Life
in the
Spirit

Society of the Sisters of Social Service

1997
Our community, the Society of the Sisters of Social Service, as we know it today, bears the mark of several great personalities, all of whom were inspired by Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum, the first of the great encyclicals calling for social justice. In Hungary, by the turn of the 20th century, there was already a growing Catholic Women's Movement, whose activities were in harmony with, and whose leaders were inspired by this document. Edith Farkas, Executive Secretary of the movement, worked for a number of years with volunteers, before realizing that the signs of the times demanded a group of women who would make the social mission of the church the motivating thrust of their lives and who, after professional training, would dedicate their total being to the service of the poor, the rejected, the marginalized.

With the encouragement of Bishop Ottokar Prohaszka, she founded the Social Mission Society on November 19, 1908. Canonically, no-one envisioned a religious congregation. The social Mission Sisters would be lay women who would take private vows. Thus, they would be free to respond to contemporary needs. In the preface to the first constitutions of the new society, the bishop wrote:

"The situations in which you will have to function are completely new. The social mission requires mobility and a great deal of adaptability. It is absolutely necessary that you remain in the world, that you not be conspicuous because of your clothing, education or mannerisms. You must not give the impression of being strangers to those to whom you are sent."

The cry was for women who shared the experiences of those to whom they ministered.

Very early, the sisters chose to follow a Benedictine spirituality so as to draw strength from its gospel-rootedness. Their life was one of great simplicity, deep prayerfulness and joy in the Holy Spirit. Already aware of a special need for the love and power of the Spirit in their lives, the first sisters selected Pentecost Sunday, 1909, to make their first vows.

Most prominent among the founding members was Margaret Slachta, who not only quickly made her own the vision of Edith Farkas and Ottokar Prohaszka, but developed creative ways of enfleshing that vision. She was a pioneer in the field of social work, developing means of direct service, organizing women not only to heal the wounds around them, but to work toward changing the conditions that caused the wounds. She trained women for political action and was herself the first woman to sit in the parliament of Hungary.
After World War I, many factors, political, social, and religious, created difficulties in the Social Mission Society. Finally, Mother Edith Farkas introduced a new rule which would have made the group a religious congregation and changed its spirit radically. Those who wished to retain and develop the original charism were dispensed of their vows and, under the leadership of Sr. Margaret Slachta, became on May 12, 1923, the Sisters of Social Service. The new society would send into whatever social areas the need arose, women consecrated to the Lord, competent in their fields of service, contemporary in their approach.

As our community grew, the mother district in Budapest sent sisters to make foundations, several of which became districts of their own. Already in 1921, under the leadership of Sister Augusta Ikrich, the vision of social mission was taken to Rumania. These sisters joined the Sisters of Social Service in 1923. In 1927, we went to Sister Margaret's native city, Kassa, in Czechoslovakia, where Sister Anita Kowalcze developed the community.

Simultaneously, our Society was blossoming in the new world. In 1923, Sister Ida Horvath, Sister Mary Schwartz, and Sister Julia Lamperth left Budapest to begin a work with Hungarian immigrants on the plains of Western Canada. Sister Paula Ronai had prepared the way for them and welcomed them to Stockholm, where she mothered the new foundation for two years. That same year, 1923, Sister Frederica Horvath was sent to open a house in the United States. On November 16, 1926, in Los Angeles, the California district came to birth; here the community quickly developed in the context of American culture.

Sister Margaret was a woman of great courage and broad vision who saw the social mission of the Church as embracing all of the pressing needs of the human family. The scope of the ministry was conceptualized by her in the form of a pyramid. The base of the pyramid consists of the works of charity. The second level comprises social service. The third level consists of movements, and the top of the pyramid is the political ministry.

**Works of charity:** were pursued in parishes; in state, city and diocesan offices of charity; in soup kitchens and in emergency relief activities to the destitute. Sisters conducted day-care centres and kindergartens, founded and maintained maternity homes for the villagers; residences and programs for working women; and homes for the aged. They organized courses in sewing, cooking and indigenous arts and crafts. Sisters organized summer camps for the poor children of Budapest, and organized vacations for women working in factories and in clerical jobs.

**Social work:** Sisters organized study days and courses on social problems, and on the social teachings of the Church. In 1937, they founded the school of social work in Hungary. Somewhat earlier, a „Social Seminary” and a training program for parish ministers in Rumania. From among the activities of Catholic
Action, our Sisters worked in the socio-political department of the Catholic Women’s Association; in the National Organization of Catholic Housewives.

In Czechoslovakia and Rumania, Sisters organized religious and liturgical article stores, and indigenous art and craft cooperatives. Between 1927 and 1944, the sisters in Kolozsvár conducted a hotel. This secured the financial basis for the social work and movement programs of the Rumanian District. Sisters worked in the „Railway Mission“, and in the organization of domestic workers. Between 1940-1945, Sisters worked in behalf of the state’s social welfare program on regional, county and city levels.

**Movements:** To spread awareness of and devotion to the Holy Spirit, Sr. Margaret organized the "Holy Spirit Association". Sisters worked in the liturgical movement of the times, organizing liturgical study days, retreats and days of prayer. In 1930, the Hungarian section of the Young Christian Worker and Young Christian Student was started and our Sisters gave leadership to all sections of the movement through the National Catholic Women's Association. In Czechoslovakia and in Transylvania, they led the entire Hungarian Catholic Women's Movement. For all the above movements and associations, our Sisters provided leadership training. They also served in the movement for the revival of folk-art, and promoted reconciliation among the various groups of minorities in the country.

The Second World War and the terrible persecution of the Jews which it engendered, led Sr. Margaret to make heroic efforts to save the persecuted. They were hidden in our motherhouse and in every house where our Sisters lived. Sr. Sara Salkahazi was martyred for this cause. Together with this activity, Sr. Margaret led the resistance against the ideology of Nazism. She gave talks and organized study days and courses on the evil of racism, and the values of the Gospel. She utilized films, radio and the press to give voice to her vision. The Sisters had several publications in Hungary: *The Voice of the Spirit, The Catholic Working Woman*; in Transylvania: *The Sun, The Sundays Bells*; and in America: *The Dove*.

**Political ministry:** In order to promote the political rights of Women and to better penetrate the public sphere with the Gospel, Sr. Margaret organized the "Christian Women’s Corps" (a political party).

For the defense of the rights of the Church in Rumania between 1945-49, several of our Sisters collaborated with the apostolic Nuncio in Bucharest. For these and other activities, 15 of our Sisters were in prison, some for very long terms (10-13 years).

In Hungary, Sr. Margaret was elected three times to the Parliament. During her first term of 1920-22, she was the first and only woman member of the parliament. She was elected again in 1945 and in 1947. She served until 1949,
giving her voice to the values of the Gospel in legislation. Sr. Mariann also
served in the Hungarian Congress between 1947-49, and was city
councilwoman of Budapest together with Sr. Natalie from 1945-49. In addition
to her membership in the Parliament, Sr. Margaret served as city
councilwoman during the following years: 1920-22, 1930-34, and 1945-49.

Because of differing religious, political and cultural structures, our Sisters in
the United States and Canada engaged in parish ministry, organized summer
schools for the children of the immigrants, worked in Settlement houses and
gave workers to professional social agencies.

Forced to leave her native Hungary for political reasons, Sr. Margaret moved
the general government of the Society to Buffalo, NY in 1949. In that same
year, the community went to Cuba in the person of Sr. Nicoletta Csekey. From
these actions, two new districts developed. At the same time, the districts of
Rumania and Czechoslovakia were suppressed by their respective
governments in 1949, and the Hungarian in 1950.

In 1955, the California and the Canadian districts became an autonomous
institute with headquarters in Los Angeles. In 1977, the Sisters in Hamilton
(Canada) became autonomous. The European, Cuban and American districts
form the community based in Buffalo. The Sisters of Social Service of Buffalo;
of Los Angeles; and Hamilton, share common origins and common heritage.
We are related to one another through the Federation of the Sisters of Social
Service, established on April 7, 1972.

This book -- The Constitutions of the Sisters of Social Service of Buffalo, -- is
our attempt to capture the purpose, goals, aspirations, charism, life styles and
structures of our Society.

**Previous approvals of our Constitution**

Our Constitutions were approved by the Church as follows:
2. Esztergom, August 19, 1948 By Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty (#461-
1948).
3. Buffalo, NY, September 17, 1966 By Bishop James A. McNulty
(#8377-1966).
4. Buffalo, NY May 12, 1986 by Bishop Edward D. Head

**Preface**

**Life in the Spirit**

Life in the Spirit is the meaning and the goal of our existence.
This life consists in the interaction of God’s self-gift to us and our response. Out of love for us, the Father bestows the Spirit to be at the core and ground of our being.

The Spirit present within us calls us continuously to life by calling us to love, by praying and struggling in us so that we may be enabled to respond to the Father’s loving attraction.

The Spirit inspires love for love and rewards us with grace for grace until we become transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

Life in the Spirit embraces the totality of human hope and striving to become all that God wants us to be. This life presupposes the exercise of conscious awareness of the Spirit's presence in us and in all human reality around us.

Life in the Spirit is based on conscious choices and free responses to the loving call of God for more life and to the pleas of our neighbors for meaning.

Life in the Spirit leads to freedom. A Spirit-filled life is created by the Word of Truth. The truth of the Word is self-giving love. If we live by his Word, his love will make us free. It will liberate us from selfishness, so that we may live for others. The Spirit of Love will teach us how to be free without license, how to be true to convictions without obstinacy. The person led by the Spirit is free to say: Abba. Amen.

Life in the Spirit is a life of openness in hope. It is a life surrendered to the creative activity of God, whose coming it awaits and upon whose self-gift it depends. It hopes for God's presence to receive direction and meaning.

Life in the Spirit is a life of pilgrimage. We walk from call to call, from challenge to challenge in faith, peaceful and even joyful amid uncertainties. The Spirit within us and among us knows where to lead us. The Spirit urges us to faithfulness in our response and commitment to a constant search for fuller life.

Life in the Spirit is a life of conversion. The Spirit calls us to recognize the darkness of evil in our own hearts; to identify the wounds of sin within and around us, and to uncover the system of evil in our world. A life of conversion summons, and the Spirit empowers us to turn our darkness to light; to confront evil with good, to repay hatred with love and to heal even in woundedness.
Life in the Spirit is a life of forgiveness. The Spirit of forgiveness bestowed on us by the Risen Lord was meant to be breathed forth, to flow from person to person, from heart to heart, from generation to generation. Forgiveness transmits new life and hope. It gifts all persons with a new beginning. A life of forgiveness is creative.

Life in the Spirit is a life of mutual love. It is a life which gives itself away in order to give itself to others. It is a love which empties the heart to make room for the self-communication of the Other. Life in the Spirit is a mutual in-dwelling.

Life in the Spirit is actualized by the willingness to lose our life, to lay it down, to let it fall into the ground like the grain of wheat.

May our life, penetrated by the love of the Holy Spirit, become food for our neighbours.

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Our dedication to the Holy Spirit developed over time. In the early days, our reflection on the presence and activity of the Spirit drew us more and more toward a deeper relationship. We realized that the living out of our charism and the development of our ministry would not be possible without this special dedication.

Margaret Slachta
Part I.

Our Way of Life: Participation in the Mission of God's Sanctifying Love

Part I. of these constitutions contains the theological foundations for our way of life and express our spirit, charism, and purpose.
NATURE OF THE INSTITUTE

1. The Sisters of Social Service, is a Society of Apostolic Life of pontifical right.

2. Called to witness to God's Sanctifying Love, and particularly in the social mission of the Church, our charism, our purpose and dedication to God are traditionally lived out either as conventual, or non-conventual Sisters. All members of the Society, whose status is equal, undertake to live private vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and fidelity to our charism (Can 731,#2).
I. Purpose and Charism

3. As Sisters of Social Service, we are a community united in hope and dedicated to the Holy Spirit. Our society was founded to give glory to God and to collaborate in the redeeming activity of Christ by witnessing to God's Sanctifying Love. We participate in the social mission of the Church, which we see as embracing the many needs of society arising from social, religious, economic, environmental, cultural and civic conditions. Our call is to live a life which is
- rooted in the Holy Spirit
- grounded in the spirit of St. Benedict
- characterized by an informed social consciousness and
- contemporary in its life style.

4. Our communion with the Holy Spirit is a most treasured component of our life. It is only through the Spirit who fills the earth and renews it that our ministry can be effective. We strive to live a radical evangelical life, to be instruments of love, justice and peace, bearers of hope, and servants of the poor and the oppressed. Our awareness of the magnitude of our task and of the limitations of our ability to respond to a world calling out for life, meaning, dignity, faith and truth impels us to deepen our reliance on the Holy Spirit, to deepen the contemplative dimension of our lives.

5. Our Benedictine tradition leads us to view humility as being both at the threshold and at the heart of all inner experience. The same spirituality challenges us to an ongoing conversion of heart, to a spirit of prayer and love, a positive view of all that enhances life, a liturgical and ecclesial spirit, a love for peace, a warm family spirit, an appreciation of cultural heritage, a regard for hospitality, and esteem for work, a pioneering spirit, a sense of holy freedom, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

6. We provide consecrated and professionally trained women for the church and secular society to minister in the fields of social service, social ethics, economics, public health, culture, women's movements and in political ministry. Through the plurality of these ministries, we pursue both evangelization and the promotion of the welfare of women, children and families. Under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, we seek to hasten the reign of God by identifying the needs of society and the most suitable ways to respond to them. Whatever our ministry, we wish to insert Christian values and to bring people closer to the vision of God for them.
7. In order that our work for the kingdom may be more effective, we involve our Associates to collaborate in our mission, according to their state in life.

8. Because of the pressing needs of the world, we have a responsibility for developing in ourselves and in others a deeper awareness of the problems of human rights and of world justice. Not only should we seek to remedy social evils and inequalities, but we must also endeavor to prevent these ills by addressing the root causes. This we do by engaging in activities aimed at structural changes in harmony with the gospel, and according to the directives of Church authorities.

9. It is part of our charism to participate in the political process on whatever level we can be effective, directing our efforts toward the transformation of social systems which are marked by injustice. We recognize the value of being in solidarity with those affected by injustice. At times this is the only way open to us, but it is also most effective.

10. True to our prophetic role, we keep our pioneering spirit alive by our willingness to explore new ways and to blaze new paths in order to speak God's reconciling Word to the world. Mindful that God reveals himself to all, we pledge ourselves to contemplate the face of Christ as he reveals himself in people of varied races, nationalities, cultures, and backgrounds.

11. Our contemporariness seeks expression in all aspects of our life: in communal prayer and worship, in ministry and life-style. Sensitive to the signs of the times, we strive to be adaptable and flexible, yet daring to be counter-cultural when the spirit of the Gospels calls for it.

12. We are fully aware that without the help of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. We seek to live in trust and openness, confident that the Spirit will guide and teach us how best to live out our mission.
God's vision of our mission
is one that must take shape in a modern form.
We are to be pioneers
for a better world,
working for social reform,
not through decrees imposed by power,
but through renewal of the spirit
from within.
The society, crying out for liberation,
challenges us to continue
the redemptive mission of Christ.

Margaret Slachta
II. WORSHIP AND PRAYER

PRAYER

13. Prayer, a core value for us, is the expression and the living out of our relationship with the Triune God. We live and delight in God's presence. We listen to the voice of the Beloved, and we respond with wholehearted dedication.

14. Jesus, our model, lived out his relationship with the Father in loving surrender. By the power of the Spirit, he said only "Yes" to the Father in life and in death. Jesus shares with us the Holy Spirit, who continuously calls us to life by calling us to love; who prays and struggles in us so that we are enabled to respond to the Father's loving attraction. Spiritual freedom is the fruit and the condition of the Spirit's presence in our lives. This freedom enables us to respond as Jesus did, with a wholehearted "Yes" to the Father's will.

15. Prayer for us is gift. We welcome such a gift with openness, thanksgiving and profound reverence. This gift causes us to reverence each other as the temples of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge the uniqueness of each person's relationship with God. Prayer is not only gift; it is also mission. We are entrusted with continuing the prayer of Jesus by offering adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to our Father. We are commissioned to share in Jesus' ministry of intercession and self-surrender. To become women of prayer is one of our deep aspirations. By being such, we hasten the coming of the kingdom in our lives and in the lives of others.

LITURGICAL PRAYER

16. Our life, rooted in and sustained by the Holy Spirit, is ecclesial and liturgical. We live out the mysteries of Christ through the Church year. Faithful to our benedictine tradition, we commit ourselves to liturgical prayer, the official prayer of the Church, the highest expression of which is the Eucharist. Through liturgy we celebrate and witness to God's love. We nourish faith and love in each other when we come together to encounter God in liturgical worship in the Eucharist and in Lauds and Vespers.
THE EUCHARIST

17. Central to our life together is the celebration of the Eucharist. In it, our communal worship is most deeply expressed. Through the Body of Christ, we are drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other. Our commitment is nourished and renewed around the altar. Through the Body of Christ, though many and different, we are formed into one heart in love. From Christ we learn, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to offer ourselves as an "eternal Gift" to God in response to his faithfulness. Through the Eucharist, we are drawn into Jesus' sacrifice by laying down our lives with him through the sufferings and labors of our apostolate. We continue to live the Eucharist through our genuine concern for others, through the asceticism of openness and obedience to the Father, and through responding to the challenges of the Spirit as we meet them in human reality.

SCHOOL OF THE LORD’S SERVICE

18. We are aware of our weakness and the need we have to deepen our love. We believe that God will always remain faithful and continue to bestow his love on us. We gratefully recognize and wholeheartedly accept our utter dependence on God.

19. We commit ourselves to a spirit of contemplation, to regular periods of reflective prayer, to spiritual reading, especially the Scriptures, to a continuous conversion of heart and to the kind of asceticism which is necessary personally and communally for the nourishing of our love.

20. We recognize the value of silence and solitude in our effort to be present to God, to ourselves, and to others.

21. Our greatest treasure is God’s love and the response which he elicits from our hearts. To facilitate this response, we endeavor in community to share our faith, to proclaim God's goodness and to nourish in each other the vision, the dedication, and the mission for which the Holy Spirit called us together.

22. Although our prayer is primarily liturgical, we maintain a number of prayers traditional to us and treasured by us. We affirm diversity of expression.

23. We honor Mary as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit; in her openness, she is the model of the contemplative dimension in our life. We remember her also under the title of Our Lady of Ransom, and place our apostolic
activities under her protection. We trust in the protection of St Joseph, the patron of families and workers, and in the guidance of St. Benedict.

24. In the spirit of our Benedictine tradition, we strive for a harmonious integration of prayer and work. Our apostolic involvement is our response to God's love encountered in prayer; our prayer is nourished by our service. We recognize our sinful condition; therefore, our posture before God is the humble acknowledgement of our creaturehood and a childlike confidence in his goodness. In God's mercy is our peace. His faithfulness makes possible our joy.

"They who abide in me and I in them will bear much fruit."

John 15:5
III. The Evangelical Counsels

25. At Baptism, we were marked with God’s seal for adoption and given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that we belong to the Lord.

26. The vowed life is our specific way of living out our baptismal commitment, a way to which each of us has been personally called. We who undertake a life of consecrated chastity, poverty, obedience and fidelity, have received a charism from the Lord Jesus, who himself was chaste, poor and obedient to his Father. Our vowed life is sustained by a deep faith, a consciousness of being loved by God, by daily union with the Lord in prayer, by active involvement for him and by loving support of our sisters.

27. The evangelical counsels call us to love the Lord with an undivided heart and to be available to serve others. We therefore lay ourselves open to the demands of the Gospel in a way that directs the whole of our being to God. Through a total gift of ourselves to God who first loved us, we proclaim the freedom of the children of God. The Holy Spirit frees us to listen and embody the values of Jesus in our lives. By our vowed life, we are united to the Church and its mystery in a special way. We are called as disciples of Jesus to build the Kingdom by working for every form of human liberation and healing.

28. In order to have a deep realization of the life-giving character of the vows and to help us plumb the depths of their mystery, Sister Margaret referred to them as "the vow of bridal love for our Lord, the vow of unity with the will of the Divine Spouse, and the vow of spiritual independence from created goods." We trust that the Spirit of God will enable us to live out the deepest meaning of our vows.

29. Although today we have different tasks to perform, different risks to take, we wish to live our lives with the same dedication as did our founding sisters. Through the intensity of our commitment, we wish through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to find ways to touch and transform other human lives.

30. We believe that our vowed life and the renunciation involved is an eschatological sign pointing to that fullness of life which can only be reached in God.
Religious commitment
is not
an occasional flare of emotion;
it is, rather,
a permanent graced condition
of the human heart.

Margaret Slachta

The spirit of true poverty is this:
in Christ we are so rich that,
apart from Him,
we are willing to give up everything,
even His gifts

Margaret Slachta
CHASTITY

31. Our call to consecrated celibacy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a charism which liberates us in a unique way to have a direct relationship with the Lord and to join in his work for the Kingdom. We live in a world often overwhelmed by loneliness, hungry for affirmation, for love, for intimacy without exploitation. Because through our vow we strive to give ourselves to the Lord without reservation, those in need have a claim on our love.

32. Our vow of chastity binds us to love the Lord with an undivided heart and to be available to serve others, thereby witnessing to God's love as absolute, creative and fulfilling in our lives.

33. The living of our vow of chastity involves us in the mystery of the death-resurrection of Jesus. Life in community where warm sisterly love flourishes helps us to embrace the daily realities of this mystery. When celibate love is characterized by maturity and responsibility, interpersonal relationships are enriching and life-giving.

POVERTY

34. Our greatest treasure is the Lord and his love for us. In imitation of Jesus who "being rich became poor for our sakes", we freely choose to commit ourselves to religious poverty. We wish to reflect Jesus' life of self-emptying love and availability to people. Acknowledging our own brokenness, helplessness, sinfulness, we seek to express our total dependence on our heavenly Father for all things. Hearing the cry of the poor, the neglected, the oppressed in our contemporary society, we desire to be in solidarity with them and to respond with our lives in the way the Spirit directs us. Moreover, by our life of poverty and our work, we bear witness to the human meaning and dignity of labor. By our work, we support ourselves, we share in the creative activity of God and we contribute to the transformation of the world.

35. Like the early Christians, we hold all things in common by renouncing the independent use of materials goods. As an expression of our individual poverty, we freely share with one another our time, talents, material goods, spiritual gifts, putting them all at the disposal of our community.
The blessing of true obedience is this:
It sets the soul free.
The gaze of the one who obeys
rests constantly on God.

Margaret Slachta
36. As an expression of our communal poverty and our availability to respond to societal problems, we renounce the ownership of institutions, privileges, favors, or whatever may hinder our freedom of action. We do not wish to cling to power, wealth, or prestige. Our vow of poverty is an expression of our desire to become free - free as only the children of God can be.

37. Our affirmation of life motivates us to appreciate all of God's creation. We are grateful for his gifts to us. Our happiness is to share in a redemptive way, all that we have and all that we are, and so collaborate in the creation of a new era marked by the spirit of the Gospel.

**Obedience**

38. Through living the vow of obedience, we deepen our participation in the obedience of Jesus. We grow in unity of will with him who, in openness to his Father’s will, did always the things that pleased him.

39. It is especially by our vow of obedience that we commit ourselves to listen and respond affirmatively to the Holy Spirit who speaks to us both individually and communally through the Gospel, the Church, our designated leaders, the signs of the times, the needs of those around us, and all the demands of life.

40. This way of obedience is a listening-speaking dialogue. It is an obedience that involves a merging of wills, a yielding of wills, a blending and bending of wills in the Spirit. The Spirit working in and through each sister brings about genuine freedom and assures the community's obedience to its mission.

41. Living in the spirit of gospel-obedience means that our personal decisions be weighed in relation to our committed life, the good of all in the community, and our responsibility to the mission given us.

42. Those entrusted with guiding and directing our community must strive to be leaders in faith and in desire for holiness. Their task is to serve, and through serving to bring forth life. Our leaders are to encourage each sister to share what she has received from the Lord. Discernment with humility and openness results in a unity in which authority is at its best and obedience at its fullest.
**Fidelity**

43. Through the vow of fidelity, we commit ourselves to become rooted in the charism and mission of our Society, and to grow in loving faithfulness to our sisters with whom we share the same call.

44. In the spirit of fidelity, we embrace our Society's values, its past, present and future in our hearts. Through dying to ourselves we bring life to each other. By carrying each other's burdens we make real the joy of the resurrection of Jesus.

45. Our common vocation impels us to have a Christ-like love toward each member. Each Sister of Social Service should strive to be distinguished by a love that is loyal, reverent, self-giving, forgiving, compassionate and redeeming.

46. Our community will continue to witness to God's sanctifying love in the measure in which each member treasures this faithful love in her heart and expresses it in action.

*If we believe in our call, we will also come to see that our Society is God's plan for us.*

*Margaret Slachta*
IV. APOSTOLATE

47. The mission of Jesus is to reveal the Father’s love, and to heal, redeem and liberate all people. As ecclesial women united in the life and holiness of the Church, we are sent to continue and to participate in that mission. We proclaim the Gospel with our lives as Sisters of Social Service. As integral to our vocation, we strive to bring about a social order founded on truth, built on justice and animated by faith and love.

48. Jesus challenges us to affirm life and to seek new ways of responding to those in need. He calls us to be faithful to him and to the mission he has entrusted to us. Our pioneering spirit impels us to move forward, to risk, to be compassionate toward the world and to learn from it. Whatever fosters unity, whatever raises people to fuller life, whatever enhances faith, must be of great concern to each of us.

49. As joyful, prayerful persons led by the Spirit, we try to develop a critical awareness of social structures. Whenever the values of these structures are not in accord with the values of Jesus, we must confront the injustices we see. It follows that in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church, we attempt to change unjust structures and thus to participate in the transformation of the world.

50. By our prayerful presence and commitment to action, we wish to be in the heart of the world. It is in this spirit that we choose ministries in which we

... proclaim gospel values to the world;
... bring people to a greater awareness of and reverence for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within themselves and in the world;
... foster Christian faith, love and service;
... promote life and reconciliation;
... affect the transformation of unjust systems and structures;
... consciously address ourselves to the poor, the oppressed and alienated and thus work to shape a world where each person can live in justice and freedom;
... alleviate suffering and work for the prevention of social evils;
... strengthen family life, and promote the welfare of women, children and families.

51. The selection of our ministry is conditioned by the need and circumstances of the society in which we live. We share in the struggles and hopes of people around us. By our lives and our work, we give witness to gospel values. We wholeheartedly affirm the apostolate of
presence. We believe that wherever human wholeness is promoted, the world is hearing the Good News.

52. Our effectiveness in any apostolate will depend on how deeply our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit. Our task is to live our lives in such a way that our announcement of the Good News is credible. Our mission is to bring the reign of God to greater fullness by our service and love of people. We trust the Holy Spirit to guide us. We wish to be witnesses of God’s Sanctifying Love in the world.

Our Society - called to be actively apostolic

affirms the life of prayer as indispensable.

Margaret Slachta
V. COMMUNITY

53. As Sisters of Social Service, we are called to be Spirit-filled women living a radical evangelical life. We are to be builders of the Kingdom by witnessing to God's sanctifying love. Our Benedictine heritage leads us to value community and to challenge each other to live the Gospel.

54. We proclaim by our life in community our love for the Father, our collaboration in the mission of Jesus, our openness to the Spirit. Living a life of love in the Spirit makes possible our oneness as a spiritual family. Our life together, modelled on that of the Trinity, should be one in which each sister loves and is loved, knows and is known.

55. As we gather in faith and joy at the table of the Lord, we witness to the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives. Our worship nourishes us and fashions us into a family of God, a community of disciples, united by our common call, vision and mission.

56. Our membership includes conventual and non-convontual sisters. Supported by communal friendship, and in faith and joy, we affirm the variety of gifts, cultures and life styles that are present in our Society.

COMMUNAL WITNESS

57. We believe that the credibility of our message and the effectiveness of our service will depend upon the quality of our lives as individuals and as an evangelical community. Guided by the Spirit, we search together for lasting justice, fuller truth, more selfless love. We strive to create an environment which fosters personal worth, growth and challenge.

58. We need continually to pray that we be able to live a life worthy of our calling. Only with patient, forbearing love will we be able to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Our lived witness of the Gospel proclaims and manifests our unity only when we strive to be a community committed to ongoing conversion of heart.
RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

59. As a member of a Gospel-centered community, each sister has the right and the responsibility...
   ... to be a part of a faith-sharing, praying community;
   ... to be a part of a community characterized by mutual love, personal affirmation and challenge;
   ... to take a genuine interest in community affairs by participating in their formulation and implementation;
   ... to have her talents and leadership ability called forth as she shares in the mission of Jesus;
   ... to create an environment of mutual trust, spiritual freedom and openness so that she is able to go forth with a positive response to a world in need.

PASCHAL MYSTERY IN OUR LIVES

60. As a society we have experienced and continue to experience dying and rising with Christ. Through our own powerlessness, our poverty, our uprootedness, we are led to a deeper understanding of those we serve. In God's love for us, we have been allowed to know tribulation. We thank the Lord for inviting some sisters to sacrifice their lives for his sake. Many sisters' lives are marked by illness, pain and suffering; through their faithfulness they nourish our life together. By participating in the paschal mystery, we are enabled to enter into a healing closeness with others and to speak God's reconciling Word.
Let this longing fill our hearts:
that each Sister of Social Service
be a dwelling place
for the Spirit of Love

Margaret Slachta

May your life
be like a mirror
which reflects the
goodness of God
and the joy
of those He loves.

Margaret Slachta
VI. FORMATION

61. We welcome into our community young women who share our call to live a radical evangelical life rooted in the Spirit. Through a process of growth in Christian and social awareness, in prayer, in community and in apostolic involvement, new members gradually become incorporated into our Society until they are ready for a lifelong commitment to God, to our community and to its charism and mission.

62. Formation occurs as the young woman grows in fidelity to the Holy Spirit, and as she enters into a deepening relationship with Christ, with the members of the community and with those whom she serves. Rather than placing great emphasis on external structures, we foster and encourage inner growth. It is our hope that this guided self-development will lead to personal maturity and uncompromising integrity, spiritual depth, intellectual growth, and professional competency.

63. During the time of initial formation, Jesus and his message must so penetrate the new member that a continual conversion of heart takes place. The person sees with a new vision and is able to commit herself with freedom and joy to the ongoing faith journey. She is encouraged to spend time in prayer, silence and solitude. Thus will the contemplative aspect so integral to the vocation of the Sisters of Social Service be fostered.

64. Those who guide the new member in identifying with and internalizing the spirit, values and heritage of our community must also assist her to travel the road of death and resurrection with Jesus. Thus she is prepared to make a complete gift of herself to the Lord and associate herself with his redeeming activity. Through her apostolic spirituality, she learns not to set up dichotomies between prayer and action, between community living and service; but to live the paradox. She recognizes Jesus as Light in the darkness, enabling her to make the journey anew each day. In time she will come to know from experience that Jesus is the true source of her fidelity.

65. Each sister in the community shares some responsibility for assisting new members to grow in their appreciation of the committed life and of the core values and heritage of the Society. All of us must reflect to them the goodness of God and the joy of those He loves.
66. Finally, we believe that formation is a community venture, a life-long task of each member, young and old alike. In our new members lies our hope for the future. As we willingly share with them all that we are and all that we have, we in turn receive from them. Each new member, called to live our common charism, enriches community with her unique gifts. We wish to create an atmosphere wherein each can grow, can come to experience in her heart the richness and beauty of being created by the Father, called by the Son, united to the life-giving Spirit.

A true Sister of Social Service realizes in her heart the richness and beauty of being created by the Father, called by the Son, and united to the life-giving Spirit. 
Margaret Slachta

Separation

67. Every community has substantial boundaries beyond which belonging is not considered credible or possible. Belonging to our community as well as separation from it is a question of relationships between an individual sister and the community.

68. If a need is experienced for a member’s separation from our Society, it is essential that prayerful, mutual discernment precede the decision which leads to separation. The discernment should include reflection and dialogue on the experiences which led toward this decision. The quality of the process leading to the decision is as important as the decision itself.

69. The forms of separation may be mutual or non-mutual. All forms of separation follow the requirements of Church Law. (Canons 742-746.)
VII. SERVICE OF LEADERSHIP

70. It is the Spirit who has called us together, so that responding to the Father's plan we may participate in the mission of Jesus. The gift of vocation confers on each member a great dignity and a great responsibility. In this gift we are all united. Each of us is to give a personal, and in some way, a unique response to the Father's love, while we are engaged in our common mission.

71. The purpose of governance is to facilitate the living out of our call. Christ’s words and actions show us how authority is a service to lead in love.

   Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

   (Mk 10:43-45)

72. Authority, with the help of the Holy Spirit, guides the community toward the full truth about itself, and inspires it to grow in responsibility for the gifts received. Those entrusted with guiding and directing our community must be leaders in searching out the will of the Father through listening and dialogue; by prayer, alone and with others; through openness to persons, circumstances and events. They challenge us personally and communally to live by gospel values.

73. Authority is a service which frees the members for the ministry and challenges both the individuals and the community to „spend themselves readily in God’s service and in the works of the apostolate”. It inspires the members to share their gifts in a self-emptying love which promotes the good of others. It encourages each to serve according to her abilities and in the kind of ministry where she can be most effective.

74. Authority unifies the members in their life of dedication. United in common effort, we work to renew the face of the earth. It is the task of authority to coordinate the various gifts and ministries of the members. Leadership facilitates the ordering of services so that in God’s house, all is done in peace and tranquility.

75. By its very nature, a Gospel-centered governance necessitates the principles and structures of participation and communication. Personal responsibility and accountability, collegiality, subsidiarity require great
openness to the Holy Spirit. Rightly exercised, these can effect unity in the diversity and allow us to enter more wholeheartedly into the mission of our Society.

76. The effectiveness of our governance will depend upon how deeply each of us is attuned to the Holy Spirit; how sensitively we listen and respond to the Spirit's promptings.

The loss of old forms and structures is of no importance.
What matters is that the spirit be kept alive.
This will create new forms.

Margaret Slachta
It is the Spirit who gives Life

John 6:63