



Q & A with Sr. Sharon Dillon, executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference



| Sr. Sharon Dillon (Provided photo)

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#)



Sep. 19, 2017 in [Q & A \(/blogs/q-and-a\)](#), [Ministry \(/topics/ministry/all\)](#) [Trends \(/topics/trends/all\)](#)

In 1991, Sr. Sharon Dillon of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis (www.ssj-tosf.org/) became the executive director of the National Religious Vocation Council (https://nrvc.net/home_page), or NRVC, in Chicago. The Franciscan spiritual director says it's a welcome return home to the Midwest after 25 years of ministry that have taken her across the country.

Dillon previously served as the vocation director for her community in Wisconsin, the executive director of the Franciscan Mission Service of North America (<https://franciscanmissionservice.org/>) in Washington, D.C., and as the operations coordinator for Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (<https://www.facebook.com/CatholicsInAlliance/>), also in D.C.

Dillon spoke with Global Sisters Report about her vision for the organization and how her past ministries inform her work.

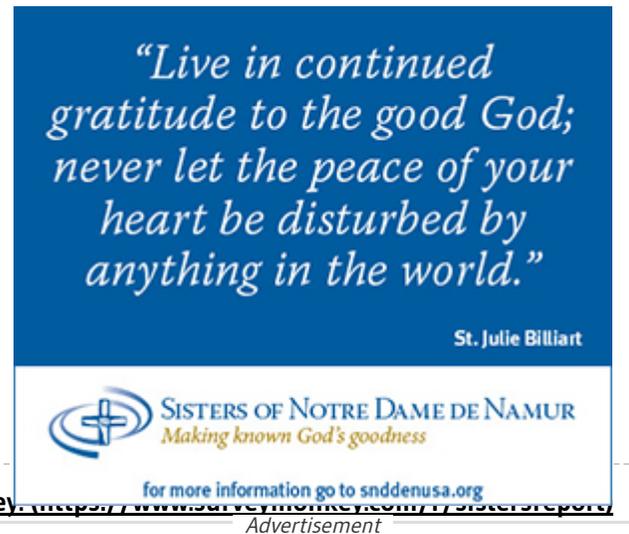
GSR: What drew you to the NRVC?

Dillon: I was a vocation minister 20 years ago, and it really helped for ~~we way to understand of the GSR reader survey~~ call to holiness. I believe everyone has a unique vocation, and I enjoy helping people find what that is.

When this position became available, it really appealed to me to bring me back full circle with vocation ministry and also bring me back to the Midwest, near my community and my family.

How, if at all, do you think your background as a spiritual director and as a vocation director will help you as executive director of the NRVC?

In my roles as spiritual director, vocation director and — more recently — as a theology teacher, I've recognized the hunger in young adults for faith development. NRVC directly addresses that hunger through its mission and its programs and resources, particularly the VISION vocation guide (<https://vocationnetwork.org/en/>) and the Vocation Network (<https://vocationnetwork.org/en/main>).



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St. Julie Billiart

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But I believe all of us — moms, dads, sisters, whatever our chosen vocation, we're all vocation ministers. We all need to share that Gospel joy of whatever life choice that we responded to from our calling from God. Being the executive director of NRVC will enable me to share the joy of my own vocation as a Sister of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis and help others share the joy of theirs.

Even though I am no longer a vocation minister at my congregation, my sisters kind of make fun of me because we go out to dinner and I'll be engaging the woman and if she has ever thought about religious life. [Laughs] In conversation with her. And my sisters are like, "You'll ask a

I have that kind of genuine excitement and joy, and we've the more likely they will consider it. Because it's a personal individual is invited at least three to five times by someone call.

What are your goals for the NRVC?

I want to shift the narrative from scarcity to hope. One of my personal goals is to share that we are in an age of discernment and inquiry on a global level. Diminishment in religious life and priesthood in the U.S. has made a turn and, for the past year, there has been a slow and steady in rise vocations. So I am excited to share the actual facts from the CARA studies (<http://cara.georgetown.edu/WomenReligious.pdf>).

What we saw in that swell in the '40s and '60s and even what we're seeing in developing countries that was similar to what happened to us, that was a need of the time. I think religious life was never intended to be a huge mass of people, so I think we're coming back to the central core



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picture of what religious life was about: community, prayer, service, commitment to the church. I wrote a comment made [at a NRVC board meeting in August] by Fr. Ralph O'Donnell from the same meeting, "Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep,' not 'Count my sheep.' "

Helping to identify and educate others about the diversity of charisms within religious life, including my own community's, is another one of my primary goals for the NRVC. I hope that in my role of executive director, I will be able to help the universal church to celebrate and appreciate the gifts that religious life brings to the church. This organization has a tremendous legacy of bridge-building and networking that I hope to continue in the hopes of creating mutual respect and collaboration among diverse communities, institutes, organizations and conferences.

Another of my goals is to enhance our digital footprint, which is a mainstay for contemporary Catholics, particularly young adults. I am a Franciscan and I have deep Franciscan values: ongoing conversion, commitment to social justice, preferential option for the poor, contemplative prayer. That will highly influence how I lead within the national office and work with our national board and membership. I will always lead with my heart and be authentic.

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