

Charism and Mission



Watawa wa Taa





Charism and Mission

Since your Congregation's founding in your country and establishment of your congregational way of life, in what areas has the spirit moved you to adapt the initial ways of thinking about the interpretation of your charism and mission?

Service to the marginalized and vulnerable

Across all Congregations, there is a shared commitment to serving the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society.

Adaptation to local needs and contexts

Many Congregations demonstrate an ability to adapt their missions and charisms to the evolving needs of the communities they serve, particularly in response to socio-economic, political, and cultural changes.

Focus on education and empowerment

Education is central to the mission of most congregations. This includes formal education, catechesis, and vocational training, with a particular emphasis on empowering marginalized groups, especially women and children.

Spiritual foundation and formation

Prayer, Eucharistic devotion, and contemplative practices play a central role in sustaining the mission and forming the members spiritually.

Witnessing and prophetic life

Congregations emphasize the prophetic nature of their mission, which involves standing up for justice, speaking out against societal wrongs, and advocating for the poor and marginalized.

Empowerment and leadership

Empowering individuals, particularly women and youth, is a central theme across all Congregations.

Unity and sense of belonging

A sense of unity and communion, both with the Congregation and with the broader Church is consistent across all Congregations. Solidarity is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the charism.



In what areas has the spirit moved you to adapt the initial ways of thinking about the interpretation of your charism and mission?



Ghana

Initially, Sisters primarily assisted in building and running diocesan schools. Now, they have since established their own schools to ensure quality education and holistic formation. Some Sisters have taken teaching roles in universities to provide academic and spiritual formation.



South Africa

Initially, Sisters were sent to South Africa to educate children of settlers, but the mission expanded to include working with marginalized communities and promoting social justice. The Congregation now emphasizes African identity in religious life, ensuring that spirituality is deeply rooted in local traditions.



Kenya

Initially, some Congregations in Kenya focused on traditional apostolates such as teaching catechism, working in rural areas, and providing social services. Today, they have expanded to include social justice, advocacy, and contemporary pastoral needs.



Uganda

The Congregation's mission was initially centered on reviving faith and rekindling charity in communities. This has now expanded to include working closely with laypeople and forming partnerships to strengthen faith communities. Sisters now engage in outreach programs that promote peace, reconciliation, and community support for vulnerable groups, such as orphans and those affected by social injustices.



Malawi

The mission has evolved from basic religious education to a more holistic approach that includes life skills training, environmental awareness, and empowerment programs. Sisters have adapted their approach to better fit Malawian cultural contexts.



Zambia

Congregations in Zambia have adapted their mission to respond to the challenges of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality. The initial model of religious Sisters working independently has evolved into a collaborative approach that includes laypeople and other partners.



Nigeria

The mission has evolved from education to multi-sector evangelization like legal advocacy, health services, and social justice programs. Sisters have modified traditional religious attire and evangelization methods to be more culturally sensitive, ensuring better reception in communities.



Zimbabwe

Congregations originally focused on caring for orphans, but as social needs evolved, they expanded to include nursing training, maternity services, and broader healthcare initiatives. Sisters continue to interpret their charism dynamically, ensuring they remain responsive to emerging social issues.



How is the leadership of your Congregation organized?

How is authority exercised in your Congregation?



Ghana

Initially, all decisions had to pass through the superior, causing delays. Now, leadership is more decentralized. Leaders are now expected to consult the council and community members before making significant decisions. Leadership is rotated among Sisters, ensuring that everyone experiences leadership at some point.

We are learning that authority should not suppress, but uplift. It should create space for dialogue and new ideas, not just enforce rules.

—Ghana—



Kenya

Years back, Congregations were led by European Sisters, with African Sisters serving in supporting roles. Over time, African Sisters have taken on more leadership positions, though challenges remain regarding full autonomy.

For years, leadership was something given to us by the 'mother house' in Europe. Today, we are taking ownership of our Congregations and leading with confidence.

—Kenya—

The understanding of authority has shifted from authoritarian control to a model of servant-leadership, where leaders are expected to serve rather than command.



Malawi

The Congregations initially followed strict hierarchical leadership, but have now transitioned to a more facilitative leadership model, encouraging dialogue.

Authority is no longer about commands and rules. It is about walking alongside and ensuring every Sister feels heard.

—Malawi—

Leaders now develop long-term strategic plans, ensuring the sustainability of Congregations.

It is still a struggle to balance authority with participation. Some Sisters still expect leaders to 'decide for them,' while others want full autonomy.

—Nigeria—



Nigeria

Leadership is no longer an individualistic role; decisions are made collectively, and leaders serve for a fixed term before rotating. Superiors do not have absolute power.

How is the leadership of your Congregation organized?

How is authority exercised in your Congregation?

We are embracing shared leadership, where voices from different levels are heard and respected.
—South Africa—



South Africa

Leadership is no longer concentrated in one person, but shared among teams, encouraging greater involvement of all members. Laypeople are now part of leadership structures, helping in financial management and governance. Local communities handle decisions at their level before escalating issues to the general house, ensuring greater autonomy.

In the past, leadership was about administration. Today, it is about vision, mentorship, and empowering the next generation of Sisters.
—Uganda—



Uganda

Leadership has shifted from top-down decision-making to a more inclusive model where Sisters at all levels participate in governance.

Decisions are increasingly made through councils and committees rather than by an individual superior. The issue of tribal favoritism in leadership appointments still exists, though there is an effort to ensure equity in leadership selection.

We are slowly dismantling the idea of leadership as power. Instead, we see it as a call to listen, accompany, and discern together.
—Zambia—



Zambia

Leadership now focuses on mentorship and preparing younger Sisters to take on responsibilities. Local leaders consult with Sisters before making major decisions. Sisters now involve lay collaborators in decision-making for apostolic works.

Our leadership model now reflects the reality of the African Church — synodal, participatory, and rooted in communal discernment.
—Zimbabwe—



Zimbabwe

Leadership was initially top-down, but has now become more consultative and participatory, allowing all Sisters to contribute. Authority is now shared among councils.

Key Insights and Challenges

Charism and Mission

Religious congregations remain deeply committed to serving marginalized groups, including the poor, refugees, women, children, and the elderly. Many congregations are shifting toward advocacy, justice, and environmental stewardship, showing adaptability to changing social and cultural realities.

Challenges

Resource scarcity, political instability, and balancing tradition with innovation — particularly with technology and modern evangelization methods.

Ministries and Ways of Ministering

Ministries have evolved from primarily education and healthcare to include trauma healing, mental health support, prison ministry, women's empowerment, environmental care, and digital evangelization.

Challenges

Aging membership, limited personnel, and financial constraints.

Leadership Organization

Leadership is transitioning from centralized, hierarchical models toward participatory and servant-leadership styles.

Challenges

Tribalism, governance tensions, and unequal opportunities between African and European congregations.

Exercise of Authority

Authority is increasingly exercised through dialogue, shared decision-making, and communal discernment rather than unilateral commands.

Challenges

Favoritism, lack of trust, and uneven adoption of participatory models.



Watawa wa Taa Consecrated Women of Light

Watawa wa Taa can be loosely translated as “Consecrated Women of Light” in Kiswahili. The name was chosen as an ode to the remarkable presence and works of women religious in Africa.

Whether as members of international, missionary or local Congregations, holding pontifical or diocesan status, African Catholic Sisters can be found at the forefront of society, working for sustained and systemic change in the areas of health care, education, social work, pastoral care, agriculture, and many more.

Watawa wa Taa acts as an incubator of ideas, thoughts, and inspirations of African Catholic Sisters from around the continent as they reflect on this shared and unique way of life and together seeking the Holy Spirit’s invitation as to how to move forward together.



Connect With Us

Watawa wa Taa



Phone +254 115 507353

Address Hekima University College, Nairobi

Website watawa.org

Email watawawataa@gmail.com
director.watawa@hekima.ac.ke

Facebook Watawa Wa Taa

Instagram watawawataa

X watawawataa

