

June 27, 2019

JOURNEY OF ONENESS UPDATE: Leadership

July 2, 2019: What will be different this Tuesday?

On Monday, July 1, 2019, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas will pass into a new canonical reality: the congregation will have one center of authority—that is, one set of elected leaders, the Institute Leadership Team (ILT).

On Tuesday, July 2, 2019, what difference will that change make in the lives of sisters, associates, companions, staff members, ministry leaders or others? Whom should a sister call about any given topic? What's happening with staff and our ministries? Is it true that there will be new titles for some in leadership? This article draws on recent Institute and Community communications to address these questions, revealing both continuity and change.



Whom should I call about...?

In a June 11, 2019, letter to all sisters, the ILT clarified that they and the members of the Community Leadership Teams have agreed on ways to share leadership during the next two years (2019–2021). Significantly, as the canonical leaders for the whole Institute, the ILT will be responsible to mission all the sisters and to make decisions about new members. Sisters on the current elected Community Leadership Teams will be appointed by the ILT to continue in

their leadership roles with delegated authority, effective July 1. The June 11 letter outlined areas of responsibility that will rest with the Leadership Teams, including support for the life of the members; reserved powers for ministries; fostering community; day-to-day operations; and sisters' ministries, residences and budgets. In other words, to the question, "Whom should I call about this?" the likely answer is "Whomever you would have called before July 1."

What's the situation for staff?

Through their respective Community presidents and/or COOs, staff members also received a letter from the ILT in recent weeks. The letter expressed the ILT’s appreciation for staff members’ “commitment, generosity and patience as we have moved through the various phases” of the Journey of Oneness. It explained that changes are proceeding at different paces as seem appropriate for the various administrative functions. Also, the ILT thanked staff members for the “expertise, professionalism, and commitment” they bring to our shared mission of Mercy.



As reported in the [March 21 Mercy Now](#), as of July 1, 2019, staff for archives, new membership and justice will become Institute employees working with Archives Director Kathryn Oosterhuis, New Membership Director Sister Eileen Campbell and Institute Justice Director Maggie Conley, respectively. This change will happen without shifting their locations. Also new, the Institute’s first Human Resources Officer, Jackie Gordon, is now in place and will be visiting offices across the Institute in the coming weeks as part of her orientation to Mercy. Searches are in process for an Institute Communications Officer and an Institute Advancement Officer (fundraising). For most staff members, however, as is the case for sisters, day-to-day operations will not experience significant changes in the near term.

Who’s looking after our ministries?

A third ILT letter this month informed and reassured Mercy ministry leaders across the Institute about the changes now unfolding. ILT members explained that on July 1, they will assume canonical responsibility for all of our Mercy ministries. However, they went on to explain that between 2019 and 2021, they will delegate authority for most of the current reserved powers to the current Community Leadership Teams. This means that ministry leaders—like sisters and staff members—will continue to work through whatever processes are already in place for ministry accountability and financial support.



The members of the ILT indicated that they hope to establish an Institute Office of Ministry, as recommended by the Ministry Development Team, by 2020, and they assured ministry leaders that they will be part of the conversations about how to best structure relationships for the future. The “more immediate and more important” impact of July 1, the ILT wrote, “is the shift in perspective on our ministries as we, both sisters and co-ministers, enthusiastically embrace all our ministries as

‘Institute ministries’ and celebrate ... our heritage of service and commitment to systemic change.”

What’s this about no more “CLT” or “Community”?

It's true: a few familiar terms are being retired as we live into the new Institute reality. We are now primarily sisters, associates, companions, staff members and ministry leaders of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. The Communities have been assimilated into the Institute. Additionally, our leaders are now appointed and receive delegated authority, so titles are changing, even though we continue to have geographically based offices and leaders.

Geography will name us, as in the past, but without the word Community. Moreover, sisters in some of the other nations now relating directly to the ILT will be identified by their country. So, at this moment, here's how we're named within our reality as the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas: CCASA, Guam, Mid-Atlantic, New York Pennsylvania West, Northeast, Philippines, South Central and West Midwest.

Additional vocabulary notes include the following:

- Institute Leadership Team (ILT) *remains*, indicating the Institute President and Council
- Leadership Team *replaces* Community Leadership Team
- Leader *replaces* Community President
- Local Leader *becomes* a generic term indicating roles that have and may continue to have varied titles in different parts of the Institute (e.g., Local Coordinator, Life and Ministry Facilitator, Personal Contact Sister, etc.)

What would Catherine say about all of this?

Her wisdom about change and continuity is legend among us: “We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God—for whom alone we go forward—or stay back.” (*Letter to Mary de Sales White, December 20, 1840*)

As we “trip” through the changes associated with our Journey of Oneness, we can repeatedly center ourselves on the questions that urge us to “go forward or stay back”: Who do we, as Sisters of Mercy, desire to be for one another and for our world? How might we embody the mercy of God for a suffering world in more meaningful and impactful ways into the future?

