul against what is evil and destructive in the exterior environment. Significantly, it is the woman whose heel rests on the head of the Serpent who seeks to injure both her and her children (Gen. 3:15). This responsibility may find expression in a variety of worthy efforts relating to the creation of a wholesome environment for human thriving. In our Apostolate, it includes but is not limited to a commitment to teach youth about the reality and power of sin and to unmask the ways in which evil masquerades as good.

The death to self that must inevitably be a part of every person's quest for God makes its appearance in the maternal vocation in a particularly fruitful way. The deep devotion of both the natural and the "spiritual" mother for her child becomes a path to sanctity when it is finally purified of all possessiveness. It is the son of the once-barren Elizabeth who calls all of us to "decrease" so that the Son of Mary may begin to take root and grow in us and in our charges. Our role as spiritual guides to the young requires, finally, that we point them away from ourselves and towards the One who points to the Father. The young ones entrusted to our care come from the Father and belong ultimately to Him.

Spiritual maternity finds its fulfillment in the full maturation of that which has been protected and nourished, so that the one who was once our "child" eventually becomes our companion in the quest for God. The goal of our efforts is a securely-formed Christian character marked by a capacity for selfless love, freely given; and in the fulfillment of this goal we come to see the meaning of our sacrificial efforts: The feminine desire for a loving union is for the sake of fruitfulness--a fruitfulness which itself exists purely for the sake of more love in the world.

*Statutes 1.3-1.9*

**COMMUNIO**

**MISSIO**



**UNION**

**FRUITFULNESS**