

## ***Qualitative Summary and Examples***

For each question where one choice among several was “Other,” the number of other responses are given. A short text summary notes the major areas that were covered in the open-ended responses to that question, and a few examples are given to show a range of common statements made by respondents.

### **Question: With reference to my personal budget:**

*Responses: Other n=42*

Most have choice between a stipend/allowance or setting a personal budget (often noted for personal needs) which is reviewed (16)

Most suggest personal budget review is based on need and not a problem.

Few indicate having any discretionary funds.

Several suggest money pressures resulting in more scrutiny from leadership.

- We can be on a personal budget or an allowance. Personal budget you figure out your needs for the year and on an allowance you ask for a set amount for each month (example: \$50 every month for the fiscal year).
- Given an amount at the beginning of the year that we may ask for monthly. To use for personal use at the end of year any not used can give back to the community.
- We have been trying to cut back all our budgets. Still, 'reasonable' is the key word from the congregation. I like our flexibility & adult approach.

### **Question: Throughout the Congregational documents there is a list of religious traditions and practices such as praying for benefactors praying the rosary prayers for the deceased sisters reciting the office attending daily mass etc. In your lived experience:**

*Responses: Other n=31*

Most indicate the practices are a mix of required ones and those that involve personal decision; no practice is more prevalent than another in being required in these responses.

The range of mentioned practices is more likely to be practiced in Motherhouse or where there are larger communities, but are harder to follow elsewhere.

Some noted that the practices in the documents were not enforced in practice.

- Some practices, while strongly encouraged, are left to the individual based on a ministerial schedule. Some practices are done as a local community.
- I'm not sure. I treat them as a personal matter since I live alone. My prayer life is more tailored to my needs.
- These are all in the Constitution but no one is checking up for we are considered committed women religious.

### **Question: When I want to make a donation to a charity (assuming it is less than \$100) I:**

*Responses: Other n=56*

Where sisters are living in a house with others, donations may be part of a house budget or discussion item for the community (19).

Most have to include any donations in their set personal budget or decide from their monthly stipend if it is a small donation (13).

Some indicated they are able to use gift money given to them towards donations without asking. (5).

- According to our present practice it is possible to budget for the year for an annual amount not to exceed \$100. I also give out of my personal budget.
- If it is small and will fit my allowance, I decide. The local house sets amount and to what it wishes to contribute and how much within governing Board's limits.
- Sometimes I use gift money for such contributions.

**Question: When I want to get away for a few days (assuming that this absence does not adversely affect my ministry):**

*Responses: Other n=81*

Most of these responses gave details to clarify the checked responses rather than different information in the open-ended statements.

Most let someone know as a courtesy, in many cases this is required and the individual is a set contact person who must be notified.

Longer trips are more likely to require permission rather than just notification. Many required permission if the trip was out of state, most if out of country.

Those in shared living usually indicate they need to consult with their communities before going.

- I can go. At the Motherhouse, we check ourselves out at the Portress desk, and leave contact info with her. At my local house, we simply mark the common calendar when we will be out.
- I only have to inform someone if I am going to leave the country. It is a courtesy to inform someone, though.
- I should inform someone on the Congregational level if it is out of the area where our Congregation has houses. Regarding local community, we have the practice of checking with each other to be sure that no one is left alone in the house for too long.
- Since I live alone I would let another sister in my community know where I am going and leave a phone number.

**Question: My Congregation's policy on cars includes the following:**

*Responses: Other n=75*

These responses typically give greater detail than was possible in the checked responses, in particular separating maintenance and operational costs from purchase arrangements.

Many respondents indicated that their congregation has specific policies and restrictions related age, health, and/or driving records. Some have a set age for ending driving, others evaluate competency in various ways.

In Motherhouse may have more central control of maintenance, may have shared fleets of cars while those living separately usually have maintenance responsibility.

Most have some individual or team that determines when cars are purchased and that approves major repairs.

- The leadership determines the number of cars able to be purchased each year (including surprises). We have a financial range and support of the sister as she negotiates the purchase. We are looking at creating objective criteria for when a person stops driving.
- One sister is responsible for maintaining our maintenance contract and for advising when a car needs replacing. She is also responsible for having sisters 'tested' after the age of 65 to determine their ability to drive and care for the vehicle.
- A central staff person is in charge of the rotation of cars. I am to send her information about mileage and maintenance and repair costs.

**Question: Study ministry prayer and community are integral parts of each of our Congregations. At this point in time which of these does your Congregation emphasize?**

*Responses: No option for Other in this question.*

**Question: Many Congregations have funds for the needs of the poor and include justice issues as a proper work of the Congregation and all pray for peace. How would you characterize your individual involvement?**

*Responses: Other n=104*

Most respondents wanted to be specific about the way they contribute to peace and justice issues, expanding on the options in the checked responses.

Most noted that they were involved in letter writing in addition to prayer and study, or serving on action committees in their houses (40).

Some were specific about how they were involved, for example through their teaching ministry or membership in social action committees in their local areas.

- Served on the committees that established the hunger center and the food bank. Helped establish a land trust and served on executive committee. I contact local, state and national leaders regarding justice issues. I have taken part in peaceful demonstrations on all levels.
- Social justice education in the school. Service projects and donations for the poor and marginalized.
- I am on the committee for funding special requests for the poor; for emergency funds for different sisters involved closely with the poor; and for organizations that ask for funds--like Crisis Center for women.
- My personal direct involvement with poor and marginalized thru education, food donations, and helping with shelter.

**Question: Some Congregations have associate programs. What level of involvement best describes the associates in your Congregation?**

*Responses: Other n=91 (w/ 16 indicated only that they had no associate program)*

Most statements attempt to clarify relationships that fall between the checked choices. In many cases, respondents stated specifically that associates do not have a voice in governance but may be active in other ways.

Many said associates attended only a few events in the community.

In a few cases where more associates are more integrated, some respondents indicated discomfort with the associate's role in decision-making.

Note that 16 responded in this category to say they did not have an associate program.

- Some of our members are more involved with associates than most of us. We see them on special occasions.
- Our associates help us in different ways with our ministries and companion with us at various events and on various issues/needs, such as, those related to peace and justice. They uniquely carry not only the charism of Dominic where they work and live, but also extend the face and spirit of the Dominicans of Oxford in those places as well. So, they are Integrative in some aspects and companions in other respects.
- They are invited to most events. Occasionally, they participate. It depends upon the event. They have been consistently discrete, supportive, and loving. I have never witnessed any attempt on their part to cross appropriate boundaries, to make demands, or otherwise to be troublesome. My sense is that we should do much more with these good people than we do. We should be actively recruiting associates. We will need them very much eventually.
- We have worked through some of our strong differences regarding the involvement of associates and have made a certain peace with the compromise.

**Question: Many sisters live singly. What is the frequency within your Congregation of sisters living singly?**

*Responses: Other n=45*

More than most other questions, this one drew a mix of responses that did not simply elaborate on the checked responses. It appears to be an area where there are some strongly held opinions, both positive and negative although there is a smaller number who provided comments.

Most recognize living in small groups or singly is done for ministry, housing shortages, or other positive reasons; but have a number who see this as related to those who are not able to get along or that living singly significantly hurts community efforts.

Some encourage community living and living singly is uncommon; in others it is common and usually seen as necessary.

Many see those living singly as making effort to connect with community.

The statements included here are designed to show the mix, not necessarily the most common opinions expressed.

From those living in communities:

- Some sisters ministries require living singly.
- Sisters tend to live singly because of ministry but the preferred living arrangement is with community (Dominicans and others)
- It has evolved in the cases where it occurs, and is not considered ideal, but leadership 'blesses' living singly if the sister makes a case for it.
- Some sisters live singly because of personality characteristics which make it difficult for them/group to live together.
- There are very few convents left for sisters to live in a big community. Some just want to live alone.
- While I lived singly during an important time in my personal healing journey, I am dismayed at the increased numbers who are and continue over long periods of time to live singly. I recognize

that there are many acceptable reasons for living singly for a time. We say that it is an exception to the rule of common life; however, our experience is that it is not an exception but a present reality.

From those living singly:

- If we do live singly, we try to stay connected to others in the area and to the community as a whole. I, at least, am anything but disconnected from the whole.
- I feel more connected to the community than I ever did when I lived 'in community' or at the Motherhouse.
- Living communally is encouraged more for economics than for the enhancement of community.

**Question: Community is central to our life. How much time is devoted to sustaining healthy living situations in most community/houses or among those living singly?**

*Responses: Other n=72*

Many interpreted this question as being specific to activities done together and issues that impacted a sense of community.

Aging and health are cited as issues in building a central community, both positive and negative. Aging tends to bring sisters back together in common living but may make common activities harder.

Most those living apart try to return periodically for formal gatherings and they see this as important for community health, but frequency varies.

Local groups mostly work particularly when options to live singly or smaller groups, more focused efforts and activities appear to be needed to ensure community health in larger units living together.

Much individual discretion in degree of shared activity; varies over time.

Independence in decisions about frequency of shared activity and timing is valued.

- Most of us like one another, so the effort to sustain community is not particularly demanding, except perhaps at the Motherhouse where there are some sick Sisters, some who do not adapt easily to any situation, some troubled Sisters. On the whole, I think, we make tremendous efforts to be inclusive.
- Our central house has an 'open door' policy which encourages sisters living singly to come often & participate in community activities. All in the area are invited/encouraged to participate in a planned monthly mass/dinner & all major feasts/holidays.
- I think this varies significantly from house to house, and among sisters living singly. My experience of living with others, and living alone, has been that I put much time and energy into the quality of our common life whether living with others or alone.
- My local community is predominantly an aging community and that comes with its own set of issues.
- Common life under one roof has become almost an unsolvable situation....The most difficult phenomena for me to accept and mourn is that many, if not most, of our sisters have 'wandered' back to their place of origin. I find that itinerancy has become 'going home'. As one gets older, relocating and gaining employment become realities that impact one's choices. Decreased life energy, age discrimination, physical diminishment are sobering when faced with one's more stable, secure if not comfortable, situation. Hence, movement becomes paralysis until illness intervenes.

**Question: Approval of requests affecting community life and day-to-day operations of local houses are made primarily at which level:**

*Responses: Other n=30*

This question did not provoke much comment, and the respondents focused on elaborating their checked responses.

Most see decisions as happening within their localized living space (if alone, much discretion; if with others in small local community).

A designated contact person common for those outside of motherhouse used in some cases.

Major issues requiring significant expenses required referral to leadership (capital outlay, emergencies)

- Approval of local budgets and community goals is done on a Congregational level. How it is lived out on day to day basis is left up to the local houses and individuals.
- We are so small that whatever we do is pretty well known through the ranks.
- Generally, requests and concerns are brought before the local house meetings. If it is an issue of urgency or great concern it may be brought before the local superior for discernment.
- As the age of members increases more congregational guidance seems to be the norm.

**Question: What type(s) of leadership style characterize(s) your Congregation's promotion of the mission?**

*Responses: Other n=20*

While generally the checked responses were for collaborative style, here most suggest that it depends although overall it was collaborative.

Where regional, not agreement about how decisions made among respondents.

A minority see rigid leadership; a few think some sisters are less responsive to leadership decisions.

- The role of the leadership team depends on the nature of the situation. Many decisions are made by individuals, but in every case, the leadership asks to be informed and rarely challenges the individual. Only if there is considerable evidence that a bad decision is being made by an individual is there intervention (And that has occurred.) The Sisters have been extraordinarily careful to consult leadership, and leadership usually trusts their insights. Counsel may be offered, but every decision is based mutual listening.
- This combination of styles for Congregation mission promotion depends somewhat on how much the individual loves the mission of the Congregation. What we love a LOT, we promote a LOT.
- Though ostensibly collaborative, we have only an individual/contact person forum--no larger forum with leadership, no local or regional voice.
- Ultimately dialogue between leadership and each sister happens. Some talk about discernment, but I wonder if they go to leadership after they've made their decision.

**Question: Within your own Congregation which component of government has the most direct impact on your daily life?**

*Responses: Other n=34*

Most responses are small elaborations on answers given in checked responses.

Many living singly or in very small community (2-3) don't think it applies to them as daily life is locally determined.

- For me, the needs of my mission assignment have the most direct impact on my daily life.
- I usually follow the local house decisions - I can follow whatever I wish in ordinary daily living.

- This is a draw. I work with the Leadership team, so their views bear on my decisions, but daily life is pretty much my own to decide on.
- This is executed both through ministry liaison who communicates to my administrator(I work in a Congregational ministry) and on a personal semi-annual 'contact person' level.

**Question: When sisters do not agree with other sisters or with leadership what action if any is taken?**

*Responses: Other n=100*

More than other questions, this one drew many open-ended responses so this suggests it is an issue around which there is much concern even when the responses were positive.

Most answers provide the specific person/board to whom serious disagreements are referred which is different among the various groups.

Solutions vary between an internal process and outside facilitator.

A small number do not think disagreements get resolved and are concerned that they continue to fester.

Some do not see that there are any problems; some of these indicate their communities are very small.

Some expressed concerns about how disagreements are resolved when leaders are involved.

- In serious matters of disagreement our constitutions offer an ombudsman to mediate disagreements with leadership. For less serious disagreements about congregational level (policy) issues there is chapter or requests for dialogue. Otherwise it is up to the individuals involved to work through the issue.
- We elect an appeals administrator who would work with an individual sister or sisters and leadership to resolve a problem.
- Sometimes a facilitator from another congregation is asked to have sessions with the sisters in which differences are worked through.
- Sometimes disagreements are never really settled. They show up at meetings.. If counseling is needed, it will be offered. The individual stills makes the decision to accept/reject such offer.
- There is no voice supported if there is a disagreement with leadership. leadership is 'always right'
- I have never been involved in a disagreement serious enough to involve anyone or have I seen one.
- There is the possibility of using a board of reconciliation but most disagreements are hopefully settled at the lowest possible level.
- For the most part none - we do not have a well organized means mostly it's a drift and flounder method.
- So far, I haven't sees any steps applying into my experience. Sometimes, the house has facilitator, but most of the times, it doesn't help with this issue. Basically, we have to do it in our local community or let it be.
- Good heavens, what a question! We never disagree!!! Seriously, it depends on the matter, the sisters, the occasion, etc. Sometimes we are good at this, and other times things get messy.
- Some never get resolved.

**Question: At this time in your Congregation what **THREE** issues are discussed the most?**

*Responses: Other n=61*

Responses either add an area (none mentioned more than a few times, but some repeated several times including finance and peace/justice/environment and new members. Others elaborated on checked responses.

- It is hard to generalize. [Motherhouse] demands much attention. Because we (USA) are at war and we have just completed an election, we have had lots of discussions about Peace and Justice issues related to war, national and international policy.
- There is interest in and concern about peace and justice issues and the role of religious in the world, but the most immediate impact on our daily lives is in the three that I have checked.
- Living by myself and not in daily contact with our sisters, I tend to talk about these items when I gather with them as often as possible.

**Question: For many of the sisters the relationship with family remains a strong bond. Do you feel family commitments are:**

*Responses: Other n=61*

Many note depends with most common response noting issue of geographic proximity  
Many feel encouraged to maintain family bonds or personal decision.

Some have less contact. Some only if family problems, may become care giver.

As more of sisters age, it is less of an issue for some groups.

Have a number who see relationships as taking sisters away from community; see some sisters as "clinging" to family.

- Many of us became the one to whom family looked at times of need. Leadership has supported this - we are small and are aware of the needs of our extended family - i.e. the families of our sisters.
- Our sisters tend to have some bonds not only with their own family but also with the families of other members of the congregation. They reach out with care and concern to others.
- I believe that family is very crucial part of each person and she has right to take care them and walk with them. Same with the Congregation too. So, the balance and know when is the primary focus depends on each situation and it can not put on settled rule for this issue because all are human beings not robot.
- This is a local congregation. Most of the Sisters are with an hour's driving distance from their families. For those whose families are out of town (and I am one), the disappearance of most of the community on major holidays and weekends is depressing. Family ties are a mixed blessing . Some people seem never to have left home--I wonder how healthy this situation is.
- I belong to a very large family and find a great deal of support and joy from my brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. Both my congregation and my relatives are an integral part of my life.
- I would not say encouraged but rather are a link to family concerns. It is good to recall that we left family. One cannot be fully be in community if one is out of community.
- Time spent with family is a personal decision of the Sister. Leadership is open to continued family contacts and to help aging parents if necessary and possible.
- In my own experience, I have always been geographically distant from my family so I haven't been able to spend time with my family. I have a strong bond with my family but I do not spend time with them on a daily or weekly basis. This varies for members of my congregation depending on how close they are geographically to their families.
- We actually have so few sisters now with living parents that we are very supportive of those who need to care for their parents. If someone is being so absorbed that it is hurting them physically or community-wise, there is a conversation about how to help them.

**Question: Each Congregation has policies for health care. Which statements describe how you perceive your situation:**

*Responses: Other n=69*

Most elaborated on the checked response noting whether they were encouraged or required to have signed documents to cover choices.

Most feel they have say unless too ill.

A few are concerned about health care costs for community.

- We are encouraged to make our wishes known regarding health care issues.
- The quality of our care is very good. We are encouraged to sign advanced directives and living wills.
- The quality of care given to our sisters in our assisted living and health care facilities is excellent. Many of us would like to age in place and find the transition to assisted living and skilled nursing care very difficult.
- I truly feel that each sister have a primary role in the decision making process concerning her health care unless she is found incompetent due to dementia.
- I am truthfully alarmed at the level of 'care' most of us receive. We do not need to have all the best of everything, I think. Some of it seems unreasonable to me: the tests, the extended chemo, even some surgeries. But then, I am very healthy. We will see what I say when that is no longer so.

**Question: Each Congregation has policies for retirement. Which statements describe how you perceive your situation:**

*Responses: Other n=73*

Predominantly note decision made in consultation with leadership based on health, ability to maintain more active work.

Most feel encouraged to less active but still contributing ministry.

Hints that some feel they are encouraged to continue work beyond their own choice.

- It is mainly up to the individual many continue to work or to volunteer. Most want to continue to something unless they are unable.
- Much depends on health and ability to engage in part time work or ministry either congregational or voluntary service in the area of residence.
- If a sister is unable to make reasonable decisions about her life, and conversation doesn't help, she MIGHT be told what to do. That is sometimes necessary, but mostly unusual. For us, 'retirement' is a financial word that means where our funding comes from. Sisters work until they are 70 if they can, and beyond, bringing in full time salaries. Not all comply with this even if they have the health. We need more conversation about this matter!!!!
- We are involved in the process of decisions regarding retirement and many possibilities exist.

**Question: Changing Ministry is:**

*Responses: Other n=37*

Most responses note cases vary.

Many indicate it can be determined/strongly encouraged by leadership or the congregation when circumstances require, but few suggest this is detrimental.

- Depending on multiple factors any of the above can happen. Usually the Sister initiates and consults with leadership person each step in the process

- It would be mandated only for a serious reason, possibly for the good of the Sister or because of a situation in her ministry. This would be done after much discussion and gathering of information.
- Mandated by leadership only if there has been a specific problem.

**Question: In which areas of Congregational life do you feel you have a personal choice/initiative?**

*Responses: Other n=57*

Most elaborate on answers. Generally agree they have some choices but not all. No single theme or major concerns here.

- Though I am free to initiate in relation to each of these, policies and working with the appropriate persons is done so the decision results from mutual collaboration.
- I have choices within our financial situation but there are limits. I have had one sabbatical and I had to apply for the funds and the sabbatical. We don't have unlimited options. Funds for study and vacation are also limited.

**Question: Each Congregation has extensive documentation on formation. What is done in your Congregation to invite new members?**

*Responses: Other n=57*

Some think not enough attention with mixed reasons why.

Some mention vocation team or director who deals with this, and note specific positive efforts.

Some use prayer or example to promote.

A few question whether it is time to let the issue go.

- Our vocation team is untiring and creative. the process is very long often not obvious in its genuine effectiveness.
- We have had various opportunities to invite women to our community. Soup suppers and conversations, inviting the local grade schools to visit local houses, inviting seniors to visit local houses and mentoring youth through our ministries. These and other activities help formation. We are 'all' responsible for formation and inviting women to our congregation.
- We have a vocation director but we're all encouraged to promote vocations in any way we can and also invite others to join us.
- Really need to ask WHY young women are attracted to the newly formed communities; Is our identity too fuzzy and unclear to be an attraction to women?
- I'm not too sure just where my community is on this. I do ask myself if all 7 community have decided to cluster and have larger numbers so that we can die in a larger community? This distresses me. I did not see in the cluster meetings any real discussion about vocations. If we don't have vocations we will die eventually.