



UNANIMA: Bringing the “Feminine Soul” to the UN

We are the women of UNANIMA International—a coalition of 21 congregations of women religious, representing together about 22,000 women all over the world. The coalition was named after the “UN” and “Anima” (the Latin word for the feminine soul or life principle). UNANIMA does bring the energy of the feminine spirit to our work at the UN and, through our member communities, to over 80 countries around the world. In the rich experience of coming together in a common ministry—not just in one community, but in 21! – we manifest the one-ness to which the Gospel calls us. Our member communities include:

- Carmelite Sisters of Charity, Vedruna
- Congregation of Bon Secours of Paris
- Congregation of Mary (Marist Sisters)
- Congrégation of Notre Dame of Montreal
- Congregation of Our Lady of Sion
- Congregation of Sisters of Saint Agnes
- Daughters of Wisdom
- Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Holy Union Sisters
- Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart (Cabrini Sisters)
- Religious of Jesus and Mary
- Sisters of Saint Brigid (Brigidine)
- Sisters of the Divine Savior (Salvatorian Sisters)
- Sisters of Notre Dame
- Sisters of Providence
- Sisters of Saint Anne
- Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
- Society of the Holy Child Jesus
- Sœurs de l’Assomption de Sainte Vierge
- Religious Sisters of Charity (Ireland and Australia)
- Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph

We joined together to expand our global outreach, to address world problems at the systemic level, and to collaborate on international issues of common concern. Our unique charisms enrich the work of UNANIMA through the educational, hospital, parish ministry, social justice and other specialized work of our members. And our work together in UNANIMA brings a rich sense of global involvement, of being one with our

brothers and sisters all over the world. In our work at the UN we are enriched by being more closely connected to the tragedies and triumphs of other nations, and we bring them to our prayer in new ways. We find new answers to Jesus' question, "Who is your neighbor?" by expanding our vision in new ways to the whole world.

UNANIMA International (UI) works with the United Nations on issues relating to UI's special focus areas: women and children (especially those living in poverty, or who have been trafficked); immigrants and refugees; and the environment (especially water and climate change). UI is governed by a board consisting of one representative from each of the member congregations. The Coalition Coordinator and her assistant connect with the board, the leadership of the 21 communities, and with regional coordinators who form other relational networks. They carry forward the UI vision through internet, phone, and personal visits. The work of UI, supported entirely by the contributions of the member congregations, includes the following:

- **Lobbying** UI takes issues to the United Nations by working on NGO committees; by offering its own written and oral interventions to UN working bodies; by directly talking with individual countries and UN departments; by offering educational events that bring its own congregations' "grassroots knowledge" to the UN; and by giving its membership the tools to work with UN agencies and governments in their own countries – the goal of all these activities to affect UN policies in the areas of UNANIMA's mission.



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- **Membership Education** UI educates the membership of its congregations by offering them paid internships; by providing UN passes for members attending UN events; by publishing a monthly e-newsletter (in four languages) with news from the UN and from other member communities; by maintaining a website and Facebook page; and by providing educational activities for members of the board. The Coordinator and board members also speak about UI and the United Nations at congregational events or to various other religious / civic groups.

- **Education Projects / Activities** UI has produced educational material on human trafficking and on water, and given workshops / lectures on various subjects across the United States and in several other countries. The UI human trafficking educational material is spread all over the world! Most recently, a two-



year program in Kenya focused on “youth teaching youth”--training a group of Catholic youth to go out to several parishes in the Nairobi area to train other youth in how to recognize and combat human trafficking. In 2013 a UI international youth workshop in northern Ghana attracted 75 youth, sisters from six UNANIMA communities, and other religious, clerical, and lay people working against trafficking in eight countries.

- Membership Networking / Ministry Support** UI seeks to provide members with tools they need to work on issues of concern at their own country / regional / local level, by sharing website connections, Power Point presentations and the like. Currently UI is working on a pilot regional network project to connect UI sisters and associates with each other, so they can share resources and common concerns. Many individual sisters report back to UI that they have become involved with issues in their own countries, using resources provided by UI or shared by other UI member communities.



- Member Outreach** Inspired by their experience with UNANIMA many sisters take UI issues back to their own countries. In the last three years, Board members have given anti-trafficking workshops for religious leaders in Ethiopia, and alerted groups of women religious leaders in Ireland to the issues of human trafficking and water pollution from fracking. Staff members and former interns have joined groups working against trafficking, those involved with water issues, or other social justice movements in the Philippines, South America, Australia, and the USA. An Australian member of parliament came to interview the UI staff on trafficking, migration, and other issues, saying, “The sisters sent me.”



- Networking** UI maintains a network of relationships with organizations all over the world, such as the Bakhita Initiative, ACRATH, APWRATH (see picture below), CATHII, the newly-formed US- CSAHT), and others, passing along information from them to the UI membership.



Recently the first steps have been taken to encourage the formation of networks of UNANIMA communities in different



regions of the world. The sisters from our 19 member communities are actively engaged in many religious ministry and social justice

activities, and joining their voices together—all 22,000 of them—will surely make them heard.

The challenges are many. Working with a small staff on issues that are too complex for whole nations to solve, coping with the huge and confusing bureaucracy that is the UN reality, and having to be satisfied sometimes with tiny victories like the change of one word in a large document...these are the everyday realities of religious NGOs at the United Nations.

But women religious are uniquely qualified to collaborate with each other and with other groups, and the feminine gift of one-ness as practiced in the coalition structure of UNANIMA embodies its charism of "*One Spirit, One Mission, One Hope.*" We are transformed by the same Spirit which at Pentecost united a diverse band of disciples into a powerful group that would speak with one voice all over the world; dedicated to our common mission to minister to all people, especially the most vulnerable; and united in one hope that the message of the Gospel ultimately will transform the world. As we work toward this transformation, we and the other religious NGOs bring to the UN a vocal testimony to the one-ness which is at the heart of the mission of the United Nation itself.



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UNANIMA International

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