

## Title: Forming Women Religious As Agents of the Catholic Social Tradition

### Summary

Inspired by the method of practical-theological reflection and committed to distance education, the Loyola Institute for Ministry has educated laypeople and women religious the world over. It is currently implementing a project in East Africa funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and entitled “Catholic Sisters in Partnership for Sustainability.”

Motivated by their congregational charisms and faith commitments—including, for some, the Catholic social tradition (CST) and traditional African concepts, such as “abundant life”<sup>\*</sup>—Catholic sisters in East Africa are working on a wide range of projects that contribute precisely to the kinds of outcomes that the CST envisions. Congregations of sisters, therefore, represent a powerful impetus for the accomplishment of goals of the CST.

These sisters are exercising the option for the poor in their care for the sick in their clinics, their land- and water-use practices that mitigate the effects of climate change, and their work to reduce conflicts and so create more just and resilient communities.

Yet, they do not simply respond to needs; they also educate and empower those with whom they work. They know that educated women change not only individuals but also societies, and so they educate girls with the clear intention of redressing gender inequalities. They have developed small-scale industries that employ their neighbors and teach skills that can be leveraged in the local economy. Yet surprisingly few people beyond the immediate Catholic community know about their work or see it as contributing to sustainable development.

Loyola’s project assumes that sisters would be more effective if

- more people knew about the inspiring work they are already doing in the service of the CST,
- more stakeholders in the sisters’ ministries, including more sisters, knew about the CST and its relationship to their charisms,
- they could partner more widely to develop resources and build capacity to extend their work inspired by the CST.

This panel consists of three presentations followed by a question-and-answer period. The length of the presentations depends on the time allotted for the session.

To provide background to Loyola’s project in East Africa, Ryan offers an overview of LIM’s method of practical theological reflection and its grounding in the CST. DeMarais examines CST in the East African context, its challenges and opportunities. She also highlights the practices and structures that disempower women in general and women religious in particular. Urassa tells the story of a woman religious who has come to see herself as an agent of the CST in East Africa and the implications of that perspective for her work and for that of her community.

### Panelists

- Sarah DeMarais, M.Ed., Manager of Loyola’s project entitled “Catholic Sisters in Partnership for Sustainability,”

- Thomas Ryan, Ph.D., Professor and Director, Loyola Institute for Ministry, Loyola University New Orleans,
- Mary Dolores Urassa, CDNK, a Sister of Our Lady of Kilimanjaro from Moshe, Tanzania who is pursuing a master's in nursing from Calumet College of St. Joseph in Calumet, IN.

\*See Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Orbis 1997).

**Abstract:**

Motivated by the Catholic social tradition (CST) and traditional African concepts, such as “abundant life,” the work of Catholic sisters in East Africa represents a powerful impetus for the accomplishment of goals of the CST.

This panel introduces a project on CST in East Africa. Presentations include

- An overview of the project's method and its grounding in the CST.
- An examination of CST in the East African context and of what disempowers women there.
- The story of a woman religious who has come to see herself as an agent of the CST in East Africa and what she finds most compelling about CST for her context.