

APRIL 2023

ASEC Special Evaluation Report

CONGREGATION CHARISMS: ASEC ALUMNAE



Prepared by: ASEC Monitoring & Evaluation Unit



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Suggested Citation: African Sisters Education Collaborative (2023, April). *Congregation Charisms: ASEC Alumnae*. African Sisters Education Collaborative Special Evaluation Report. Scranton, PA: ASEC.

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Congregation Charisms: ASEC Alumnae

ASEC Special Evaluation Report (April 2023) Executive Summary

Each religious congregation or community has its own unique spirit or character, called a charism. Charism can be defined in many ways, including a gift the congregation seeks to share with the world, drawing from the Spirit "...for its origins and for its continually new forms." Through various means of data collection at ASEC, it became clear that sisters may describe their charisms quite differently, even within the same congregation. The 2023 Special Report looks to better understand the similarities and differences amongst ASEC alumnae charism descriptions.

2023 ASEC Special Report

The central goal of the 2023 Special Evaluation Report was to explore how alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs **describe their congregation's charism**.

ASEC alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs in attendance at the 2020 Alumnae Workshops across ASEC's 10 countries of operation, as well as alumnae from Zimbabwe who participated in SLDI, were invited to complete the 2020 Alumnae Survey. In this survey, alumnae responded to an open-ended question asking them to describe their congregation's charism. This data was used for analysis for this report.



Sr. Eliza Wambui, DHM, SLDI alumna, at the Ruben Centre in Kenya, which provides services to empower the community.

A total of 508 alumnae (349 SLDI, 110 HESA, and 49 both) described their congregation's charism in the survey. The respondents represented 171 congregations. Qualitative data was analyzed for themes using NVivo 12 software, employing the constant comparative method for analysis.

Emergent themes from analysis represented potential elements of charism, including (N = 1,329):



Virtues

34% listed a virtue as part of, or the entirety of, their charism. These included virtues such as love, compassion, simplicity, humility, etc.



Ministry Focus

26% described their charism as the focus of their ministries, such as the type of service the congregation provides or more general statements about what the congregation seeks to accomplish.



Population Served

25% described the charism in terms of the population served by their ministries. Such as poor or needy, marginalized, women, or children.



God or Christ

16% reported that their charism includes how the congregation is inspired by, seeks to emulate, or is grounded in a characteristic of God or Christ.

Results indicate that alumnae may require additional training to more fully understand the relationships between charism, spirituality, mission, and ministry.

Left: SLDI alumna and HESA student, Sr. Ndatchi Sylvianne Mangwi, SST with Form I students at Bishop Peeters College in Cameroon.

Congregation Charisms: ASEC Alumnae 2023 ASEC Special Evaluation Report

Introduction

In 2020, Catholic sisters who are alumnae of ASEC’s Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) program and Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program were asked to describe their charism. Each religious congregation or community has its own unique spirit or character, called a charism. Charism can be defined in many ways, including a gift the congregation seeks to share with the world, drawing from the Holy Spirit “...for its origins and for its continually new forms” (Murray, 2002, p. 133); expressing and returning God’s love to Him, through his attributes (Catholic Diocese of Arlington, n.d.); and/or the way the Holy Spirit works through the founder/ess of the congregation to inspire members to meet the needs of the Church, united in the congregation’s mission (Institute on Religious Life, n.d.). In other words, the charism can develop from the congregation’s founding inspiration, mission, and spirituality as well as the lived experience of the members. The charism is articulated in the congregation’s documents and mission statements. In addition to having its own charism, some congregations also share a Rule and Spirituality, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines.

Through input shared at the International Consultative Research Conference in September 2020, a conference centered on sharing research by religious and about religious life, it became clear that sisters describe their charisms quite differently, even within the same congregation. Also, prior to the conference, ASEC evaluators wanted to know more about congregational charisms and decided to include a question about charisms in its 2020 survey of program alumnae. This report shares an analysis of the qualitative responses from the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey and aims to provide a starting point in developing more nuanced understandings of congregational charisms.

Specifically, this study and report aims to answer the following research question: How do alumnae of ASEC’s SLDI and HESA programs describe their congregation’s charism?

Methodology

Purposive convenience sampling was used to determine who would be surveyed. ASEC alumnae of the SLDI & HESA programs who attended the 2020 Alumnae Workshops across ASEC’s 10 countries of operation (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan,

Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) as well as an alum from Zimbabwe who participated in SLDI, were invited to participate in the 2020 Alumnae Survey. Alumnae answered an open-ended question in the 2020 ASEC Alumnae Survey asking them to describe their congregation’s charism.

A total of 508 alumnae described their congregation’s charism. Most respondents are SLDI alumnae (346), but respondents also included: HESA alumnae (105), alumnae of both SLDI and HESA (48), HESA alumnae who also completed the Scholarship program (5), SLDI alumnae who also completed the Scholarship program (3), and one sister who is an alumna of SLDI, HESA, and the Scholarship program. The majority of respondents resided in Kenya (118) and Tanzania (87) but all ASEC countries were represented.

Country	Number of Respondents
Cameroon	30
Ghana	49
Kenya	118
Lesotho	10
Malawi	41
Nigeria	38
South Sudan	5
Tanzania	87
Uganda	69
Zambia	49
Zimbabwe	1

Also, the respondents represented 171 congregations. The most frequently represented congregations were: Little Sisters of St. Francis, LSOSF (14), Daughters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, DST (10), Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Gulu, LSMIG (9), Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary, ESM/MCESM (9), and Sisters of St. Therese, SST (9).

Qualitative data was analyzed for themes using NVivo 12 software, employing the constant comparative method for analysis. Results of this analysis, including coded themes and sub-themes are shared below.

Analysis & Findings

The themes that emerged in the analysis represent different potential elements of a charism, including: Congregational Virtues, Inclusion of God or Christ, Spirituality, Ministry Focus, and Populations Served in Ministry(ies). More specific sub-themes were coded under each theme. Sisters frequently included multiple elements of a charism in their descriptions. For example, a charism that contained the themes of Ministry Focus and Population Served by Ministry(ies) is: “-Teaching of Catechism -Caring of the aged -Caring of orphans -Administration -Computer training - -Sewing of church linens -Catering services -Health work -Baking of (sic) altar.”

Another example is a charism coded at multiple themes is: “Total Trust In The Divine Providence of God, the sisters should be connected to God through Constant prayer in order to be faithful in her apostolate which is taking care of the needy children, by showing them affection and love” which is coded under the themes of Inclusion of God or Christ, Spirituality, Congregational Values, and Population Served by Ministry(ies).

Themes

Congregational Virtues

When respondents described a virtue as part of, or the entirety of their charism, this was coded under the theme of Congregational Virtues. While it is possible, and likely, that virtues coded under this theme may stem from God, Christ, or other religious figures or beliefs, the virtues under this theme were not explicitly associated with a spiritual or religious component. If God or Christ were mentioned, it was coded under the Inclusion of God or Christ theme. Mentions of spirituality or prayer were coded under the theme of Spirituality. In this analysis, the most frequently mentioned virtues are: Love (62), Compassion (58), Simplicity (38), Humility (23), Charity (18), and Joy (16). Please see Appendix A for a full listing of all sub-codes within this theme.

An example of a charism statement coded under this theme is: “Charity in simplicity and humility in all our ministries.”

Inclusion of God or Christ

Responses were coded to the theme of Inclusion of God or Christ when a respondent included God or Christ in her charism description. Specifically, when a description included how the congregation is inspired by, seeks to emulate, or is grounded in a characteristic of God or Christ,

it was coded under this theme. The most frequent inclusion of God or Christ, was the love of God or Christ (42), followed by embodying God or Christ's example (28), the redemptive nature of Christ (16), God's mercy (15), and giving witness to God (11). Please see Appendix B for a full listing of all sub-themes under this theme.

An example of a charism coded under this theme is: "We give glory to God through our living the Paschal mystery of making the Precious Blood fruitful in our apostolate wherever we work with the we work with and for."

Spirituality

When respondents mentioned prayer, contemplation, or spirituality as part of their charism description, their responses were coded under the theme of Spirituality. Only 22 references were made to this element of congregational charisms.

An example of a charism coded under this theme is: "We are a contemplative congregation, our charism is to be present with God (prayer life), to be present with my sisters (fraternal life), and to be present with my surrounding (apostolic work and pastoral)."

Ministry Focus

Responses coded to the Ministry Focus theme include descriptions of the focus of congregational ministries, such as the type of service the congregation provides or more general statements about what the congregation seeks to accomplish. Respondents most commonly mentioned education (71), evangelization (65), generalized focus on mission or ministry (43), healthcare (32) and social work or services (25) as the focus of their congregation's ministry. Please see Appendix C for a full listing of all sub-themes under this theme.

An example of a charism coded under this theme is: "Education and social work."

Population Served in Ministry(ies)

Respondents who provided a description of the population served by their ministry were coded under the theme of Population Served in Ministry(ies). Respondents most commonly mentioned that they serve individuals who are poor or needy (88), individuals who are marginalized or vulnerable (60), children (47) and women (43). Please see Appendix D for a full listing of all sub-themes under this theme.

An example of a charism coded under this theme is: "Empowerment of women, youth and children."

Conclusions

This study and report is intended to provide an initial understanding of how ASEC alumnae describe their charism. Results indicated that most often ASEC alumnae associate their congregation's charism with a virtue (34%). It was discovered that alumnae often use terms such as love, compassion, simplicity, and humility in their descriptions. The second most common description of a congregation's charism included the focus of the sisters' ministries (26%). These descriptions were more practical in nature, detailing the types of services the congregation engages in, such as teaching or healthcare services. Great variation was found, even amongst sisters in the same congregation, in how charisms were described. These results indicate that alumnae may require additional education and/or training to more fully understand the relationships between charism, spirituality, mission, and ministry.

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Appendix A. Sub-Themes: Congregational Virtues

Sub-Themes	Number of References
Love	62
Compassion	58
Simplicity	38
Humility	23
Charity	18
Joy	16
Franciscan values	12
Inspired by or follow the example of Mother Mary	12
Mercy	12
Motherhood	12
Unity	11
Spiritual childhood	10
Community	9
Contemplate	9
Serve God or Christ	8
Reparation	7
Generous and/or spontaneous service	6
Liberation	6
Selflessness	6
Gospel values	5
Incarnate the word	5
Intimacy or connection with God	5
Openness	5
Poverty	5
Accept challenges	4
Bring the Church to new places	4
Peaceful service	4
Restitution	4
Sacrifice	4
Build communion	3
Fraternity	3
Good leadership	3
Hope	3
Teach by example	3
Adoration to Blessed Sacrament	2
Adorers	2

Birthing	2
Conceiving	2
Conversion	2
Family	2
Family of Nazareth	2
Goodness	2
Holiness	2
Inspired by Mother Kevin	2
Love of neighbor	2
Marian	2
Minority	2
Nurturing	2
Passion	2
Proclaim	2
Reconciliation	2
Self emptying	2
Availability	1
Behold the Handmaid of the Lord	1
Celebration of incarnation	1
Confidence	1
Development	1
Faith	1
Grace	1
Imitation of Mary Angela	1
Littleness	1
Make Carmel grow	1
Mutual love	1
Poverty of spirit	1
Purity of heart	1
Sanctification	1
Servant leadership	1
Servitude	1
Solitude	1
Spirit of St Vincent de Paul	1
Thanksgiving	1
Unity of Christians & non-Christians	1

Appendix B. Sub-Themes: Inclusion of God or Christ

Sub-Themes	Number of References
Love of Christ or God	42
Embody Christ's or God's example	28
Redemptive nature of Christ	16
Mercy of God	15
Give witness to God	11
Participate in mission of or service to Christ	8
Give glory or love to God's people	7
Love and Unity of Trinity	7
Paschal mystery	7
Characteristics of Christ or God-General	6
Providence of God	6
Dedicated to Christ	5
God's or Christ's will	5
Make Christ present in the world	5
Sacrifice of God or Christ	5
Christ's fullness	4
Christ's newness	4
Compassion for crucified	4
Imitation of Christ's eucharist-Praise, Thanksgiving, Love, Sacrifice	4
Celebrate incarnation	3
Integrity of Jesus	3
Christ as healer	2
Compassion of God or Christ	2
Beatitudes	1
Charity of Christ	1
Cooperate with Christ	1
Jesus' wisdom	1
Life, death, and resurrection	1
Purity of God or Christ	1
Spirit of pentecost	1
Spirit of the Lord	1

Appendix C. Sub-Themes: Ministry Focus

Sub-Themes	Number of References
Education	71
Evangelization	65
General ministry activities	43
Healthcare	32
Social work or services	25
Pastoral	19
Respond to current needs i.e. needs of the time	17
Salvation	16
Catechism	15
Uplift dignity	10
Healing	8
Empowerment	4
Hospitality	4
Readiness to travel for mission	3
Use mass or digital media	3
Communication	2
Economic empowerment	2
Parenting support	2
Provide food	2
Polytechnic education	1
Spiritual renewal	1

Appendix D. Sub-Themes: Population Served by Ministry(ies)

Sub-Themes	Number of References
Individuals who are poor or needy	88
Individuals who are marginalized or vulnerable	60
Children	47
Women	43
Individuals who are sick	20
Orphans	15
Youth	14
Elderly	11
Girl Child	7
Individuals living in rural areas	7
Families	4
Individuals with disabilities	4
Refugees or displaced people	2
Gender-based violence survivors	1
Immigrants	1
Prisoners	1
Trafficking survivors	1



AFRICAN SISTERS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE (ASEC)

The mission of ASEC is to facilitate access to education for women religious in Africa that leads to the enhancement and expansion of the education, health, economic, social, environmental, and spiritual services they provide. Established in 1999, ASEC was built on a foundation of solidarity and global sisterhood developed between Catholic sisters in the USA and Africa. The organization continues to forge partnerships that enable ASEC to grow, and, in turn, benefit sisters and the people they serve.

ASEC's vision is to be a sustainable organization with a proven capacity to collaborate, develop and deliver educational programs that strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa. In order to accomplish this, the organization is informed by six core values: transformation, collaboration, leadership, service, capacity building and reverence.

