JOURNEY OF ONENESS UPDATE: Civil Structure

Civil structures evolve to fit with Institute’s single canonical status
As many of us are aware, since the Institute is both a canonical (Church) and a civil (legal) entity, the structures for these two parallel realities must be in harmony so that the Institute can carry out its responsibilities in both the ecclesial and the societal spheres of life.

It should be no surprise, then, that the July 1, 2019, change in the Institute’s canonical structure to one center of authority and a single canonical identity also necessitates changes to Institute civil structures. Significant work is occurring to accomplish those changes, especially with regard to the status of sponsored ministries.

It was necessary that ministries previously sponsored by the former Communities became sponsored works of the Institute, and the legal provision for that change was crucial. Why? First, because having a ministry’s civil structure clearly indicate oversight by the Sisters of Mercy is a key factor in establishing the ministry’s right to claim publicly a Catholic identity. Second, some of our sponsored ministries gain their federal tax-exempt status through their legal connection to the Sisters of Mercy. Thus, ministries formerly sponsored by Mercy Communities needed a new home—the Institute—immediately, and the legal documents to accomplish that shift had to be in place by July 1, 2019.

Some sponsored ministries were already Institute-sponsored. Those include Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE), Mercy Education System of the Americas (MESA), Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC) and Mercy Investment Services (MIS).

Other adjustments of current civil structures are in progress to reflect the authority of the Institute and to be responsive to future needs. Additionally, new civil structures (corporations and trusts) are being established to serve the Institute as a whole. These changes and creations will be the topic of a future Mercy Now article.