



**Maryknoll Sisters**  
Making God's love visible



## ICCR MEMBER PROFILES

# The Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers & the Maryknoll Sisters

In each issue of the Corporate Examiner, we profile an ICCR member organization and its work in corporate social responsibility. Below, we spoke with Sr. Janice McLaughlin, Cathy Rowan, and Fr. Joe LaMar.

*Social justice emerged as a prominent Maryknoll concern in the wake of Vatican II. Can you talk about how and why your two communities adopted corporate social responsibility as a strategy to achieve progress towards justice?*

**CATHY ROWAN:** As the Congregation's SRI guidelines state: *The nature and purpose of the Congregation demands that its corporate investments conform to moral, ethical and social issues and values according to the Maryknoll Sisters General Assembly Proceedings and Office for Global Concerns priorities.*

We use our voice as shareowners to alert corporations to the concerns of the communities in which the Sisters live and work. We have an SRI policy that speaks to supporting investments in companies that respect human rights, that are sensitive to ecological balance and that promote sustainable development. In short, the Congregation uses its role as a shareowner to try and foster positive change in company policies and practices.

**FR. JOE LAMAR:** The pronouncements of the collective world body of the Roman Catholic Church Vatican II identified social justice as a constitutive part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, our 6th General Chapter of 1972 directed that the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers "seek change in corporate policy causing grave social injury or dispose of our investment in such" which essentially compelled us to become shareholder advocates.



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Sr. Janice McLaughlin,  
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Our organizations joined with ICCR to pool our resources, increase our influence and to avail ourselves of the strategies and experience honed by many long-term ICCR members. Additionally, correspondence among our missionaries in the field and our newly formed office of Corporate Social Responsibility provided additional outlets in which to share how social injustices affected the folks with whom we worked. While the local injustices were obvious, this was also the beginning of our deeper understanding of the negative impacts of corporations, governments and economic powers on the poor.

In certain overseas conflicts, it became obvious that, while many of the social violations were due to corrupt governments, the capital and influence of international corporate entities were complicit, wittingly or not, in the violence.

In those early days, we also engaged companies on matters of water consumption/pollution; worker rights and

safety; and mining and its impacts related to labor and the environment.

*Maryknoll has foreign missions in numerous countries. How do Maryknoll's overseas missionaries inform your strategies in face-to-face dialogues with corporate management here in the U.S.?*

**SR. JANICE McLAUGHLIN:** Information from our Sisters in the field shapes our advocacy work. For example, a Maryknoll Sister in Peru doing work around the environmental impacts of mining on local communities was brought to the UN to speak. Her work has informed our shareholder advocacy with extractive companies. The work of a Sister in Cambodia to empower women who were formerly trafficked has made us more aware of this problem, and as a result, we will only invest in hotel companies that have signed the ECPAT code against sex trafficking.

**FR. JOE LAMAR:** We are blessed with numerous country emplacements where we gather first-hand reports on injustice. We are shocked by the conditions of poverty suffered in the developing world and we search for ways we can correct the situation.

Our Office for Global Concerns takes on the legislative side of the problem, while our Office of Corporate Social Responsibility sees to the parallel effort of mitigating corporate impacts on communities. Returning Maryknoll missionaries tell stories of horrible social violations perpetrated upon local communities where they worked. These first-hand reports and photographic evidence are presented to lawmakers directly by missionaries. Overseas members aware of our contact with corporations share information with ICCR members and our Washington Office of Global Concerns to demand action.

*Maryknollers have participated in dialogues with some of the nation's largest banks, calling for proper risk oversight systems to help stabilize global financial markets and prevent future financial crises. How does this work impact the marginalized communities that Maryknollers serve around the globe?*

**CATHY ROWAN:** We show the banks how their practices can lead to heightened volatility in the international finance system, and how it impacts the people at the furthest margins of that system. I've had the opportunity to bring a few Maryknoll missionaries from Latin America to bank dialogues, and it is clear that their perspective is one that representatives working at corporate headquarters do not normally hear. I recall one bank representative's surprise at hearing from a Maryknoller that many of the people our missionaries live and work with do not even have their births registered – and so are not even counted in a government's economic statistics.

**FR. JOE LAMAR:** For more than twenty-five years we have called these financial institutions to account for practices that are profitable for them but economically prejudicial to most of the developing world, including payday lending, derivatives trading and investments in the fossil fuel sector. As part of ICCR's work in this sector, we have released an extensive benchmarking study titled *Ranking the Banks* which rates seven leading banks on criteria of importance to responsible investors.

The study uncovered many examples of poor risk management and weak regulatory oversight along with an incessant focus on short-term profits without consideration of the long-term impacts on average customers and broader society.

*How does leveraging congregational assets via shareholder engagement help the Maryknoll Sisters to live into their mission of "making God's love visible"?*

**CATHY ROWAN:** Advocacy for all people living with AIDS is part of this ministry on a local, national and international level. One route for this advocacy work is through shareholder engagement. For nearly 15 years, the Maryknoll Sisters, through ICCR, have engaged pharmaceutical companies held in their investment portfolios regarding their efforts to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Shareholder resolutions and dialogues have contributed to companies lowering the prices of many of their HIV/AIDS medicines and agreeing to share the patents of some of these medicines with generic manufacturers in order to increase access to treatment.

*Apartheid was the issue that galvanized the entry of the Maryknoll community into corporate social responsibility. How have your congregational justice priorities evolved since that time?*

**SR. JANICE McLAUGHLIN:** The major issues we relate to now are environmental and human rights concerns. We have Sisters in various parts of the world working on both

these issues and this influences our choice of investments and our advocacy.

**FR. JOE LAMAR:** The very first social justice shareholder resolution was filed to abolish apartheid in South Africa and was the genesis of ICCR. Vatican II and the social justice advocacy it inspired occurred concurrently. Since then we have greatly improved our shareholder advocacy strategies and increased our network of allies and, hence, our influence with corporations. The best evidence that we are a growing force to be reckoned with is a sharp increase in the number of dialogues versus the number of shareholder resolutions, the latter of which are now used only as a last resort with uncooperative companies.

*How does working in coalition with other ICCR members help you achieve progress/leverage on the social justice issues important to your congregations?*

**CATHY ROWAN:** Collaboration with other ICCR members, including members of the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, is critical to the Congregation's efforts to hold corporations accountable and we have learned from the experience of other ICCR members. ICCR provides a forum where we can raise issues of concern and advocate on them with like-minded investors. As an example, joining our voices with other shareholders to speak to pharmaceutical companies about their moral obligation to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic has, I believe, made a difference.

**FR. JOE LAMAR:** Numerous benefits come from forming voting coalitions, and when a large block of faith groups support a particular resolution it definitely increases the likelihood that other investors and the company will pay attention. In the case of Maryknoll-sponsored resolutions, our on-the-ground voice can make these proposals quite compelling. In the end, justice for vulnerable communities is what motivates us to do this work.