



Curriculum for Vocation Ministers

INTRODUCTION

The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) is committed to providing its members with educational opportunities, resources, and other supportive services that strengthen and enhance the professional ministerial skills of those serving in vocation ministry. It is essential for vocation ministers to keep up-to-date on trends, issues, skills, and best practices in the field of vocation ministry. This document outlines a recommended course of professional preparation and personal development for vocation ministers serving their religious institutes in today's church. The intent is to provide a guide for initial and ongoing learning and development for vocation ministers who wish to deepen their understanding of the complex theological, spiritual, psycho-sexual, ethical, and diversity issues of contemporary vocation ministry.

Each year NRVC provides various opportunities for professional growth through its comprehensive workshops and other resources. NRVC strongly suggests that vocation ministers participate in ongoing educational opportunities to attend to their own vocation and to further develop their professional competencies. To assist vocation ministers in this, NRVC suggests the following three-component curriculum, which provides foundational, continuing enrichment, and renewal opportunities.

1. Foundational component

- **Orientation program for new vocation directors**

This provides new vocation ministers the foundational skills for contemporary vocation ministry. Important topics include the theology of vocation and the context, theory, and challenges of vocation ministry, as well as vocation discernment and the practicalities of assessment and the admissions process. It is recommended that vocation ministers participate in this program prior to or early in their ministry.

- **Ecclesial competency**

This includes a current understanding of the church documents written on religious life and vocations. Such examples include: *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Starting Afresh in Christ*, *Vita Consecrata*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Perfectae Caritas*, and *Lumen Gentium*.



- **Ethics of vocation ministry**

This is designed to assist vocation ministers, congregational leaders, and members in understanding and articulating the basic ethical values, principles, and standards of vocation ministry. Such topics as the following are addressed: the ethical principles governing agency, confidentiality, and obligations related to positions of trust; dissemination of information; the timeliness of admissions or dismissal decisions; dual relationships; document disposition; the cultural, ethnic, and sexual diversity of candidates; and other issues related to ethical rights of candidates as well as ethical rights of those in positions of authority.

- **Human and psycho-sexual development and assessment**

This provides vocation ministers with a solid understanding of human and psycho-sexual development to assist them in their efforts to assess a candidate's aptitude for leading a healthy and integrated celibate life. It includes the basic elements of human sexuality: the fundamental aspect of being human, healthy intimacy and friendship skills, attraction and sexual orientation, age-related developmental tasks, and boundaries, as well as the impact of technology and social media on identity, addictive behaviors, and unhealthy sexual expression. Helping vocation ministers determine if candidates may be at high risk of potential sexual abuse of minors is also an important element.

- **Requirements of civil and canon law in the assessment process**

This points to the critical nature of knowing and conforming to civil and canon law as it pertains to potential candidates to religious life. Such topics as the following are addressed: assessment policies and document disposition, internal and external forum in candidate assessment, policies and practices in financial assets, salary and tax issues during the formation period, immigration status of candidates, re-admission and community transfers, and special issues regarding older, widowed, and divorced Catholics.

- **Requirements of immigration law in the discernment process**

This addresses immigration law for religious institutes who have foreign-born candidates in the discernment process. Such topics include: clarification of key immigration terms, documentation and tracking immigration status, long-term immigration planning, and legal responsibilities of the religious institute and the candidate.

- **Safe environment**

Anyone who is promoting vocations by ministering to minors and vulnerable adults must have current safe environment training. This includes programs where youth are present in parish and school visitations, fairs, retreats, and conferences. This training is available through diocesan offices, Praesidium workshops, and various national programs such as VIRTUS.



2. Continuing education component

- **Behavioral Assessment I and II**

This teaches practical interviewing techniques housed in a theoretical framework of behavioral assessment. While the focus is on initial assessment of candidates, the methodology easily applies to assessing candidates in other stages of formation as well. Interview topics include: family background, educational and occupational histories, psychosexual histories and intimacy skills, faith history, and other pertinent issues related to comprehensive vocational assessment. Behavioral Assessment II builds upon these skills acquired in Behavioral Assessment I.

- **Intercultural competency for ministers**

This enhances the cultural sensitivity and skills of vocation ministers for assessing inquirers and discerners from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Topics include differences in cultural values, attitudes, perceptions of power, and communication dynamics in culturally diverse settings as well as addressing some of the challenges faced by vocation ministers and the competency skills needed to effectively promote vocations.

- **Ongoing issues in candidate assessment**

This responds to the ongoing learning that is necessary in vocation ministry. Focus areas include: issues of ecclesial/cultural/ethnic/sexual diversity, education, spirituality, age, and assessment of physical and psychological health.

- **Spiritual accompaniment and discernment**

This focuses on the skills necessary for vocation ministers to accompany potential candidates in the discernment process and their spiritual journey. Topics include spiritual direction and 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.

- **Technology, communications, and marketing**

In an ever-expanding world of new technology, communications, and marketing, this addresses the need for vocation ministers to exercise their ministry in a digital era. If religious institutes are to be effective in vocation ministry, it is imperative that their vocation personnel use the communication tools and technology available for effective vocation promotion and marketing. This involves the need for training in messaging strategy, social media platforms, communication and marketing skills, and online technology.



- **The role of the family in nurturing vocations**

This component addresses the role of the family in the discernment and formation process. This includes learning how to assess family-of-origin issues to formulate specific questions for discerners that may inhibit or exclude candidacy.

- **Young Catholics**

This fosters the learning and experience of the values, practices, and beliefs of today's younger generations, especially in light of the challenges faced by some religious institutes, where there is a widening generation gap between the present membership and those discerning a vocation. It is recommended that all those interested in promoting vocations continue to learn about intergenerational living, relating to young Catholics, the church, contemporary young adult research, and social networks.

3. Growth and renewal component

- **Ongoing development of vocation ministers**

This component supports the ongoing attentiveness of a vocation minister to his or her own growth spiritually, physically, psychologically, and emotionally—promoting a healthy integration of his or her own sexuality as a celibate religious. This includes spiritual direction, retreats, enrichment opportunities, and days of renewal and reflection, as well as a plan for physical health that includes exercise, healthy eating, and resting.

NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE MISSION

The National Religious Vocation Conference is a professional organization of vocation ministers that presents religious life as a viable option in the Catholic Church. NRVC promotes vocation awareness, invitation, and discernment to life as a religious sister, brother, or priest. NRVC reflects all forms of religious life and provides educational opportunities, resources, and other supportive services for spiritual, professional, and personal growth.

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