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CONFERENCE is a catalyst for vocation discernment and the full flourishing of religious life as sisters, brothers, and priests for the ongoing transformation of the world.

Editor's Note

Pursue big goals

THE RACIAL RECKONING happening now in the United States has resonated at the National Religious Vocation Conference. Our members, staff, and board are grappling with the insidious and deadly reality of racism. This “soul sickness” (to borrow an expression from Father Bryan Massingale) is so pervasive in our society that vocation ministers can’t afford to ignore it without distorting their ministry.

To be part of the solution is more than a one and done step. Those in religious communities who have been fighting significant social problems for years, such as homelessness or immigrant rights, know that a problem as large and deep as racism requires hearts fully engaged for the long haul. NRVC and HORIZON aim to be there for the long haul. Our “Updates” column on page 2 condenses the board’s statement on racism, and this edition’s focus on intercultural assessment and understanding is part of our ongoing coverage of racial justice issues in vocation ministry.

It is a sacred responsibility to invite God’s people to consider their calling, including inviting those from racial groups underrepresented in the community. It is sacred to walk with young people who are discerning their calling. Part of accompanying, inviting, and assessing people of varied ethnic backgrounds is making an effort to know their culture and know how to appropriately walk a vocation journey with them.

Overcoming racism and encouraging a vocation culture are big goals that go together. Let’s embrace both. The HORIZON library at nrvc.net has a wealth of helpful articles to assist you.

—Carol Schuck Scheiber, editor, cscheiber@nrvc.net



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NRVC condemns racism

The national reckoning over racial injustice in the United States has been part of the conversation at the National Religious Vocation Conference in recent months. In response the board released a statement that is also available on nrvc.net. In it, the board stated: “We publicly condemn racism in all its forms and manifes-



The NRVC board

tations. We stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who have suffered injustice and discrimination.

We are heartily sorry for the pain they have suffered and continue to endure and for our own complicity, actions, and omissions that played a role in

furthering the legacy and

reality of systemic racism.” The statement also listed action steps:

- “Incorporating the values and principles of anti-racism and intercultural competency in our planning and programming as well as in decisions undertaken by the National Board.
- “Providing additional tools and resources to our members on anti-racism and inclusion in our professional journal HORIZON, on the NRVC website, and in our current and future programming of workshops and institutes.
- “Committing to featuring program speakers and presenters as well as HORIZON and VISION Vocation Guide authors who represent a diversity of races and cultural backgrounds.
- Working together with the leadership of the African American Religious Vocation Committee in

identifying and/or creating additional tools and resources, as the Board, Member Area Coordinators, and National Office Staff commit to further educate ourselves and our members about the history and legacy of racism, our unconscious bias, as well as what steps can be taken to combat this grave social sin.”

HORIZON and VISION win four awards

HORIZON and its sister publication, VISION Vocation Guide, won four awards from the Catholic Press Association in June 2020. HORIZON won honorable mentions in the book review category and for “magazine of the year.” VISION won first and second place awards for best feature article.



Study of newer members now in Spanish

The *2020 Study of Newer Religious Vocations*, published in March 2020 by the National Religious Vocation Conference, is now available in Spanish. Find the full report in both English and Spanish at nrvc.net.

Archbishop Charles Thompson appointed as NRVC episcopal liaison



Archbishop Charles Thompson of Indianapolis, Indiana has been appointed episcopal liaison to the National Religious Vocation Conference by Bishop James Checchio, Chairman of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations. In his role as episcopal liaison, Thompson will aid with continued collaboration between the bishops’ conference and NRVC. ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC CONGRESS

Sisters take part in a gathering of the National Black Catholic Congress.

Inviting African Americans to join our communities

FOR RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS that are predominantly European-American to extend a sincere invitation to people of color to join in furthering the mission of their communities, it will be necessary to engage in a process of designing an intentional plan to address inherent weaknesses in the current approaches to the ministry of invitation to new members.

—Sister Gwynette Proctor, S.N.D.deN.

In preparing this article, I found the above comment by Sister Gwynette Proctor, S.N.D.deN. a natural place to begin. Our efforts as vocation ministers to invite and welcome all racial and ethnic groups requires a conscious effort. It is unlikely to just happen because we are people of goodwill. The cultural patterns and habits that exist in the United States have emerged from a long legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and discrimination. It is hard to escape the racism, both subtle and blatant, that is part of our larger culture and church; however we can choose to become more aware. We can choose to open our communities up to the whole church; we can choose to make the extra effort it may take to seek out, invite and welcome our African-American brothers and sisters. Our communities and our church will be the richer for it if we do.

Many religious communities are comfortable with serving African Americans, but to authentically follow Christ, we must invite that same population to become part of us, to minister alongside us. This was one of

By SISTER JOSITA COLBERT,
S.N.D.DEN.



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board member, a recipient of the NRVC Recognition Award, and currently serves on the NRVC African American Religious Committee.

several messages Father Bryan Massingale, a renowned social ethicist, shared in a presentation at the 2010 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference. He told his listeners: “Our faith calls us and empowers us to be the compassion of the Risen Christ.” He added: “If candidates for religious life are unwilling or unable to relate to people of color and socially stigmatized groups as

The call for African-American candidates emerges out of their particular experience within the black community. This call emerges in spite of the many obstacles that still exist.

equals and not just paternalistic benefactors—this is an indisputable sign that they do not have a vocation to serve the church as it exists today.”

To prepare this article I found myself re-reading and thinking of workshops and articles by various African-American presenters. I found their recommendations and tips in concert with my own views about what it will take to bring about greater diversity in congregations where

the majority of members, leaders, and vocation and formation personnel are, in fact, of European heritage. I had the opportunity to converse with Sister Gwynette Proctor, S.N.D.deN. about her booklet, “Toward Cultural Competence and Incorporation of People of Color into Predominately European-American Religious Communities,” (2000, published by the National Religious Vocation Conference). She stressed that the need for conscious efforts continues to exist today, as it did some 20 years ago when the booklet was published. Congregations must reverence diversity and recognize, as well, the Afro-centric approach, she told me. They must explore and accept that there is an African-American culture with its own practices and its own values.

Where to begin a conscious effort to build greater diversity? We can all agree that the call to religious life comes from God. Religious congregations must be intentionally conscious that the call for African-American candidates emerges out of their particular experience within the black community. This call emerges in spite of the many obstacles that still exist. Sister Proctor listed some of those obstacles: the withdrawal of the Catholic Church from black urban areas; the reluctance of white brothers, priests, and sisters to invite African-American people to Catholicism and to religious life; and the growing deterioration of education in the urban public and parochial schools.

These are significant hurdles, but the call to religious life continues to go out to African Americans, and vo-

cation ministers can do a great deal to help the call be heard and to support those who respond. The following tips are drawn, with permission, from Sister Proctor’s booklet on cultural competence. She graciously gave her permission for her work to be adapted here.

Tips for vocation and formation personnel

- Attend courses and workshops at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies xula.edu/ibcs.
- Worship in predominantly African-American parishes.
- Enroll in courses or workshops led by African-Americans.
- Acquire knowledge and experience in the African-American community.
- Contact the National Black Sisters Conference, The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, or the National Black Catholic Congress (see page 7) to assist your congregation in inviting and, more importantly, in nurturing African-American candidates in ways suggested here.

Tips for vocation promotion

- Publish print and online materials using graphics that include African Americans depicted as equals, not just as people being served.
- Publicize congregational activities in outlets that reach African Americans: in social media used by diverse young adults, African-American newspapers, in the bulletins of African-American parishes.
- Sponsor vocation awareness days in historically black colleges and universities.
- Take out ads in promotional booklets for events within the African-American community.
- Contact the diocesan Office of Black Catholics—meet the staff; enlist help from the staff in spreading the word.

Nurturing discerners and new members

African Americans who are considering or who have joined a religious order that is mostly of European heritage can use support in dealing with the cultural and racial concerns they’ll encounter. Here are ways to help provide that support.

INITIATES, CANDIDATES, DISCERNERS

For persons formally contemplating entrance and in structured contact with the congregation:

- Arrange for a sister, brother, or priest mentor who is black.
- Arrange for the candidate's assessment to be done by an African-American professional.
- Arrange periodic interactions with black religious (correspondence, visits, personal conversations, retreat/prayer experiences).
- Arrange participation in ministry experiences with African-American religious.

For affiliates and postulants (those persons who have formally entered at the pre-novitiate level):

- Provide regular interaction with black religious, even if they are from different congregations. The emphasis here should be on reflection and discussion, but you may want to arrange opportunities for shared ministry or prayer, such as working in places where black religious are employed or attending retreat or prayer experiences within the African-American Catholic community.

NOVICES

The canonical year is still accepted as a year apart, yet it should not be a year of isolation. The canonical year should set a model for living, not stand as an antithesis to it.

- Involve African Americans directly in the formation program throughout this period. Their presence allows the novice to stay connected to his or her own culture while adapting to religious life.

WHAT HAS WORKED WELL WITH CANDIDATES

Pre-entrance experiences with the community can be helpful, such as:

- living in a community for a short time,
- attending community gatherings,
- having assigned contact persons from a local house or community, and
- spending time with other religious congregations that are comfortable interacting with African Americans.

Once a candidate has entered, support systems can be helpful. These might include steps such as encouraging

the candidate to maintain ties to the black community, utilizing national black Catholic organizations as resources, or living in parishes with other black Catholics. Other support systems might be found by:

- ministering among African Americans;
- sharing his or her culture with the religious community, such as helping to develop within the religious community an attitude of openness to learn about other cultures and welcoming in the religious community different styles of cooking, relaxing, celebrating;
- incorporating into the religious community faith experiences rooted in African-American culture, including liturgies, retreats, spirituality, prayer groups;
- visiting with the candidates' family as appropriate;
- being sensitive to the family and extended family and friends; and
- initiating honest dialogue about community members' attitudes, biases, prejudices and fears.

Taking individual action

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

- 1) What are my prejudices, biases, values, criterion for women and men of color? What do I need to change within to truly welcome a person of color?
- 2) What attitudes and behaviors must I change to deal with my unconscious racism? To become more aware of this persistent reality, it may help to read books such as *Silent Racism: How Well-meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*, by Barbara Trepagnier or *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*, by Frances E. Kendall.
- 3) Do middle class white values impede me in welcoming a person of color?
- 4) Can I name any racist attitudes and language that are present in me?
- 5) How do I appreciate, encourage, affirm, and support the cultural gifts that the Asian, Native American, Latino, African-American woman or man brings to our community? How do I allow and enable Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans to continue to live their culture?
- 6) How am I open to others' cultural or ethnic forms of prayer, ritual, and liturgy?

- 7) What expectations do I have that the African-American candidate will “fit-in” and adapt to the dominant culture of our community?
- 8) How would I consider adapting my lifestyle to meet the cultural expression needs of an African-American man or woman?
- 9) How do I see the charism of the institute/religious community lived out in a culture other than my own? How would I envision that charism being lived out by an African-American woman or man?
- 10) Do the province policies, formation plan, and structures include people of color?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Read works by African-American authors.
- Pray daily for vocations among women and men of color.
- Take a course in intercultural awareness, or study one or two specific ethnic groups.
- Learn about your own culture and its unique gifts.
- Become aware of racist language and expressions, and erase them from your speech.

Taking collective action

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 1) What does it mean to be an intercultural community? To be pluralistic?
- 2) What would our congregation look like if we were intercultural? (Prayer styles, food, recreation, dress, theology, liturgy, spirituality)
- 3) What kinds of reading and visual artifacts exist in our residences that are not from a Eurocentric perspective?
- 4) What opportunities are available for the African-American man or woman to share his or her story and culture with the community?
- 5) How is our congregation involved in ministry in the African-American community?
- 6) In what type of ethnic neighborhood is our community located? What is our witness to people of other cultures by living here?
- 7) In what ways will our community welcome the family of our African-American community members?
- 8) What needs to change in our religious community

to make it more welcoming to an African-American woman or man?

- 9) What do we, as a congregation, think about our province’s formation policies and programs regarding women or men of color? Do they support the unique gifts of people of color, or do they attempt to “bleach” them to be more like the dominant culture?
- 10) Are we as a congregation willing to allow the African-American members to have the necessary support systems to grow and flourish, even if that means going outside of the community?
- 11) How and to what extent are we willing to prepare ourselves to accept African American women or men to form community, to serve, to proclaim the Gospel?
- 12) How does our congregation encourage and support African-American members to develop their own spirituality in the light of the charism of the congregation and their charism as a person of color?
- 13) Do we really want African Americans among us as community members?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Invite African Americans to celebrations and to be resource people.
- Experience the African-American woman or man’s way of praying, relaxing, cooking, conducting meetings.
- Contact local African-American religious men and women for guidance in learning how to become a welcoming community for an African-American candidate.
- Provide opportunities for cross-cultural spiritual and educational celebrations and experiences.
- Examine the values of the dominant culture and the African-American culture. Based on the values of the Gospel, discuss which values are negotiable and which are not.
- Celebrate major holidays of one or more ethnic groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROVINCES OR REGIONS

- The province formation plans can state clearly a value for diverse approaches to the formation plan that would serve to meet the specific cultural and ethnic needs of the candidate.
- Formation and vocation personnel can engage in a process of training for cross-cultural min-

RESOURCES

istry such as coursework or workshops at Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholics or seminars conducted by African Americans.

- African-American women and men can be actively engaged as planners, facilitators, resource persons and consultants at province level assemblies and projects.
- Provinces can implement a policy to establish business relationships with and purchase goods and services from African-American entrepreneurs.

National Black Catholic Congress
nbccongress.org

National Black Catholic Sisters Conference
nbsc68.com

National Black Clergy Caucus
tnbcc.com

Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Xavier University
xula.edu/ibcs

NRVC African American Religious Committee
nrvc.net (Select "About" tab. Select "NRVC Member areas and committees.")

U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, Subcommittee on African American Affairs
usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/index

- Province formation and vocation personnel can devise a national plan to utilize support networks such as those found on the "Resources" list on this page.

In general religious congregations need to begin serious reflection on the ways that unconscious racism causes barriers that result in the absence of earnest invitations and a lack of earnest responses from men and women who are African American.

In his 2010 address to the National Religious Vocation

Conference Father Bryan Massingale spoke on the implications of transformative love and passion for justice for vocation ministers. He said:

I believe that women and men religious are called to be agents of social reconciliation, healing a divided church and world. To do that, religious need a cultivated stance of unease... a transformative love that Christian tradition calls "compassion" and that Catholic social teaching calls "solidarity."

If this vision is true, he said, the implications include relating equally to and with people of color, tackling the issue of unconscious racism personally and corporately, and realizing that this change must begin with compassion and solidarity.

In the quickening Spirit of our Good God, we as vocation ministers must be about recognizing, reverencing and nurturing God's call of African-American women and men to religious life as brother, sister, and priest. As Father Bryan Massingale told us, "Our task as vocation ministers is to seek and call forth women and men who radiate the hope of a world made new." ■

A version of this article appeared in HORIZON, Summer 2012.

Related reading

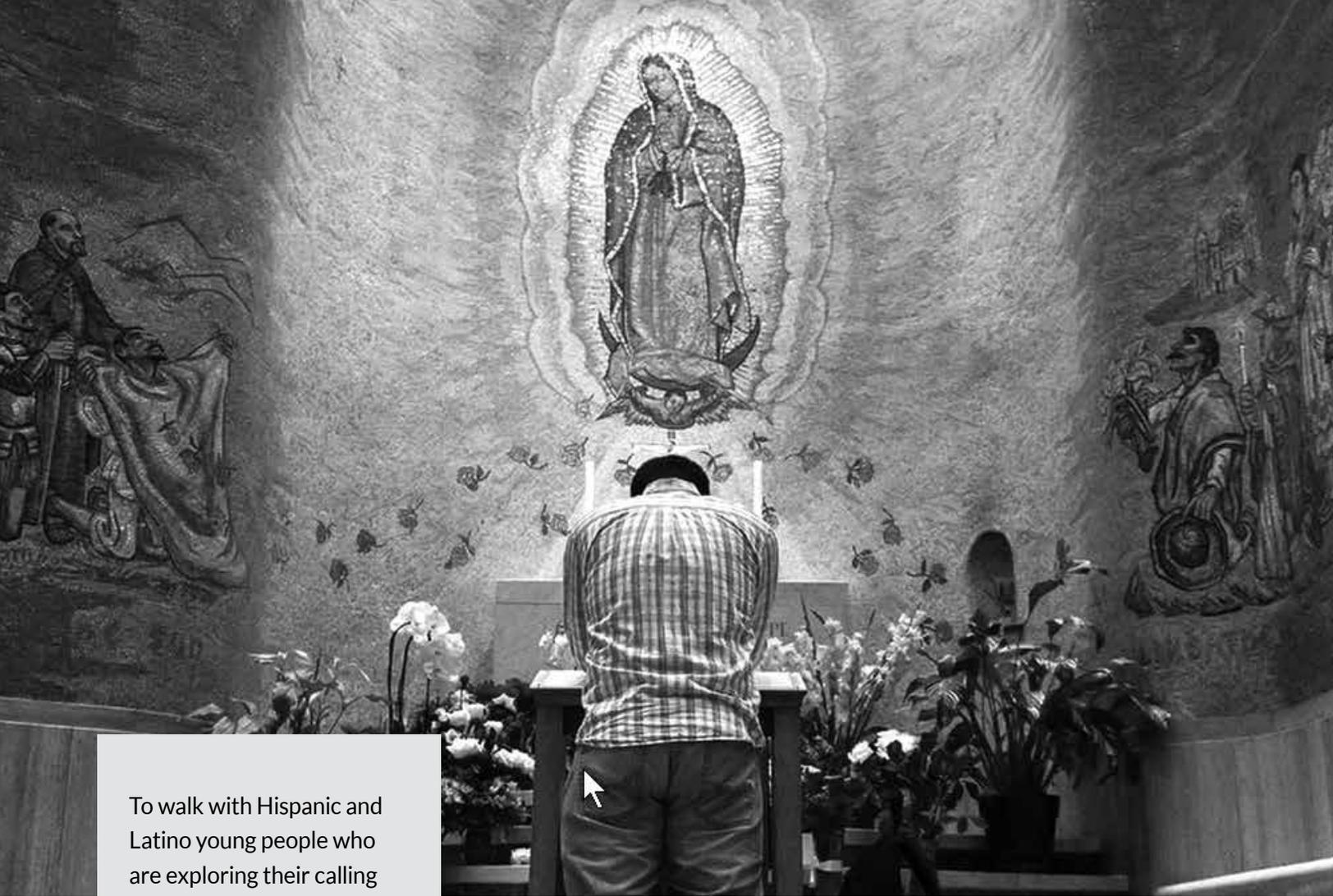
"Transformative love, passion for justice belong in vocation ministry," by Father Bryan Massingale, HORIZON, Winter 2011.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- 1) What is the definition of "intercultural" in our congregation as it currently exists in the U.S.?
- 2) Is there a genuine interest and commitment to engage in cross-cultural sharing and discussion in our religious congregation?
- 3) How can a discussion be advanced about how our congregation can include members from diverse cultural and ethnic groups?
- 4) It has been said that understanding your own culture helps you invite other cultures. How can we foster a process for this to begin?
- 5) How does our religious community witness the faith among African-American people?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- Formation and vocation personnel can engage in a process of training for cross-cultural ministry. This could involve taking courses or workshops at Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholics, taking advantage of webinars, or engaging in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' intercultural training (see usccb.org).
- African-American women and men in religious communities can be encouraged to gather and create networks to support one another for life in mission. Further, it is recommended that on-going financial, emotional, and psychological support be directed toward this effort.



JEFFREY BRUNO, JEFFREYBRUNO.COM

To walk with Hispanic and Latino young people who are exploring their calling involves getting to know them, taking the time to be with them, and entering into their reality.

Walking with *jóvenes* who are discerning their vocation

BY SISTER ANA CECILIA MONTALVO, F.Sp.S.



Sister Ana Cecilia Montalvo, F.Sp.S. has been a member of the Congregation of Daughters of the Holy Spirit since 1996. Originally from Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico, her

apostolic service has been mainly with adolescents and youth. Currently she is the assistant vocation director in the Vocation Office of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Texas.

THE FACES OF THE MANY YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN I have accompanied on their vocational journey come to my mind and heart as I take up this topic of accompaniment of *jóvenes* (young people). I have met them in campus ministries, parishes, regional retreats and national encounters. I pray to the Holy Spirit, the Soul of Vocation Direction, for enlightenment for all of us who give guidance to the *jóvenes* that God keeps calling to build the reign of God.

I hope to share insights and movements of the Spirit that I have been integrating into my vocation ministry to Hispanic/Latino young adults, especially first, second, and third generations of *jóvenes* discerning their call. I am not pretending to offer a recipe or a manual. No ministry has a recipe. Rather I will share my own experiences, strategies, and processes that allow us to journey together.

Clarifying terms

Terms such as Hispanic and Latino tend to be used interchangeably when they refer to two different realities. In this article I consider the following distinctions: Hispanics are people who speak Spanish or are descendants from a culture that speaks Spanish, arriving from more than 20 different countries, and Latinos are those who trace their roots to Latin America. I will be referring to the “jóvenes” as both Latinos and Hispanics, aware of the diversity among them.

When I speak about *jóvenes*, I refer to a great number of men and women who seek to flourish and have a better quality of life than their parents. *Jóvenes* seek a place where they belong and are accepted for who they are, with all their cultural richness. For the majority of those I minister with here in San Antonio, Spanish is spoken at home, and it is the language in which they express their faith. However, at school and work, *jóvenes* tend to communicate in English or a mix of both, which we call Spanglish.

Signs of the times

Our country and our church are becoming increasingly Hispanic. “More than 40 percent of all Catholics in the country are Hispanic, and 60 percent of Catholics under 18 are Hispanic. Of these, more than 90 percent were born in the United States” explains Hosffman Ospino, Ph.D., and Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, Ph.D. in a report on Catholic schools and the U.S. church. The other 10 percent of *jóvenes* either are undocumented immigrants who came here as young adults, or they are “dreamers,” people brought to the U.S. as children and raised here but who never obtained documents.

The V *Encuentro* National Research team report tells us that the regions with a majority of Hispanic Catholics are in the Southwest and California. In recent years several religious congregations have settled in these areas to minister and to open formation houses because of this demographic reality.

This data shows the importance of being physically present and interacting with *jóvenes* in campus ministry and in the Pastoral Juvenil [youth ministry]. We need to come to know them better, journey with them, and cultivate relationships, including relationships that involve religious life discernment.

Looking beyond colleges and universities, we can find *jóvenes* in many places vocation promoters visit. The *jóvenes* we have encountered surely come into our mo-

ments of prayer and inspire us to ask ourselves: “How can we accompany them as Jesus would?” The poet Federico Garcia Lorca says, “There are souls that you lean toward, like a sun-filled window.” The souls of our *jóvenes* are open and manifest new horizons. Let us move to encounter them.

The signs of the times in the church of the United States are inviting us to open doors to the youth of other cultures, races, and nations, and especially at this time to open our doors to our *jóvenes*. Even though the predominant culture in our religious communities might be of European or Asian descent, it is time to prepare our communities to embrace those who may look and speak differently. The prophet Joel says, “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.” (Joel 3:1). The dreams we carry in our hearts and the visions *jóvenes* see, can breathe freshness to our charism and mission, helping us value new faces, novelty, and diversity. *Jóvenes* enrich our communities with values such as solidarity, a desire to share life and faith, and generosity in both work and fiesta!

To better accompany and invite *jóvenes*, we must know something about their culture, a very large topic indeed, but let’s examine a few basics.

Family first

Family ties are very important for Hispanics/Latinos. The mother is critically important to the family because she has moral authority with both her children and grandchildren. Mothers summon and gather everyone to the table and to the altar. It is not unusual to see *jóvenes* attending Mass with their family or being present at family meals. For “the Mass and the table” give us fellowship that we celebrate as a family.

Motherhood is an important goal for women in Hispanic/Latino culture, and a mother is expected to sacrifice for her children and take care of elderly relatives. When we work with young women, we need to introduce them to spiritual motherhood as part of a Catholic sister’s wholeness as a woman. As a female pastoral minister, I see women (and here speaking specifically of Hispanic/Latino women) as having a maternal sensitivity that is much needed in today’s church and world. St. John Paul II, in his Letter to Women, talks about spiritual motherhood having an “inestimable value for the development of individuals and the future of society” and the church.

As we accompany *jóvenes* in their vocational dis-

cernment, working with their mothers and indeed the whole family is key. “Mi casa es tu casa” is a very popular expression among Hispanics/Latinos. Visiting the family in their own home, sharing with them at table, and getting to know them at a personal level becomes part of the vocation accompaniment.

In the Archdiocese of San Antonio, we tend to integrate family members into retreats and other vocational experiences. We offer the parents information and formation talks. This way parents learn about the process their children are taking part in. We involve the family by asking them to pray for their son or daughter attending the retreat and inviting them to the closing activity. The presence of the entire family, which comes to celebrate and congratulate the *joven*, always catches our attention. There are even times the family comes with a present.

Strong family ties are sometimes the reason an interest in religious life slows down. When a *joven* finishes his or her career preparation, especially when parents worked hard to help pay for college, there is a family expectation that the child will work to return that investment. For this reason some young people feel a duty to work and contribute economically to the family following their schooling. Once on a vocation retreat with *jóvenes* in their last year of college, I asked about their goals. A main priority was to work hard to help their families. It is here where the vocation director should walk patiently with the *joven*, so he or she may discover how to respond in a free and profound way to God’s call. For we know that God does not say “yes” and then “no”; God’s “YES” is permanent and forever faithful. At the same time, we should accompany the family, especially the parents, in a manner in which they can recognize that their adult child is not wasting his or her life and education or behaving ungratefully. We build a relationship so the family recognizes that their *joven* is accepting God’s invitation to love and serve as Jesus did. Indeed it is not an easy or quick task; therefore, prayer, closeness to the family, and help from the family’s pastor can be of great support.

El sabor of the Hispanic faith

For many Hispanic/Latino families, it is important to pass the faith down from one generation to the next.

When a *joven* finishes his or her career preparation, especially when parents worked hard to help pay for college, there is a family expectation that the child will work to return that investment.

Different religious traditions are preserved thanks to the family, especially the grandparents. *Religiosidad popular* (popular religiosity) plays a significant role in the life of faith of many *jóvenes*. As we walk with them, it is important to understand the meaning they give to celebrations such as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, pilgrimages, family prayer (especially the rosary), novenas, devotion to saints, and other celebrations. In the post-synod apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (Christ is Alive), Pope Francis said that “the variety of the manifestations of popular piety attract young people who do not readily feel at home in ecclesial structures and represent a concrete sign of their trust in God” (238).

Likewise, it is fundamental to recognize that in some parts of the U.S. the majority of the younger generation, especially the first and second generation, have received their faith in Spanish. Some have even told me, “Sister, I speak with God in Spanish.” Research from 1995 showed 61 percent of Hispanic young adult leaders spoke at least as much Spanish as they did English. Although most of the *jóvenes* I encounter are English-speaking and grow up embracing many of the values of the larger U.S. culture, they are also influenced by the Spanish language and a faith mediated through Hispanic cultural narratives and symbols. We can say that their faith has *sabor* (flavor) and meaning in Spanish.

The reality of Hispanic/Latino Catholics is shifting as much as the rest of society. Vocation promoters must pay careful attention to the secularizing trends of U.S. culture. Secularization has certainly affected the Hispanic community. In a report about Hispanics and the American church Hosffman Ospino affirms that the secularization of Hispanics is a major threat to the future of the Catholic Church in America. He reports that only 10 percent of Hispanic Catholic children attend Catholic schools, and fewer and fewer Hispanics under 30 attend church. A whole generation of Catholics may be disconnecting from the church.

Hispanic vocation in the U.S.

Secularization trends aside, culture continues to influence our vocation ministry approach with *jóvenes*. The majority of the Hispanic/Latino Catholic families I know still respect and value the figure of the nun, priest, and brother. Among Hispanics/Latinos who have rela-



A vocation director can accompany *jóvenes* simply by walking with them, building a relationship, getting to know them and their families, and learning about the culture.

tives in Mexico or Latin America, it is common to find some family member who has consecrated their life to God.

In the United States, religious life is no longer the white American enclave it used to be. Studies from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) report that newer entrants today are more likely to be non-Caucasian than in the past. Every year the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, working with CARA, releases an annual report on the new “entrance class” of those beginning formation. In 2019 15 percent of new entrants were Hispanic/Latino. These individuals could be born in the U.S., born elsewhere, be native Spanish speakers, or be native English speakers.

And they may or may not have citizenship papers. When it comes to citizenship documents, an important question vocation directors must ask themselves is: “How open am I to accompany *all* the *jóvenes* who walk in my door?” In process of accompaniment, we will encounter *jóvenes* with different migration histories and different legal statuses. Such situations can be overwhelming to a vocation director, as well as to a *joven* in discernment. However, our mission calls us to walk with them and become more familiar with the possibilities, so that a *joven* in discernment can find accompaniment when they knock at our door, instead of simply a no.

It is useful to know a little about migration law. We draw closer to their reality when we know the complications and consequences of lacking legal immigrant status and when we can offer possible options to them. The following options could work in some cases, but each

case is unique and has its own risks and possibilities. We present options to the *joven*, being clear about both the possibilities and risks. In the end she or he is the one to make the final decision about how to proceed. Some possible options for the undocumented who wish to join a religious order:

- If a community has formation houses in Mexico or Latin America, the *joven* could begin formation there while his or her case is resolved.
- Sometimes a vocation director or diocese on the border to Mexico can arrange for formation there.
- The candidate might find a religious community or seminary in her or his own country of origin.

When a *joven* asks for a waiver, the process of legal status resolution tends to take between three to 10 years. Again each case is unique.

Room for improvement

No matter what the legal status is of *jóvenes*, our ministry of accompaniment is important, and therefore we must build up our ministry with them. The document that came out of the V Encuentro acknowledged that vocation ministry among *jóvenes* is weak, and there are insufficient intentional Hispanic vocation ministry efforts, as well as an overall lack of institutional support for Hispanic youth, young adult and *pastoral juvenil* ministries. There are also few opportunities for His-



panic culture vocation retreats at local and regional levels. This reality causes us to ponder that even though there is high respect for priests and religious in Hispanic families, it doesn't necessarily mean that a true culture of vocations exists, allowing religious vocations to flourish. We still need to reach out to the families, especially the *jóvenes*.

We must accompany them, walk at their side, and create a vocational environment where they feel at home and can take vocation discernment seriously. A vocation director can understand and learn how to accompany a *joven* simply by walking with him or her and having the capacity to communicate and work across cultural boundaries. There is no other way.

To help orient ourselves for this, it is essential to connect with Catholic institutions that work with *jóvenes*, such as *La Red*, National Catholic Network of Pastoral Juvenil, *Asociación de Hermanas Latinas Misioneras en America*, *El Instituto de Fe y Vida*, and Mexican American Catholic College. Each of these groups can be located with a simple Internet search. These institutions can contribute with valuable resources and educational

opportunities to enhance your knowledge of Hispanic/Latino culture, especially of *jóvenes*.

I believe all vocation directors should be familiar with the National V Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, a priority initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. One of the aims of this Encuentro is to reflect on how Catholics can reach out, engage, and affirm Hispanic Catholic youth and young adults. For more information about the V Encuentro see vencuentro.org.

Finally we must not forget that our vocation ministry is one of sowing and cultivating. The fruits of our labors can take longer than we expect. It requires us to be proficient in accompaniment and to have faith in the Master of the harvest. We need passion to manifest the beauty of religious and priestly vocations and foster hope in a new generation. May the Holy Spirit, the giver of wisdom and understanding, the creator of communion and *encuentros*, teach us how to journey with our *jóvenes*—to embrace them in all their cultural richness, so we may see a blossoming of new disciples eager to serve the church and world. ■



Asian Catholics bring a wealth of gifts to religious life. Familiarity with Asian cultures can help communities better invite and receive new members with these gifts.

Communities that make an effort to understand Asian Catholics and consider their culture and needs are more likely to have a positive experience in inviting and receiving Asian members.

Six keys to inviting Asian Americans

YES, I AM DOING FINE,” replied Sister Ana as we sat down in the living room of her convent house. Even though we were alone, she whispered to me that I should just speak to her in English because that is now the official language of the house. I looked at her, perplexed because I knew the majority of the religious sisters living in the house were Vietnamese.

“Even when we are alone?” I asked. “Yes,” she told me, “The other sisters want us all to speak English because we are in America.” The frustration on her face pushed me away from continuing the language discussion.

This encounter that took place many years ago sticks with me as I reflect on the sizable proportion of Asian Americans entering religious life and priesthood in the United States. I have often wondered if other convents, seminaries, and houses of formation had an English-only policy to help improve their new members’ language skills. After investigating, I found that there was never a strict written policy in any community, but it was always suggested to new English speakers to practice it.

But as I have talked to Asian religious, the informal policy became much more complicated to me than just helping members become competent English speakers. Many wondered: Was this rule really to help the new members? How come non-Asian members were not encouraged to learn at least some of the language and culture of the Asian members, particularly when Asians were a majority? Couldn’t prayers or food or traditions of Vietnamese Catholicism become part of the life of the community? Was

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the English-only rule a subtle form of racism veiled under a cloak of fraternity? These questions cannot be adequately answered here, but they merit further reflection. They point toward the complex issues that arise in religious communities when Asians and Asian-Americans join what was a traditionally Caucasian group.

In the *2020 Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life*, Asians represented 13 percent of the newer members, that is those who have entered since 2003. Asians

are over-represented in religious life because they only account for 2.6 percent of U.S. Catholics. This report underscores the need to respond to this population.

In this article I hope to first provide a general snapshot of Asian-American Catholics. Second, I will look at six areas related to Asian-American candidates that I hope will provide vocation directors, community members,

and religious leaders a better understanding of these new vocations. I present these six facets in broad brush strokes: 1) understanding the cultural background, 2) family dynamics, 3) education and language, 4) food and socializing, 5) racism, and 6) preparedness of receiving communities.

“Asian” encompasses many cultures

First let us look at the overall Asian-American Catholic population. According to the 2010 U.S. census, Asians are a small but growing ethnic group in the United States. They are just 5.6 percent of the 308 million-plus people in the country, and by mid-century they are expected to rise to 10 percent.

The term “Asian” lumps together a number of groups. The U.S. Catholic bishops describe the breakdown on their website, uscbb.org: “The U.S. Asian Pacific population with the largest number of Catholics is the Filipino community, followed by the Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian, and Korean communities.” Growing numbers of Catholics can also be found among other Asian communities such as Indonesians, Laotians, and Burmese.

Among the Asian Catholic groups, the Chinese, Fili-

pinos, and Japanese were the first to arrive in the United States. In the late 1800s, they came in substantial numbers to work on the West coast. The Archdiocese of San Francisco in the 1870s was the first diocese to minister to Chinese immigrants. These three groups (Filipinos, Chinese and Japanese) can now claim many generations of Catholics, as well as newer Catholics still coming to the U.S. looking for economic betterment.

The other Asian Catholics—Koreans, Vietnamese, Indonesians, Laotians, and Burmese who arrived in the mid-20th century—came predominantly to escape political and civil conflicts in their respective countries. Many are refugees who came anticipating that they would go back to their home country. Still others have settled and now count second and third generations among their ranks.

Similar to previous Catholic immigrants, the newer Asian immigrants have some common traits: the request for liturgies in their own language, especially among the first generation immigrants; the creation of national parishes (Vietnamese and Koreans have the most); a habit of regular attendance at weekly Masses and holy days; a custom of pilgrimage to Marian shrines (for instance, annually Asian Americans flock to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.); and a custom of generously giving time to parish activities.

In addition the support for vocations is high among Asian Catholics because being a priest, brother, or sister is respected. These are professions that bring honor to the immediate family. But there are some concerns, as the second and subsequent generations become more influenced by an American society that does not value the vocation of religious life. Nevertheless, the support among Asian Americans for religious vocations remains high. I turn now to the six areas to be considered when inviting and keeping Asian Americans in religious life and the priesthood.

Since there is little information on the specific Asian ethnic groups entering religious life, I present here some general attributes that apply to most Asian groups. From my own observation, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Filipinos appear to be the predominant groups among Asians who are entering religious life and priesthood these days. Hence, my discussion will draw from experiences with these three groups but also try to maintain a broader perspective because there are growing numbers of Chinese, Indonesians, and South Asians interested in religious life. Since these vocations represent vastly different regions and cultures of Asia, I encourage vocation directors and their communities to become educated about the specific Asian Catholics they are encountering.

The support for vocations is high among Asian Catholics because being a priest, brother, or sister is respected. These are professions that bring honor to the immediate family.

1. Understand the particular culture

Understanding someone's cultural background means learning about the person's country, its traditions and practices. A vocation director and his or her community should have conversations about what they already know. They might consult references in print and online to gain elementary knowledge about the candidate's background. For example, I have met vocation directors who, when they meet potential candidates, ask directly what their background is, where they were born, and where their parents came from. This prevents guesswork and wrong assumptions—such as making a claim about a symbol that does not resonate with the candidate.

For instance, with a little research anyone can learn that the ubiquitous Asian symbols of chopsticks and bamboo are not used or recognized by all Asians. The chopstick is used only among Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Vietnamese. The remaining Asian groups—Indian Asians, Filipinos, Thais, and Burmese—do not use them. Knowing this, a vocation director can avoid the cultural mistake of offering chopsticks to a Filipino.

Also bamboo is not part of Korean or South Asian culture but is readily used by the Chinese and Japanese. Another confusing symbol is the lunar new year. All Asian cultures celebrate a new year marked by the cycles of the moon and not occurring on the same date every year such as in the Western calendar. Knowing this much, a vocation director might chance to ask questions about a candidate's new year. What is it called in his or her culture? How is it celebrated? And why does it fall on a different date each year? Being able to understand the major symbols for a particular candidate can help welcome that person, make him or her more comfortable, and also show that the vocation director took time to learn about him or her.

2. Filial piety is a core value

In researching any Asian culture, a vocation director would no doubt learn about filial piety, a practice that is central in the lives of most Asian Americans. Filial piety means giving respect to living parents and paying homage to dead ancestors. This piety transfers to all familial and social relationships. Respect is shown through keeping appropriate distance and performing proper gestures to uphold the honor and dignity of all involved. Particular obligations fall to the eldest child in a family to maintain these familial bonds. The gender

does make a difference in some cultures, but that is not always strictly observed. Hence, the eldest son or daughter must take responsibility for the elderly parents until and beyond their death. The value of honor first learned in the familial relationship will be applied to all aspects of life. All relationships take on a sense of honor for the other. Also, for many Asian Americans, age becomes a factor in relationships. The elder in a relationship is always shown deference because elders have gained wisdom through lived experiences.

Filial piety has many consequences, both good and bad. One in particular is the insatiable expectation parents (first generation) have for their children (second generation), manifested through repaying the parents' sacrifices for the child. The child's payback seldom involves money or any other tangible compensation. Rather, repayment for the parents' sacrifice takes place through educational and professional achievements, making the parents proud and affirming the worth of their sacrifices. Many second-generation Asian Americans choose occupations consistent with their parents' desire for a mark of success as defined by the larger society, such as becoming a medical doctor or lawyer. In turn the result is that some Asian Americans do not want their child to become a consecrated religious or priest because there is not much visible financial reward.

However the dynamic of filial piety can work in favor of a choice for religious life. Devout Asian Catholic parents who desire to have a priest or nun in their family will be very supportive and proud. They will feel that the child is repaying them with a profession that brings honor to the family and respect to them as parents. In some Asian cultures, such as among Vietnamese and Korean, there are special names and tremendous recognition bestowed on parents who have a son as a priest or a daughter in consecrated life.

Sometimes this wholehearted support and desire for a religious or priestly vocation can overshadow the real desires of daughters or sons who may respond out of filial desire to please their parents rather than out of an internal sense of calling. This is a complicated issue which does not surface immediately, but it is something that vocation directors should be aware of. Thus, it is always good for a vocation director to visit the family setting of potential candidates because this will provide a better understanding of filial piety at work. Vocation directors can observe how the candidate defers to the parents, how he or she interacts with siblings, and what role he or she plays in the overall family relationships. Through these familial observations, directors can ask questions about

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the responsibilities that a candidate has in the family. From the discussion of responsibilities, a director can probe further about whether the candidate has thought through cultural implications, and about whether he or she feels heavy expectations from the family.

To invite an Asian American into religious life, it is necessary to understand how the dynamics of filial piety and honor play out in vocational development. Since an older person will receive respect because of age and rank, a younger discernor may not say or do anything to cause conflict. A young discernor or a young person in formation may feel that he or she must just learn and observe rather than to cause tension, such as by questioning a rule in a formation house. This brings us to the third attribute, the Asian value for education.

3. Education is esteemed

Education is so highly valued in Asian cultures that it is a collective pursuit rather than just an individual one. The individual must take into consideration the expecta-

tions of the immediate as well as the extended family. As a collective affair, it can create enormous pressure for an individual to be successful in every aspect of his or her education. Also, it can be humiliating for an Asian candidate to not succeed in the classroom due to a deficit such as a lack of fluency in English. Added to this pressure is the stereotype that all Asian Americans perform well in school. Asians who enter American schools with insufficient skills may not get the help they might need because of this stereotype.

Even though education is a highly valued, collective affair, vocation directors will need to discern the individual capability of each candidate. They will have to evaluate not only the capability and desire of the new member but discuss realistically the person's educational goals. This is especially true for Asian-American candidates who lack English proficiency. These candidates will need fluency programs and other help to first bring their language skills up to speed. Then they can further their education. Poor language skills should not deter a religious vocation, but lack of fluency may challenge an

individual's educational desires. It can be troubling when education is highly valued but is not a reality for some because of individual ability. The individual may feel the expectations of his or her family, and vocation directors should be aware of that when discussing education with potential candidates.

In considering Asian Americans not fluent in English, a vocation director should inform candidates about the help and expectations of the community. Most candidates probably are already trying to learn the language but may not have adequate opportunities to practice it, or they may have to curtail their classes because of other obligations. The community's help and expectations should be communicated from the beginning so that candidates do not have to later endure restrictions on using their native language. This is particularly important for communities with many members from the same ethnic group. They will want to express themselves with others who understand them and share the same situation.

4. Food can unite or divide

Food is an essential identity marker for many Asian Americans. Since Asian food is different from "American" cuisine, it is naturally distinctive and important to Asian Americans. It is both a comfort and an expression of who they are. Among Asians there are particular cuisines for each ethnic community, making it difficult to generalize about the food, and yet many times the discussion of food in religious communities revolves around its aroma. This is the point where food can become a point of contention.

When Asian Americans want to cook or eat their own food in a new community, they frequently come across members who say that the food "smells." All food produces an aroma, either good or bad, depending on the perspective of the one smelling it. Many Asians are told that their food "smells," which in general means smelling bad. For some this can be jarring and for others embarrassing because they feel they have offended others. When Asians have grown up with favorite foods that give off a particular aroma that reminds them of home or family, then being told it smells can cause tension in their engagement with the larger community.

Ideally food can open up opportunities for religious communities to share and to discuss, for example, why certain aromas give off a pungent odor but taste delicious, such as fish sauce or kimchi. In the same way some cheeses, such as Limburger, can be quite strong smelling but actually taste good.

The community inviting in Asian Americans must be aware that many will want to have foods from their homeland. Those who have entered communities with large numbers of Asian Americans have been able to cook and share their foods. Asian Americans in predominantly white communities often find their access to traditional foods is lacking. But this can be an opportunity for both the new member and the community to invite each other to try one another's foods.

5. Racism is real

Within the racial conversations in America, Asian Americans continue to be considered "foreign," which inevitably excludes them from debates that pit the majority whites against the minority blacks. Asians do not fit in either of those two camps. Furthermore Asian Americans are given the label of "forever foreign"—or the more insidious label of the "model minority."

The "model minority" concept imposed on Asian Americans provides a favorable recognition compared to other minority groups, but ultimately it keeps them from being completely welcomed as part of larger white-dominated community. The "model minority" stereotype creates resentment by other racial minorities who see the educational achievement, successful businesses, and financial security of many Asian Americans. But the label also glosses over inequalities among Asian Americans. For instance, many Asian Americans use public assistance such as welfare and food stamps. Many Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians) have a disproportionately high rate of high school dropouts compared to Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Americans.

There are also racial characterizations to consider about Asian Americans. Those who are born and raised in the U.S. can find it racially insensitive when they encounter questions about whether they can speak their native language fluently; how they practice the traditions and customs of their "home" country; and to whether they know the full history of their "home" country. These questions are often innocent, but when Asian Americans regularly confront them, it communicates that they remain "forever foreign" in America.

These racial stereotypes can be particularly harm-

Asian Americans are given the label of "forever foreign"—or the more insidious label of the "model minority."

LEARN MORE

In 2018 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released “Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters” (online at usccb.org). This pastoral response draws attention to and supports Asian American religious vocations. It also calls for an increase in the number of and visibility of Asian American leaders within the American church. The document asserts that this will attract new consecrated and ordained vocations and support the respective communities. The document emphasizes that representation and presence are key.

In addition, the USCCB has produced a course to help church groups develop cross-cultural awareness and competence. Learn more about the course at usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/.

ful when they occur within the church and religious life. However religious communities can help remedy this. For instance communities with large numbers of Asian Americans can make an effort to appoint Asian members to administrative bodies, such as leadership councils and formation programs. The inclusion demonstrates in an important way the awareness of the community, and it can be a means of encouraging new members from the Asian Catholic population. Their inclusion demonstrates that they truly belong, and it sends this message to members of all races. Another practical step is to have new Asian-American candidates share their stories, not just about their ethnic background but rather about their vocational journey. This will help members see the similarities in God’s call to all people. Sharing stories connects the candidates to the members of the community and creates common ground.

6. Prepare members of the receiving community

A call to religious life or priesthood is both personal and communal. It is through an intimate relationship with God that a person feels drawn to serve the church in consecrated life. The call is communal in that the person’s family and friends become a source of support, and the religious community needs to confirm, through the vocation director, that the candidate’s call is genuine. In addition to confirming an individual’s call, a community that is inviting and receiving Asian Americans

should be willing to explore the differences in culture and racial experiences of Asian Americans. It is necessary to prepare members of receiving communities to understand the realities that confront the Asian-American population. These realities do not go away when people enter religious life. In some cases, racial and ethnic differences become even more heightened.

This preparation for including Asian Americans in religious community will require knowing the five previous attributes and making them part of the community’s discussion. Members should be aware of the cultural, linguistic, and racial differences of their new member and not shy away from encountering the difference. A community that is willing to be open will find that it will have committed members for life.

§ § § § §

Asian Americans have created and sustained their place within the American landscape. They will continue to help fashion an American society that becomes ever more diverse. The American Catholic Church will also experience this diversity, especially as more Asian men and women enter religious life and the priesthood.

Many Asian Americans who enter religious life in the United States have the same questions and concerns as any other discerners. They have the same desire to become better followers of Jesus and the same hunger to faithfully live the Gospels. But they face many different challenges because they are entering communities that are culturally, socially, and racially different from themselves.

Some may feel that they cannot do anything about the differences and must accept their new environment without question. Most do not realize that their receiving religious community may not have consciously thought out the different cultural and racial backgrounds of new members. Many communities have not given thought to the changing face of the American church and its impact on them.

Therefore the responsibility falls on both the new member and the receiving community to acknowledge the differences. But ultimately it is the religious community that must make the first step toward a hospitable environment where new members feel welcome to explore a call from God. May all of our religious communities—through the grace of God—welcome in word and deed the gifts that Asian-American Catholics can bring. ■

A version of this article appeared in HORIZON, Fall 2014.



Two participants on a pilgrimage sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada converse.

The rich rewards of pilgrimage

The COVID-19 pandemic has put travel of all types on hold, but knowing that religious communities usually plan large-scale events far in advance, we present this outline of a pilgrimage program to inspire and aid readers to consider this possibility. The author's community began working with young people to organize the first pilgrimage two years in advance.

A PILGRIMAGE IS A TIME of inner and outer exploring, learning, renewal, and recommitment. For young people who are exploring their gifts and talents and their place in the world, a pilgrimage can be a sacred time of spiritual growth and even vocational discernment. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada and their lay ministries have found that sponsoring pilgrimages has been a beautiful way to forge relationships with young adults and introduce them to our rich spiritual traditions.

Over the last several years, young men and women in a group called Faith Connections—a lay run ministry sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto—have asked for and collaborated in organizing three pilgrimages with the sisters. The experience has been life-giving for all.

Idea sparked by “Francis Fest”

Our pilgrimage concept began in 2012 when Faith Connections collaborated with St. Bonaventure Parish, in Toronto, and the Conventual

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congregation, she shares the joy in her life with young adults. Contact Sister Rosemary at rfry@csj-to.ca.



Sisters of St. Joseph and the pilgrims gather for the Friday evening icebreaker during the North Bay, Ontario pilgrimage.

Franciscans to take 10 young adults to a “Francis Fest.” This was a gathering of 45 young adults (from Toronto, Ontario; Raleigh, North Carolina, and Syracuse, New York) who met at the Franciscan Church of the Assumption in Syracuse, New York. Father Eric de la Pena, O.F.M. Conv. led the pilgrims in a weekend program that sought to give them a “glimpse of the great spiritual wealth of the Franciscan Order, so that these values can be transmitted into the future.”

During the weekend the young people learned the pillars of Franciscan spirituality, prayed the Divine Office with the friars, visited the shrine of Sister Marianne Cope, a recently canonized Franciscan sister, and participated in the ministries of the friars to the poor in the neighborhood.

Afterward the Faith Connections ministry team, inspired by the experience in Syracuse, began to dream and ask whether they could organize something similar—perhaps a “Joseph Jam”—in collaboration with various communities of Sisters of St. Joseph. The team considered inviting young people on a weekend journey to visit a CSJ community, learn about the charism, participate in ministry, enter into prayer, eat together, and laugh together? Could young adults be gathered from diverse geographical regions to participate?

The idea was presented to the leadership of the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada by the Faith Connections team. Possible ways to be involved were participating on a visioning team, being part of the event planning team, being a host congregation, bringing a group of young adults, or simply sharing pilgrimage information with one’s congregation. The Federation leaders were interested, and planning began.

Pilgrimage itineraries

During the next two years the Faith Connections ministry team and members of the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada met with several young adults to determine the schedule, format and content of a pilgrimage based on the spirituality and ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

This process resulted in three pilgrimages over the next six years, with a fourth for 2020 that was held, in part, by Zoom, with the full pilgrimage to take place later. Each pilgrimage was evaluated and the next one adjusted accordingly.

Faith Connections publicized the pilgrimages, and the sisters hosted the pilgrims. For each pilgrimage, a booklet was prepared for every pilgrim containing the prayers, music, presentations, reflection questions, and prayer methods for the pilgrimage. The booklets left space for pilgrims to write notes and observations.

The theme for each pilgrimage was based on a recent writing of Pope Francis. We chose a destination from among the cities with CSJ foundations established by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto. Following is a description of what happened on the pilgrimages.

The pilgrims who were able to meet at a retirement home of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, where the sisters gathered to greet them and give a blessing as they set out on the first part of their journey in car pools. Individual sisters also “adopted” one of the pilgrims and wrote him or her a personal note and promised to pray for their pilgrim during the weekend. Pilgrims identified this as one of the important moments of the event.

Leaving Toronto, the young people followed a pre-

pared guide that pointed out the early foundations and present ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph that they passed on their route.

Pilgrimages have been held to London, Ontario; Hamilton, Ontario, and North Bay, Ontario. Each pilgrimage imparted information about the foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in that particular city and region, their ministries, and how the sisters lived their spirituality as CSJs according to the particular theme of the pilgrimage. The theme for our first pilgrimage to London, “Living Joy,” was based on Pope Francis’ encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). In Hamilton, during the Year of Mercy, the theme was “Living Mercy,” and in North Bay the theme was “Living Faith”—based on *Gaudete et Exsultate* (On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World).

Sisters of St. Joseph throughout the world live an Ignatian spirituality. This was reflected in the prayer experiences. During the “Living Mercy” pilgrimage, participants were led in a guided meditation on “Jesus as the face of the Father’s mercy,” using the scripture passage, Luke 14:1-14. To gather up the graces of the weekend on Sunday morning, in both London and Hamilton, the pilgrims were led through another Ignatian spiritual custom, the Examen prayer or awareness Examen, based on the theme of the pilgrimage.

Each city required some logistical adaptations. In London, the team and pilgrims slept in a local university residence hall and had their meals and activities at a nearby house of sisters where there was also a residence for senior sisters and a palliative care service for the city. In Hamilton there was enough space in the sisters’ main house for the team and pilgrims to stay there. And in North Bay some of the team and pilgrims stayed in the motherhouse while others commuted to a camp on another lake about 15 minutes away.

On Fridays we arrived at our destination in time for supper with the sisters. During all the pilgrimages our meals were eaten with the sisters of the hosting community. This provided a rich and relaxed venue for new learnings on the part of both the pilgrims and the sisters. In London we were able to have a barbeque with the sisters on Saturday evening. In the lineup for the hamburgers, one elderly sister was invited to go to the front of the line to which she retorted “No, I am waiting for the new friends I made today.” Earlier in the day she had taken a group of the pilgrims to her room and shown them prized pictures of her family and crafts she had made.

Supper on Friday nights was followed by a lively ice breaker, an introduction to the theme of the pilgrimage

as lived by sisters, and the Divine Office. We topped off Friday evenings with a social. A special event in North Bay on Friday night was the re-enactment of *Woman at the Well* by John Shea, by the young adults. This was the cause of much hilarity but also deep reflection as we shared our inner reactions to the story.

Saturday’s activities, during the day, were adapted to the particular location of the pilgrimage. In London, the pilgrims learned about the environmentally friendly house of the Sisters, helped to clean up the garden, and entertained some dementia patients with a sing along.

In both London and Hamilton we spent the afternoon on a “Hike and Prayer” throughout the city to various locations where the sisters had established ministries.

In the rain in North Bay we had a pilgrimage throughout the large motherhouse where modern Stations of the Cross were set up and different sisters spoke of their ministry, relating stories of those they served to Jesus’ suffering on the way to Calvary.

Saturday night on each pilgrimage included Adoration and Taize prayer with the sisters. Pilgrims had opportunities for sacramental reconciliation and spiritual direction. In London one of the priests who had come to help with confession was heard saying he “loved to be around when the Holy Spirit was creating a buzz.”

On Sunday morning in London and Hamilton we had time to gather up the graces of the pilgrimage and celebrate the Sunday liturgy with the sisters before the return home after lunch.

In North Bay, the Sunday liturgy was celebrated late on Saturday afternoon with all the Sisters at the motherhouse. On Sunday, three of the pilgrims shared their own “Living Faith” journey with the group. This was a very moving experience for everyone.

Another highlight of the North Bay pilgrimage was that the bishop for that diocese, Bishop Marcel Damp-house, participated in all the activities with the young adults throughout the weekend. His humble, friendly demeanor and participation as one of the pilgrims gave young people an opportunity to meet and speak with him apart from his more formal ministry. The bishop remarked on how much he had learned about the ministries of the sisters in his diocese.

Blessings of the pilgrimages

These pilgrimages were filled with gifts and graces for both the pilgrims and the sisters. One way we know the young adults enjoyed them is that several pilgrims have

attended all three pilgrimages and have invited their friends to come as well. According to the evaluations, a consistently popular aspect of the pilgrimages was spending time with the sisters, particularly the elderly ones. The pilgrims were impressed at their years of commitment and loved to listen to their stories. For some young adults this contact totally changed their idea of a sister from stereotypes to women who are serious, joyful, committed, and engaged. They see sisters aware of changing needs and willing to adapt to meet them.

In casual conversation while traveling to the pilgrimage sites or taking part in the ministry activities, the young people were able to experience the sisters as human beings like themselves. At the barbecue in London one pilgrim was amazed that a sister might drink a beer at a party on a hot summer night.

While learning about the varied ministries in each location, the young people became aware of how much the sisters had contributed to the social fabric throughout the province of Ontario since their arrival in 1851. The sisters, too, enjoyed having young people at meals, Eucharist, and prayer. In the times they visited and chatted together, they formed new relationships, some of

which have continued over the years.

New relationships among the pilgrims have also been formed, and a private Facebook group has grown among the pilgrims. For the most recent pilgrimage to North Bay some of the pilgrims met for supper before the pilgrimage to get to know one another. In addition, one of the groups has held a reunion. A reunion is now one of the new initiatives we hope to carry forward with future pilgrimages.

Several pilgrims identified the spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage as meaningful. They learned new ways of praying both from the booklets prepared for each pilgrimage and the methods incorporated into the weekend. They appreciated the opportunities for confession and spiritual direction and identified these as occasions for new beginnings.

Evaluations of all the three pilgrimages asked that the time be longer and that there be more time for reflection, contemplation, and private prayer. Clearly, each of these pilgrimage experiences has been a time for connection to God and one another, a time for learning and inspiration. We hope our next pilgrimage—in the planning process right now—will result in similar blessings. ■

What my pilgrimage with the sisters taught me

By Juan Antonio Lopéz

My experience on the retreat was, in a word, amazing. It taught me a big lesson, and that is that happiness does not lie in achieving what society calls “success”.

As a young adult, it is so hard not to get bogged down by thoughts of, “I haven’t achieved this,” “I could have been more successful by now,” “Work, work, work.” I believe everyone has experienced these types of thoughts at one point or another. We aspire, we long for, and we see “the goal,” the car, the title, and so on with yearning eyes.

A weekend spent away with the Sisters of St. Joseph was like a bucket of cold water (in a good way!). It made me say to myself, “Dude, what you keep yearning for is not something you will find on the outside!”

Seeing the simplicity of the sisters, their humanness and joy of just simply

“being,” left me with my eyes wide open. I couldn’t help but say to them, that they are like children who just have fun, who truly embrace the phrase “enjoy yourself.” They live authentically, enjoying who they are and their relationships with others. They live with true joy, compassion, and happiness, and for me that was like hitting the wall (again, in a good way).

True joy lies in cultivating the internal virtues, connecting with yourself and others, living in the presence of God throughout your day, and that’s exactly what I saw in them. Even though this idea already kind of made sense to me, actually witnessing that during the retreat made it come more alive within me.

While getting to know some of the sisters, one shared her story of flying to Africa to build a school for children in need. Another sister is currently coordinating a

construction project to build apartments for people in need. I also heard many other stories. Listening to them left me astonished. They not only live simply and joyfully, but they also live with purpose, and that, I believe, is part of why I saw such joy and life within them.

Many of these women are in their 60s, 70s, or older, but nonetheless they all have a youthful joy and life within them that is filled with motivation and compassion. That sounds like something I want to have. I don’t believe we should ever trade that kind of joy for anything, especially if it is to replace it with the fulfillment of our external desires. If we do that, we will never be truly joyful.

A weekend with the Sisters of St. Joseph gave me an opportunity to witness them embracing true happiness and bringing that sensibility into daily life. And that, to me, is “Living Faith.” ■



CHRIS MONTGOMERY, UNSPLASH

COVID-19 sparks ministry, creativity

MEMBERS OF NRVC—like people the world over—have experienced the pandemic restrictions in ways both good and bad. Emotionally and practically, life has been harder for some and not particularly burdensome for others. In terms of work, most members reported in a recent survey that they have adapted to greater reliance on technology without too many hiccups. Some are even enjoying newfound competence and success in ministering via virtual technology.

Emotional and spiritual ups and downs

Emotionally, our members have experienced a wide range of responses, each according to their individual circumstances and pressures. Some have endured a ramped up and tiring workload, with additional caregiving, administrative, and fundraising duties. Grief and anxiety have hit some individuals hard, especially those who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19—family, community members, and friends. Many members miss hugs and handshakes and the social contact of being with people up close in real life. Furthermore, members are disturbed at the heightened level of the country's social and racial injustices.

The pandemic has had a silver lining for some, as they have enjoyed a lighter workload and additional time for prayer and self care (a great deal of time was freed up initially by travel restrictions and event cancellations). Some members find themselves coping with their COVID-19 lives with equanimity, knowing themselves to be less burdened than others. The communal social

structure of religious life has freed many NRVC members from social isolation, although it has in some cases intensified difficult relationships. Even though many members have been unable to worship and celebrate the sacraments as they normally would, a large number report that faith and prayer have been sources of strength. Some have even reported better balance in work-prayer-community time.

New forms of ministry

Although the pandemic has psychologically impacted NRVC members in widely different ways, members agree on one truism: human encounter, free of technology, is the ideal way to establish and nurture relationships of all types, including those cultivated in vocation ministry. Many members report that they're glad to have phoning, texting, and videoconferencing, but they find screen-free human contact more informative, energizing, and lifegiving. They miss it fiercely.

Nonetheless, vocation ministers have revealed that they are adaptable and creative. Many are trying new techniques. Members now rely more heavily than ever on technology-assisted connections with discerners and co-workers. Even with its limits, the forced move to technology has allowed many members to have broader and more frequent connection than otherwise would be possible. Some say that attendance at virtual events seems to have been larger than if the events had been in person. This finding may encourage many to keep using virtual technology after the pandemic in order to make contact with inquirers, discerners, pre-postulants, and others more affordable and less time consuming.

VOCATION MINISTRY DURING CORONAVIRUS	
Responded to discerner inquiries or communications.	75%
Organized or took part in online meetings related to vocation ministry.	68%
Made phone calls and/or sent texts to vocation contacts.	64%
Used social media to communicate with discerners, prospects, candidates, and others in vocational target audience.	61%
Performed administrative tasks for vocation ministry (updating contact files, organizing photos, planning, etc.).	58%
Held online/livestreamed prayer.	43%
Celebrated liturgies online/livestreamed.	38%
Created video content about my community.	30%
Sent vocation-related cards or letters via the postal service.	30%
Took part in vocation-related online learning.	20%
Hosted an online retreat.	11%

NRVC Survey June 2020

NRVC members report using all the alternative forms of connection at their disposal to make contact with women and men inquirers and discerners. Above is a listing of ways NRVC members have conducted ministry during pandemic restrictions.

Tips for carrying on

NETWORK WITH NRVC MEMBERS: YOU MAY HAVE A LOCAL EXPERT! Most regions have multiple members who are adept at using technology. Don't be shy about asking your Member Area Coordinators for suggestions about who might be able to provide knowhow or guidance on things like socially distanced assessments, video-

conference retreats, and Zoom meetings with discerners. The Member Area Coordinators have met many or most of the members in their areas and can likely share names and contact information and their own wisdom on many topics. A list of Member Area Coordinators and details of member gatherings are posted on nrvc.net.

USE ONLINE LEARNING TO EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT TECHNOLOGY. Search YouTube using different keywords until you find helpful materials. Remember, some videos are made by professionals and others have been made by amateurs, but in any case, you may find visual, step-by-step answers about exactly what you need. For sustained training, you may want to see whether your library offers free online courses about video-conferencing (or a host of other topics) through a provider such as Lynda.com.

FOCUS ON POSSIBILITIES, AND ATTEND TO NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE. Members who offered tips for ministry during coronavirus repeated the need to focus on what *can* be done and be open to innovation and creative solutions to problems. One of the most common types of advice they offered was to do whatever possible to maintain relationships with young adults and other contacts. Many vocation ministers noted that they were forced to go outside their comfort zone and use techniques and technologies that they are not drawn to. One said: "Be creative and think outside the box. Talk to young adults about what they desire. Be willing to be uncomfortable and try new things!" Another wrote: "Engage with young adults even if they aren't explicitly thinking about religious life. They are looking for ways to connect to a church they love. They are looking to connect with one another."

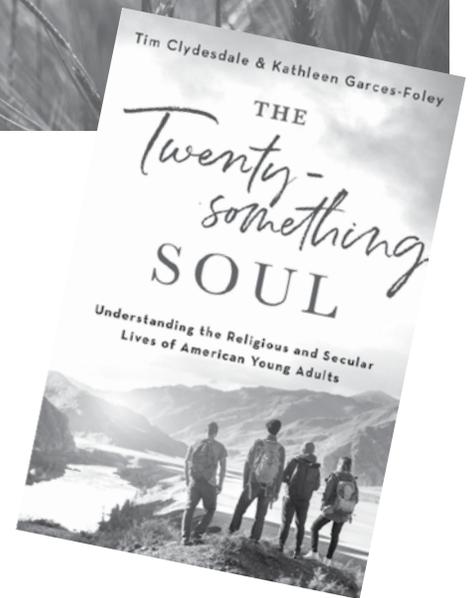
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The COVID-19 season of our lives and ministry will last for an undetermined length of time. A great deal about the virus and its impact is simply unknown, including when a vaccine will be available or if a "second wave" will happen. Through it all, vocation ministers will continue to work, pray, listen, unite, and hope.

It's a good time to remember the words of Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., who knew something about the persevering spirit of so many NRVC members: "Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make change. But if each one would light a candle, we'd have a tremendous light." ■

Reported by Carol Schuck Scheiber, HORIZON editor

It's clear that the "harvest is plenty" across a wide swath of Catholics.



BY FATHER MARK MOSSA, S.J.



Father Mark Mossa, S.J. is the director of campus ministry for St. Mary Student Parish at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He

discovered his own vocation in his late 20s, while working in youth ministry. As a Jesuit, he has led numerous retreats for young adults, and has taught and worked in campus ministry at Spring Hill College, Fordham University, and Loyola University, New Orleans. He is the author of *Already There: Letting God Find You*, and *Saint Ignatius Loyola--The Spiritual Writings*.

Twentysomethings: more spiritual interest than meets the eye

PERHAPS THE FIRST TAKEAWAY that ought to be highlighted from the book, *The Twenty-Something Soul: Understanding the Religious and Secular Lives of American Young Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2019), is that it challenges the long-articulated trope, that youth and young adults today identify themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.” Perhaps this was the case of teenagers or twentysomethings 20 years ago, but the findings of the National Study of American Twenty-Somethings (NSAT), which this book distills, clearly don’t support this conclusion with regard to the vast majority of them today. The book bases its conclusions on the study, which began in 2008 and sought a sense of where most American twentysomethings fell in terms of choices regarding religious affiliation (or not), and how they might vary even within a given denomination. The study included only those who identify as: Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Evangelical Christian, or “None.” (Jews, Muslims, and young people of other faiths were not part of the study, meaning that most—91 percent—but not all were represented.)

The authors frame their presentation of the study in the context of the demands of what is now commonly referred to as “emerging adulthood,”

which presumes that adulthood for many young Americans is deferred by extended adolescence until the mid-to-late-20s. As such, the authors observe: “To rightly understand twentysomethings requires seeing the world that twentysomethings have inherited: a place where global economic and macro-cultural changes have made secure careers elusive, where family life is often unstable, where marriage and parenthood have become lifestyle options, where the path to financial and personal independence is littered with a hundred obstructions, and where spiritual growth is promoted outside organized religions as well as inside.” Within this context, they found evidence to support three categories of adherents among those who identify as Catholic, Mainline Protestant, or Evangelical Christian. They are: active, nominal, or estranged. More broadly, the authors also identify four main strategies that all

It’s not so much that young adults aren’t committed but that they are committed differently.

the twentysomethings employed in engaging a religious or spiritual life: prioritizing it, rejecting it, sidelining it, or practicing an eclectic approach.

That they found the “eclectic approach” to be rarest also seems to exclude “spiritual but not

religious” as a useful category. Indeed, pointing to the endurance of American pragmatism, they suggest that a period of “sidelining” is common, during which twentysomethings prioritize the shifting demands of young adult life, postponing decisions about religious commitment to a time when things are more stable.

More strong commitment today than in the 1980s

The good news of this study is that the decline in religious and spiritual practice presumed in this generation is not as steep as often thought. And, despite the fact that an increasing number of twentysomethings identify as “Nones,” “strongly committed twentysomethings are, moreover, as prevalent now as they were four decades ago.” It’s not so much that young adults aren’t committed but that they are committed differently than in the past. They also tend to worship at churches with significant twentysomething populations, such as university campus ministries and “young-adult-friendly” churches.

This means that for Catholics in their 20s an ideal setting is a university parish, or a parish frequented by

people of the same age, socioeconomic and educational status. The three most important factors Catholics said they considered when selecting a parish “were community, spiritual experiences and church leadership.” The parish should be a place that allows them to connect with other young adults both at and outside the parish. Spiritual experiences that active Catholics were drawn to often focused on the Eucharist, Eucharistic Adoration and Confession.

Prayer and retreats were also considered important, especially if experienced with young adults like them. Still, while a focus on the Eucharist was common to many, this didn’t necessarily determine what they expected of parish leadership. (Young people were split on what content they looked for in a homily, some looking for orthodoxy, others for openness, and some hoping to be challenged.) While they don’t fit neatly into “traditional” or “progressive” categories, “they have strong opinions about what it means to be a Catholic, and are looking for a priest whose teachings align with their core convictions.” Those with such strong core convictions, no matter where they fall on a spectrum, may be among the most promising candidates for religious life, and they may or may not be in church, especially if the leadership offends their convictions.

While these young people with strong convictions would be those that tend to prioritize their religious and spiritual lives, they are not the only twentysomethings that you’ll see at church on Sunday. “Nominal” twentysomething Catholics would be present at least occasionally, even if spiritual growth is not a priority for them. Still, both groups, the authors conclude, demonstrate “durability.” “Young adult Catholics as a population possess a remarkably stable proportion of actively committed adherents who had important experiences in the faith as children that they wish to replicate for their children.” A surprising finding of this study is that some who identify themselves as Nones might also be found in the pews on Sunday (one in four of them attend worship occasionally). Indeed, if pressed, Nones might have more in common with nominal or estranged Catholics than they care to admit, especially if their occasional worship or spiritual activities take place at a Catholic parish, or among Catholic peers.

Though this review is far from a thorough summary, the implications of these findings for vocation ministry might be somewhat daunting. It’s clear that the “harvest is plenty” across a wide swath of Catholics (all three categories), and Nones. “In short,” explain the authors, “religion and spirituality make a difference in the lives of

young adults, and not just among those who prioritize these matters, but also among those who reject religion, postpone their decisions about it, or pursue a spiritual path of their own.” It’s not clear what to make of certain observations.

“Religion and spirituality make a difference in the lives of young adults, and not just among those who prioritize these matters, but also among those who reject religion, postpone their decisions about it, or pursue a spiritual path of their own.”

For instance: among the groups that were studied, Catholics were the second most likely to be parents and most likely to graduate from college. Also, across the board, those who prioritize their religious and spiritual life are more inclined toward marriage, parenthood, and social responsibility. Since marriage was the only vocation choice

explicitly considered in the study, does this make active Catholics more or less likely to consider priesthood or religious life rather than marriage? We don’t know.

Certainly, the finding that twentysomethings are less commitment-averse than frequently thought, even if postponement is common, suggests that across the spectrum they might be open to discerning a life vocation. This means that for Catholic vocation ministers, the “target audience” is broad, and some of the target demographic may rarely be in church. Those who have sidelined or postponed religious commitment will often be those who have had positive religious experiences they want to pass on; they just haven’t got around to it yet.

Finding ways to make fruitful connections with this group, before they have made a commitment for or against religion, might lead to more success in attracting diverse new members than merely focusing on those who have found a young adult parish. So, despite the fact that *The Twenty-Something Soul* does not consider religious life vocations specifically, it is worthwhile. It provides a broad overview of the vocational landscape of young adulthood—the context within which religious communities reach out today. ■

Related reading

“Book notes: In celebration of youthful noise and mess,” *HORIZON*, Summer 2018, by Edward P. Hahnenberg.

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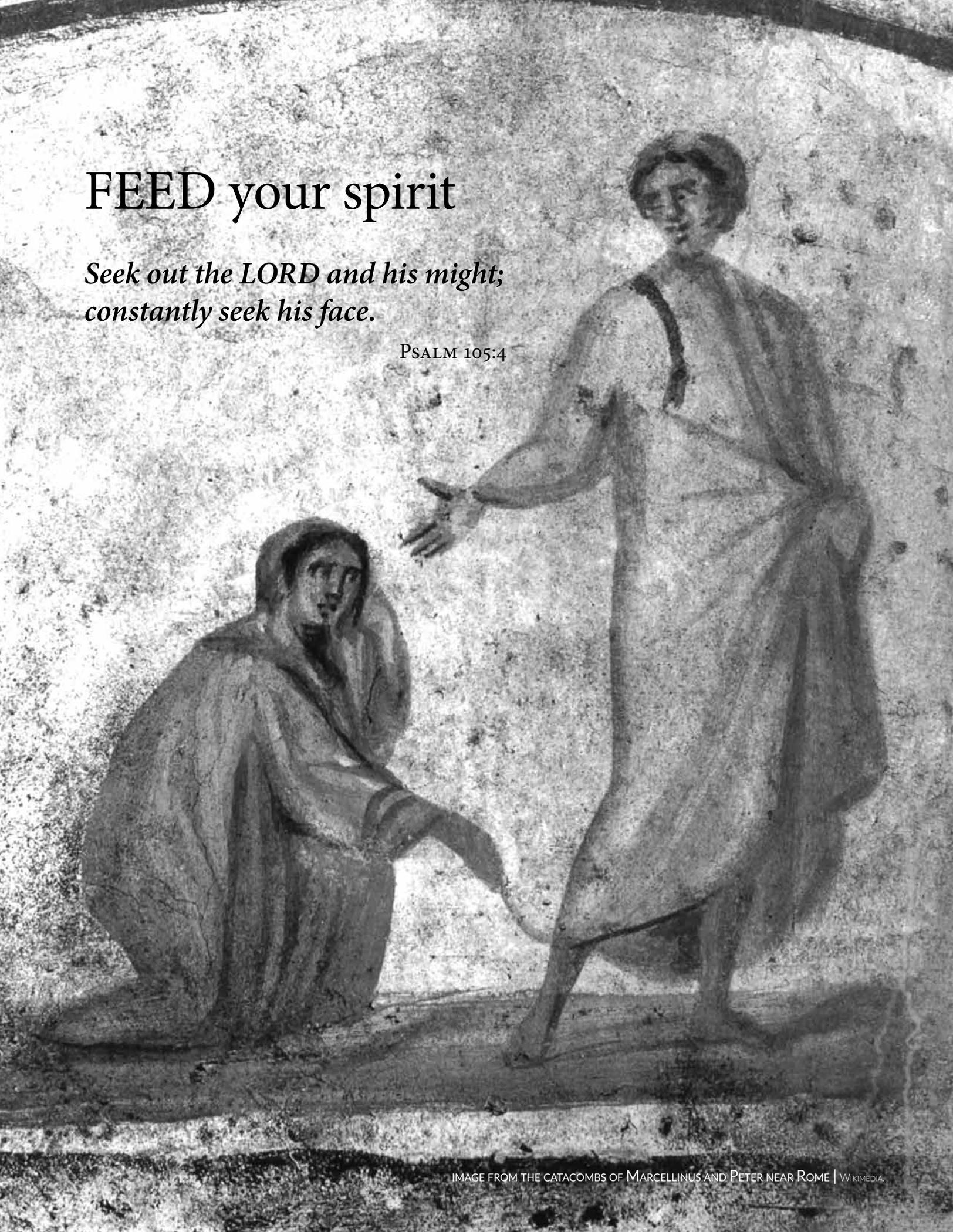
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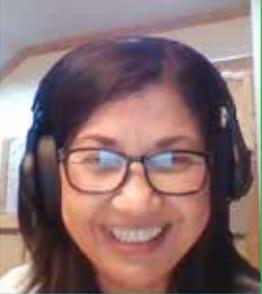
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