



Curriculum for Vocation Ministers

Mission

The National Religious Vocation Conference is a professional organization of women and men committed to vocation awareness, invitation and discernment to consecrated life as brothers, sisters and priests. NRVC shares in the mission of Jesus in serving its members by providing education, resources, and other supportive services for personal and professional growth. Foundational to this mission is affirming the baptismal call to holiness of all members of the Catholic Church. In an inclusive and collaborative style, we present religious life as a viable option in today's Church.

Introduction

The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) is committed to providing its membership with resources, workshops, and other programs that strengthen and enhance the professional skills of those serving in vocation ministry. The following curriculum is a recommended course of professional preparation and personal development for vocation ministers serving in today's church. This curriculum is meant to provide a guide of study for vocation ministers who wish to deepen their understanding of the complex theological, spiritual, psycho-sexual, ethical, and diversity issues often present in contemporary vocation ministry.

Each year NRVC provides various opportunities for professional growth through its comprehensive workshop program. NRVC strongly suggests that vocation ministers participate in opportunities to further develop their professional competencies. To assist vocation ministers in this, NRVC suggests the following three-component curriculum of foundational, continuing enrichment, and renewal programs.

Foundational Programs

Introduction to Vocation Ministry

This program should offer new vocation ministers the necessary and foundational skills for contemporary vocation ministry. Topics should include the theology, context, theory, challenges of vocation ministry, as well as the practicalities of assessment and the admissions process. It is recommended that vocation ministers participate in this program in the first or second year of their ministry.

Psycho-Sexual Development and Assessment

Vocation ministers need to have a general understanding of psycho-sexual development so that they may adequately assess a candidate's ability to lead a healthy and integrated celibate life. This program should explore the basic elements of human sexuality, which would include, but not be limited to the following areas: intimacy and friendship, sexual orientation, and healthy and unhealthy sexual

expression. Programs should also offer skills in assessing proper sexual boundaries and assessing candidates who may be at high risk of potential sexual abuse of minors.

Spiritual Accompaniment and Discernment

This program should explore the skills necessary for vocation ministers to accompany potential candidates in their spiritual journey and discernment process. Topics may include the difference between spiritual direction and spiritual accompaniment, the theology of discernment, discernment as a faith journey, boundaries of spiritual guidance and vocation ministry, and the interplay of the spiritual and psychological in the faith journey.

Ethics of Vocation Ministry

In order to exercise their roles responsibly, vocation ministers need to understand and to articulate the basic ethical values, principles, and standards of their ministry. In addition to the ethical responsibilities of the vocation minister, religious leadership and membership of the religious institute in relation to vocation ministry, this program may include the following topics: confidentiality, dual relationships, record keeping, and the cultural, ethnic and sexual diversity of candidates.

Requirements of Civil and Canon Law in the Assessment Process

Responsible vocation ministry must be conducted in conformity with both civil and canonical law. Vocation ministers, therefore, need to be aware of the state and church legal requirements that exist for both the religious institute and the candidate during the admission and formation process. This program should include the following topics: assessment policies, finances, taxes, salaries, immigration status of candidates, re-admission and community transfers, internal vs. external forum, and special issues regarding older, widowed and divorced Catholics.

Continuing Enrichment Programs

Ongoing Issues in Candidate Assessment

Vocation ministers should keep abreast of the diverse issues presented by the contemporary candidate in the discernment and assessment process. Such programs should include, but not be limited to: issues of cultural/ethnic/sexual diversity, education, spirituality, age, and assessment of physical and psychological health.

Level II of Psycho-Sexual/Social Assessment

Before one can effectively assess a candidate's social and sexual readiness to enter a formation program, he or she must have an understanding and healthy integration of his or her own sexuality. It is recommended that vocation directors avail themselves of continuing in-service opportunities in sexuality and celibate chastity for their own personal and spiritual growth, reflection, self-knowledge, and on-going education.

Technology and Marketing

Vocation ministers exercise their ministry in a digital age and media-filled world. If religious institutes are to be effective in vocation ministry, it is imperative that their vocation personnel utilize the communication tools and technology available for effective vocation promotion and marketing. Vocation ministers are encouraged to receive training in computer literacy, communication and marketing skills, and online technology.

Young Adults

One challenge that religious institutes face in attracting new members is the widening generation gap between the present membership and those discerning a vocation. This challenge, however, is not insurmountable. It is suggested that vocation directors (and religious institutes) learn about the values, spiritualities, and beliefs of today's young adults. Related topics would include intergenerational living, relating to young adults, Church and contemporary young adult research, and social networks.

Renewal

An essential part of vocation ministry is the ongoing formation of the vocation minister. Along with continued professional development, the vocation minister needs time for prayerful reflection on the ministry and how it may have been transforming in his or her personal and spiritual lives. NRVC strongly encourages vocation ministers to take part in retreats and similar opportunities that provide prayerful reflection for personal and spiritual growth and care for self. This is especially recommended for those with five or more years in vocation ministry.

Ratified by the NRVC Board of Directors, February 2009

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