

HORIZON



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE

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VALUE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE, 9 WAYS TO THRIVE

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HORIZON



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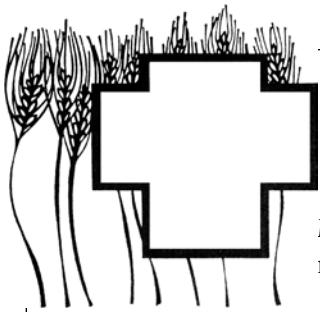

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HORIZON

HORIZON began as a vocation journal in 1975. Today, as a quarterly publication, it serves a readership of more than 2000 in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries.

HORIZON serves as a resource:

- To assist vocation directors in their professional and personal growth as ministers;
- To educate and engage educators, directors of retreat centers, formation personnel, community leadership, bishops, campus ministers, librarians, priests, religious, laity and anyone interested in vocations and their role in vocation ministry.

HORIZON has a threefold purpose:

- To provide timely and contemporary articles relative to vocation ministry;
- To provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas on pertinent issues in the field of vocations;
- To highlight some of the current resources available.

National Religious Vocation Conference

HORIZON is published by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). The NRVC is an organization of men and women committed to the fostering and discernment of vocations. It provides services for professional vocation directors and others who are interested and involved in vocation ministry. It proclaims the viability of religious life and serves as a prophetic, creative, life-giving force in today's church.

To accomplish this, NRVC provides opportunities for professional growth and personal support of vocation ministers; facilitates regional, area and national meetings for its members; sponsors workshops, seminars, conferences and days of prayer; publishes materials related to vocations for a wide variety of audiences; engages in research, study and exchange on issues of current concern; publishes a quarterly professional journal, HORIZON; maintains a Web site; and cooperates with other national groups essential to the fostering of vocations. For further information, contact: NRVC, 5401 S. Cornell Ave., Suite 207, Chicago, IL 60615-5698. E-mail: nrvc@nrvc.net. Web: www.nrvc.net.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Reminding us of the big questions

NOT LONG AGO, my husband and I spent a week at the bedside of his beloved mother, Mary, as she lay dying. It was a profoundly spiritual experience, this painful letting go, and every ragged breath in and out became a prayer. Jesus' presence in the room was palpable. Death has a way of getting our attention and bringing us back to what is most important, and I spent much of that week contemplating not just the meaning of Mary's life but my own life, too. What was I living for? What did I want to look back on when someday I am at the hour of my death?

Thus, as we held Mary's hand, negotiated comfort measures with the nursing staff, laughed about our favorite funny stories with Mary, and shed our tears ... with us in that room were questions that are essentially about vocation. What did Mary's life mean? What do our lives mean? Are we listening to God as we choose direction in our lives?

Those are the bread and butter questions of vocation ministry, and even though I work in the field, it's easy to get caught up in daily deadlines and towering to-do lists and not really ask myself those questions. Vocation ministers, however, are the people who remind us to continu-

ally consider the foundation and direction of our lives. Distracted Catholics everywhere: What is God calling you to?

To keep putting that question out there and do it effectively, vocation ministers can use some help. That is the mission of *HORIZON*: to provide vocation ministers and those who support them with nourishment, enlightenment, information and resources. All of us who contribute to *HORIZON* hope this edition does just that. This is a jam-packed issue, with articles that range from the enduring value of religious life, to new ecclesial movements, to the impact of our image of God on our discernment.

Mary's death took me by the shoulders and turned me toward God. It spurred me to consider once again the big vocation questions. But we need not wait for the death of a loved one to shake us into asking the essential question of how to follow God. May God prosper the work of vocation ministers and all who support them as they gently lead us each day in the direction of our true calling.

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



UPDATES

News from the vocation world

Year of Faith aims to reinvigorate faith

On October 11, 2012 the worldwide church began the Year of Faith, emphasizing the New Evangelization, an attempt to deepen and reinvigorate the faith. The Year of

Faith commemorates the 50th anniversary of the start of Vatican II and the 20th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Because of their contact with young adults, vocation ministers are a key part of this effort. Forthcoming editions of *HORIZON* will contain articles

on the connection between vocation ministry and the New Evangelization, and the NRVC newsletter has initiated an “idea of the month” section on the topic.

The U.S. bishops’ conference has a great deal of resources at usccb.org. Many diocesan websites are also offering programs and resources.



Communities starting to use “Keys to the Future” process

Religious communities around the U.S. are starting to use the “Keys to the Future” process and have sent NRVC largely positive reports. “Keys” is a one-day process developed by NRVC to help religious communities discuss their reality in light of current data about vocations and

then decide together on concrete steps for fostering new membership.

The process seems to be helping communities zero in on specific areas of their life together that they can strengthen for renewal and for the sake of new members. For instance, one sister wrote that her community found the “Keys” exchange of personal vocation stories created positive energy, which was then focused on a steps members could take to increase the community’s visibility.

A vocation minister from a men’s community wrote about the keen interest his members had in the “Keys” video and how it helped them address issues of common ministry. “The genuine, from-the-heart sharing [in the



The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters used the “Keys” process in August to look at data about what people are seeking in religious life and how their community might respond. Here several sisters share their thoughts.

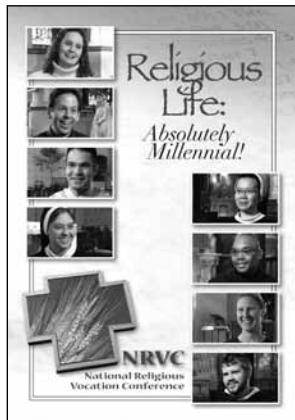
video] of the young men and women who had recently joined a community and the fact that they were looking for genuine community life, prayer life in community, and common ministry. This got a lot of discussion and reflection on how we have tended towards ‘individual apostolates’ in our community,” he wrote.

In June 2012, a cross-section of 85 religious were trained to use the process, which has been provided at no charge to every community in the U.S. To learn more about “Keys to the Future,” or to purchase an additional kit for \$25, contact Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCM, associate director at NRVC at debbiesscm@gmail.com or (773) 363-5454. Videos related to the “Keys” project can be seen at youtube.com/user/NatRel-VocationConf. The “Keys” initiative has been underwritten by a grant by the GHR Foundation.

DVD features energized young religious

In response to member suggestions and with the help of its Education Committee, NRVC has created a new DVD composed of the same footage of eight newer members that appeared in the DVD accompanying the “Keys to the Future” kit. (View a clip of those members at youtube.com/user/NatRelVocationConf.) The new DVD is called *Religious Life: Absolutely Millennial!*

This 30-minute, six-chapter DVD is designed to be used in high schools and college campuses to promote vocations. It contains a new introduction by Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC and has a reflection question at the end of each chapter with additional questions in an attractive discussion booklet. The DVD is \$10 and can be ordered at nrvc@nrvc.net or (773) 363-5454.



Diocesan discernment house for women opens in New Orleans

On August 15 Archbishop Gregory Aymond blessed and opened the Magnificat House of Discernment for Women in New Orleans, the first such house sponsored by a U.S. diocese. Magnificat House is a full-time home for post-college-age women to live in community while discerning a possible call to religious life. Residents will have regular contact with area religious communities.

The house, a vision of Archbishop Gregory Aymond and

Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, SSF, director of religious for the archdiocese, is a collaboration of the archdiocese and area orders of religious women. A New Orleans-area men’s house of discernment exists already. For more information about Magnificat House, see arch-no.org.

UK launches website, holds series of conferences

The National Office for Vocation in London recently launched a website for discerners, ukreligiouslife.org. The site represents the diversity of religious life and contains links to the website of every congregation in England and Wales. The National Office for Vocation also updated an existing site for 10-to-16-year-olds, calledtoday.com.

In addition, English and Welsh clergy and religious stepped up vocation efforts by holding four one-day conferences in different locations in October and November. Diocesan and religious vocation ministers—as well as those in related ministries—discussed ways they can work together to further understanding, communication and discernment of religious vocations. The conferences are the first step in a three year strategic plan called the National Vocations Framework.

World Youth Day to have Vocational Fair

A Vocational Fair will be part of World Youth Day, to be held July 23-28 in Rio de Janeiro under the theme, “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

The Vocational Fair will be located at Red Beach, next to Rio’s Sugar Loaf Mountain, and will include 80 individual stands and 20 joint display posts for religious congregations and movements to host exhibits. A stage will be set up for concerts, sermons and prayer, and a place to eat will also be available. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Masses, and the sacrament of reconciliation will also take place.

“The congregations, diocesan seminaries, and faith communities will pray with the pilgrims. Each will not only demonstrate its particular charism, but will also give young people a moment to encounter the Lord,” said Deacon Arnaldo Rodrigues, one of the World Youth Day pastoral organizers.

See rio2013.com/en to learn more about World Youth Day. For details on the Vocational Fair, write to feiravocacional@rio2013.com. ■



Does a robust laity diminish religious life? Nothing could be further from the truth, argues this writer. Religious life continues to witness to the Gospel's countercultural values.

The enduring value of religious life in the age of the laity

By FATHER CHARLES E. BOUCHARD, OP

THE TIME SINCE VATICAN II has sometimes been referred to as “the age of the laity.” This is both because the laity have stepped up to assume various roles in the church formerly reserved for priests and religious, but also because of intentional efforts to develop lay spirituality and lay ministry formation programs.

This process is still in its infancy; even 50 years after Vatican II, we are not clear where this new “lay church” is headed nor what it will look like. During my 20 years at Aquinas Institute of Theology, where we formed hundreds of lay women and men for ministry, I often told our students that we were preparing them for a church we could not yet see. They came to us with faith, hope and a nascent sense of call. We offered to accompany them with the resources we had, many of which had evolved over centuries primarily for priests and religious. We have been primary collaborators in this unprecedented development. This collaboration has deep historical roots, and

challenges still lay ahead of us. Through it all, religious life has maintained enduring value in an age when the laity are assuming responsibility for many things we used to do as religious.

Connections between laity and religious

At the outset it is important to name some important connections that exist between lay people and religious orders. First and most important is the fact that the first religious—desert monks in the earliest centuries of Christianity—were lay. Their monasteries pre-dated by centuries the diocesan structures so familiar today. The monks lived a simple, agrarian life that had more in common with the laity than with the hierarchical formality that marked later periods.

Although some religious orders (like the Dominicans) were clerical from the start because of the close relationship of their mission to priestly or episcopal work like preaching, most religious orders grew out of lay movements. In addition to the early desert monks, the Franciscans, the Daughters of Charity, the Alexian Brothers and others were actually founded by lay people. Many lay movements, such as the Beguines and Beghards and the military orders of the Middle Ages, adopted lifestyles and even governmental structures that closely resembled religious life. The Knights of Malta, for example, have priors and chapters just like the mendicant orders do.

From the 17th through the early 20th centuries, women religious, who are canonically lay persons, were the “front lines” of the church’s ministerial effort. Their work of teaching and health care put them in intimate contact with the laity;

Father Charles Bouchard, OP, is prior provincial of the Dominican Province of St. Albert the Great, based in Chicago. He previously served as president and professor of moral theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis and as vice president for theological education at Ascension Health, where his responsibilities included formation of lay leaders for Catholic health care.





Photo: George Martell

Religious orders have led the way in educating laity to be professional ministers. Religious continue to share their charisms with the larger church and to be a force for social change. Here, Cynthia Crino relishes her graduation alongside 16 others receiving a Master of Arts in Ministry from St. John's Seminary

they were involved in the day-to-day life of their students and patients in a way that most clergy were not. Some communities, like the Daughters of Charity, are technically not even religious orders. They are, rather, institutes of apostolic life who make no permanent vows and who do not see their commitments as signs of the kingdom but as tools for the service of the poor. They deliberately rejected the status of an order so that they could be fully available for the work of the Gospel and not have to separate themselves from the people they served by clothing and cloister or religious observance. The deep affection accorded to the sisters is due in large part to their constant presence in the life of the faithful.

In our own day, it is almost exclusively religious orders that have initiated and sustained professional ministry education programs for the laity. Although dioceses sponsor lay formation programs, the vast majority of schools that offer degrees are sponsored by Benedictines, Jesuits, Dominicans, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Franciscans and others. These orders have been a singular force in the expansion of lay ecclesial ministry in the wake of Vatican II.

Finally, because of their communal lifestyles, religious make their lives and spirituality available to the laity in a way that would be very difficult for diocesan priests, whose spirituality is by necessity largely individual and private. The variety of charisms found in religious life provides a wide range of spiritualities with which lay persons can associate. Formerly known as “third orders” or “lay confraternities,” these groups are gradually re-emerging as important “in-the-world” expressions of religious charisms and as bridges between the regular

life of religious themselves and the spiritual needs of ordinary Catholics. The growth of religious “associates” has been remarkable in the past few decades. In a 2000 study the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate tallied the number of associates in the U.S. at 27,400—a number that shot up 44 percent in just five years. (In 1995, there had been just 14,400 associates.) Ignatian, Franciscan, Carmelite and Benedictine traditions, to mention just a few, offer a wide variety of possibilities to those who want to anchor their spirituality in a particular charism.

Tensions and challenges

While these common roots are deep, that is not to say everything has always gone smoothly. Religious sometimes became overly clerical or adopted a false asceticism or an excessive formality of life that distanced them from the laity. More recently, schools that mixed lay and religious candidates for ministry sometimes found that clergy and religious felt marginalized by the large numbers of lay students. When I was president of Aquinas Institute of Theology from 1989 until 2008, we had nearly 10 times as many lay students as priesthood candidates. Attempts to structure schedules and offerings to part-time students who had jobs and families generated complaints from full-time priesthood students who felt their needs were being sacrificed to part-time lay students. Priesthood candidates sometimes felt as though they were overwhelmed numerically or that there were too many “generic” ministry courses that did not take adequate account of

their distinct call and ministry. Lay students sometimes perceived priesthood candidates as “clerical” and uncollaborative.

In the end, these tensions were the result of a search for identity. Religious, caught between the diocesan clergy and the laity, were jockeying for a new identity in a much more egalitarian church. Lay students were trying to find an identity in a church that was ambivalent or even hostile to their ministerial aspirations. They would complete studies in the relatively collaborative atmosphere of a religiously-sponsored school only to find themselves in the very different world of the diocesan parish where the pastor wielded authority in a way that was foreign to them.

Ecclesial changes

These tensions have not been fruitless. They are part of the church’s continual growing pains. Over the years, the experience of laypersons and religious studying and working together helped to create greater professionalism for laity and greater accountability for the church. Formation programs similar to those developed for religious began to emerge; eventually, they became more authentically lay, so that the goal was not to produce “mini-religious,” but lay ecclesial ministers who had a call and vocation of their own. Today, we have a much clearer idea of what aspects of formation are common to laity and religious, and where formation programs must diverge in order to meet distinct needs.

The lingering ecclesial challenge is status. Are lay people really “ministers,” or not? If not, then what are they doing when they assume responsibility for parishes, schools and hospitals? I remember many years ago when I attended an episcopal ordination in a small Western diocese that had few diocesan clergy. As the clergy lined up for the procession, I noted that in the front of the line were about 25 local clergy. In the back of the line were a similar number of visiting clergy. All of them were dressed in white vestments. Right in the middle were two women—full time diocesan “parish coordinators,” who were leading priestless parishes. They just happened both to be wearing black, which put them in high relief against all the white clerics. I don’t think this procession was designed to make a statement about ecclesial ministry, but I thought to myself what a great picture this would make: two lay women right in the middle of a long line of ordained clergy. At least that day, these two women literally had a place in the church’s ministerial lineup.

Unfortunately, integration of lay ministers into the ranks of church ministry has lagged. Lay ministers, although they

are sometimes “commissioned,” “delegated,” or “called” to church service in local dioceses, still lack the official status that goes with ordination. It is not as though they would all have to be priests; the church has many different official ministries (and in the past had even more—remember the minor ministries of subdeacon, exorcist and porter?). We could choose to ordain, or order, as many ministerial gifts as we want. But in some quarters there is a fear that there is only so much ministerial grace to go around; if lay people get more official status, there is less for priests and religious. Nothing could be further from the truth. One of the most basic messages of the Gospel is “the wideness of God’s mercy.” However much grace we need, it is available. God’s creative energy is not rationed, and it is not limited to familiar paths.

But here are some encouraging signs. One of these is the emergence of public juridic persons (PJP), little-known canonical structures that are analogous to religious orders. In Catholic health care, especially health systems that were founded and sponsored by women religious, institutions are now re-establishing themselves as PJP that may not have any religious membership at all. This is astonishing because it means the Vatican has granted to groups of lay persons exactly the same canonical status, authority and responsibility for sponsoring a ministry of the Church that religious exercised for centuries. I don’t think that anyone, maybe even Vatican officials, fully recognize the significance of this development. It is no longer a case of lay people “helping the sisters with their ministry.” These groups of lay people are now the official link between the church and the ministry; they now hold this ministry in trust for the church, just as the sisters did.

Religious life has continuing importance

Religious life (and priesthood, to be sure) are emerging from a very difficult time marked by far fewer vocations. Many religious communities, especially women’s, have still not recovered. Some never will. It would be easy to assume that this drop in vocations caused the increase in lay ministry or that lay ministers will replace religious entirely.

I don’t think that is the case. Both the emergence of lay ministry and the decline in religious membership are a result of the gradual unfolding of the theology of the laity of Vatican II and the rediscovery of baptism as the primary sacrament of vocation. This vocational re-framing forced religious to re-examine their own calls vis-à-vis baptism, and it also caused the

laity to explore how baptism called them to distinctive forms of ministry. In the end, both groups will be stronger.

Religious life will continue to flourish for several reasons. **First, religious life institutionalizes charisms that the entire church needs.** This is evident if we recall the basic distinction between what I would call “geographical ministry,” exercised largely by diocesan clergy who are bound to a bishop and to a local church, and “charismatic ministry.” The primary task of diocesan clergy is to build up the life of the church in a geographical area. Religious, however, are generally called to various kinds of “charismatic ministry” that transcend any local diocese. St. Benedict institutionalized prayer and work as fundamental Christian disciplines; the mendicant orders institutionalized study and preaching as essential to the church; the apostolic orders of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries brought missionary zeal and a commitment to the poor and marginalized. These charisms or gifts were preserved and protected in the life of these communities so that they would be available to the church at large.

Second, religious life is an antidote to the pervasive and pernicious individualism that affects much of the Western world. Religious who sacrifice a portion of their individual aspirations and goals to a common mission send a powerful message to others about service and commitment. The global witness of Mother Teresa’s group, the Missionaries of Charity, is an example. Their distinctive dress and service to the poorest of the poor have raised the social consciousness of many, even those who are not Christian.

Third, religious life is a force for social change. Individual Catholics can act on behalf of justice and the common good, but religious communities have the possibility of a corporate witness against social ills. Together, through study, teaching, preaching and social action, they can be a transformative influence in society. We need only to look at the effect of the corporate efforts of religious life in the United States in the last two centuries to see that this is true. Where would Catholic health care, education and social service be had it not been for the powerful corporate energy that inspired them?

Fourth, religious life presents an alternate model of authority. I once attended a world-wide Chapter of the Dominican order at which we elected a new master general. After the election we processed into the chapel. We together sang the *Te Deum*; our new leader prostrated himself on the floor as a sign of his obedience, and that was it. There was no approval, no permission, no validation by anyone other than us. It deeply moved me because I realized that I had exercised

a fundamental kind of authority granted to me by my vows.

The democratic process and the caputular form of government that many religious communities use is an important counterbalance to instances of clerical authoritarianism. The lay people who are being chosen as new members of the public juridic persons might see part of their responsibility as exercising church authority in a new and more collegial way.

Finally religious life is important because it is based on the possibility of growth in virtue through friendship. While some models of spiritual formation are relatively individualistic, most kinds of religious life are rooted in the assumption that community life is not just an organizational necessity, but that the special kind of friendship that exists in community forms us morally and spiritually. Of course there are dysfunctional communities that do more harm than good (the same is true for marriages), but community life at its best is a powerful moral force. As author Paul Waddell has said, “friendships are a school for virtue.” Our friends—whether marriage partners, vowed partners in religion or lifelong acquaintances—should draw the very best out of us and help us achieve the holiness and perfection to which God calls us.

In an essay in *First Things* with the unlikely title, “Walker Percy, Bourbon and the Holy Ghost,” Michael Baruzzini notes that there is no authentic spirituality without concrete, incarnational acts.

Take affection,” he suggests. “Husbands and wives do not merely sit across the room maintaining a cerebral love for each other. Affection is made concrete with actions. Handshakes between colleagues, hugs and kisses between friends not only display, but actually create or make real the respect and affection between people. The true value of a family dinner lies at this level: we are family because we eat together; we eat together because we are a family. It is in this act that our being as a family is made real, not fantasy. To take what may be the most powerful example, marital love is incarnated in the marital act. The coy euphemism “making love” has more truth to it than we may realize.

The structures of religious life are also concrete acts that make love incarnate. Religious life is a persistent, transhistorical reminder that God is present among us not just in general, but in particular ways. This institutional sacramentality is one reason why religious life will endure. It is also something that we as religious can share with emerging lay leaders as they find their place in the service of the Gospel. ■

"The week with the sisters gave me a sense of what it means to be the best version of myself, which may not be the same for someone else, but for all of us it involves something greater than ourselves."

My week with the sisters: an insider view of service

BY CAROLINE HOPKINSON

Many vocation ministers are involved in service projects. It's a way for them to connect with young adults, and it's a way for young adults to begin exploring their own vocation possibilities. To gain insight about the impact of these experiences, we present one volunteer's journal about her week of working and praying alongside sisters who serve the urban poor. This article originally appeared in VISION vocation magazine.

THIS PAST SPRING, I saw firsthand how hard sisters work and how important their ministries are to the life of their religious community and to the people they serve. I spent a week with the SSJ Volunteer Corps, which was founded in 1996 by Sisters Donna Del Santo, SSJ and Marilyn Pray, SSJ. Their goal was to provide opportunities for young people to be part

of the ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, New York. The idea is to let them experience first-hand the joys and challenges involved in Christian service.

The SSJ volunteers live in community and share their meals and work. This extensive time together allows them to reflect on how they serve the people at their ministry sites and how their own lives are affected by the experience. More than 400 young people have participated. Some college groups have returned for a second, third and even 10th visit. Many volunteers have inquired about religious life, and three former volunteers have entered the congregation as a result of their live-in and volunteer involvement with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

With me were groups of young people from AmeriCorps and Carroll College in Helena, Montana. We are all better for the experience and definitely came away with a deep appreciation for the service of the sisters, for the gifts we've each been given, and for the importance of sharing those gifts with others in need.

Monday: Nativity Prep

Nativity Prep is a Roman Catholic middle school designed for low income students who have a hard time succeeding in school because of negative social and economic factors. Locat-

Caroline Hopkinson is multimedia editor for the VISION Vocation Network—vocationnetwork.org—which includes VISION magazine, VocationMatch.com and other resources for those considering religious life. VISION Vocation Network is produced by TrueQuest Communications for the National Religious Vocation Conference.





A volunteer with the SSJ Volunteer Corps talks to a first-grader at Nazareth Hall.

ed in the South Wedge of Rochester, it is next door to the sisters' convent. The school has a mission of peace and emphasizes respect, tolerance, service, leadership, and scholarship.

The day I was at Nativity we had to take a student home to change her pants (they were not part of the school uniform). As I was driving with Ms. Dianne, the principal, I had a chance to take in the neighborhood. It was like nothing I had ever seen. Our student was being raised by her grandmother, and she couldn't go outside to play due to the violence in the community, a lot of it drug-related. Nativity is a safe haven for its students and gives them a loving and enriching learning environment where they can thrive and, at least for a time, escape the chaos and danger.

Around 7:30 p.m. the volunteers closed out the day with daily reflection. The best line of the night came from Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ when she said that ministry is "being with the people" and working with them. That is truly what a vocation is all about: taking care of one another by providing services in various ways. It is our actions that are the most important, and throughout the week I saw how each person, including myself, used actions to provide for people in need.

Tuesday morning: Nazareth School

Nazareth was originally a high school that closed as the result

of low enrollment and financial issues.

Sister Margaret Mancuso, SSJ, the current principal and a former superintendent of Catholic schools, opened a new elementary school on the grounds about one year ago and has since transformed it into a viable and highly respected institution. Nazareth School sits in an area with more than 1,000 refugee families. Sister Marilyn Pray, SSJ has been working on developing an American Refugee Committee program at Nazareth to help these refugees get acclimated to life in Rochester.

I stopped in to chat with Sister Margaret and another sister about the school. While I was talking with them, a young girl, probably in fourth or fifth grade, was skipping down the hall and waving. She was so excited and happy to be in the school. The kids, teachers, and administrators are all enthusiastic about being here. There are 15 active sisters at Nazareth. They are present to the children, and that gives students the ability to see that being a member of a religious order means you can do many things.

Sister Margaret is also active among the students. You will rarely find her at her desk. She is constantly roaming the halls, talking with students and teachers. While I was there, she was interviewing every sixth-grader to make sure each one was going to continue to work hard after entering middle school and high school.

The best part of working at Nazareth was interacting

Quick facts about SSJ Volunteer Corps

FOUNDING AND AWARDS

Started in 1996. Won the 2012 Charles Borromeo Award from Carroll College and the 2011 Catechist of the Year award from the Diocese of Rochester.

GOAL

Year-long or week-long opportunities for young people to experience ministry in a context of community, service and theological reflection.

SISTER INVOLVEMENT

Four Sisters of St. Joseph coordinate the Volunteer Corps and live with the volunteers, sharing day-to-day life with them. The shared living is an essential and lifegiving aspect of the experience, for both the sisters and the volunteers—deepening friendships and fostering understanding. However, the whole congregation is also involved: helping cook meals, mentoring volunteers, offering them spiritual direction and vocational awareness programs, etc.

PREPARATION

Leaders of groups that come to serve for short periods educate their youth prior to arrival about issues of ministry, community living and faith sharing. This helps prepare young people to serve, making it a much richer experience for everyone. The group arrives usually on Saturday (or Sunday for nearby groups). They are oriented to the house, learn about the ground rules of the community, and have fun together.

CULTURAL & SOCIAL AWARENESS

For short-term volunteers, on Sunday afternoon, the group participates in an exercise called “Praying the City.” They drive a minivan to the highest point in the city, and sisters talk about the city and the people who live there. In silence the group does a “Windshield

Survey” during which they notice people, places, housing, parks, economic differences, etc. as a way to observe issues related to quality of life. From there, they drive to each service site and share a special reading and a blessing of the persons who will be ministering there. The tour often ends with ice cream.

MINISTRY

During the week, the students are assigned in pairs to ministries based on their interest and experience. They include schools, elder outreach, foster homes, a Catholic Worker women’s shelter, a refugee outreach, and a soup kitchen. Every volunteer has a mentor on site who orients him or her. Each volunteer receives a small journal to record experiences in order to better share reflections each evening.

MEALS, THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION, FUN

Long and short-term volunteers share cooking and cleaning chores with the sisters. Short-term volunteers do theological reflection with the sisters every evening, and long-term volunteers do the same on a weekly basis. The sisters use a variety of Scripture and spiritual reading to evoke reflection and faith sharing. Mid-week they give a presentation on Catholic social teaching so volunteers better understand the call to justice while performing acts of mercy. Usually on Thursday the group has a common work experience and then takes a half-day off for group play and fun.

On the last evening the group spends time in ritual and closure. Participants share what they have learned and what concrete actions they resolve to do when they return home.

LEARN MORE

Contact Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ at ddelsanto@ssjrochester.org, 585-529-5689.

with the students. To see them learning is quite amazing. In fact, the takeaway from all these ministries is gaining perspective. We have to ask: how do we bring these ideas of ministry back to our own communities? How do we live out the mission of Christ this way?

Tuesday afternoon: Hope Hall

Hope Hall got its name from a student who said that being at the school was the first time he had felt hope and had not been afraid to be himself. Established in 1994, Hope Hall provides an opportunity for “educationally stranded” children to become successful lifelong learners. Serving students in grades 3 through 12 from 19 school districts in the greater Rochester area, Hope Hall’s nurturing, non-threatening, and creative atmosphere encourages students to take risks in learning and helps them reverse the cycle of academic failure. Its collaborative approach to learning connects faculty, staff and families as team members in a community of learning.

Sister Diana Dolce, SSJ is director of the school. Having entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester community about 40 years ago, she remains very active in this ministry. The most unique thing about the school is the number of volunteers who help out daily. At least two to three individuals sit in with students to assist them in taking notes or reading directions.

The school is bursting with color. The walls are filled with student art work: paintings, sculpture, and drawings. I left with an image of a school alive and vibrant—and filled with hope.

Wednesday: St. Peter's Soup Kitchen

Serving the West Side community of Rochester since 1982, St. Peter's Soup Kitchen started out as a once-a-week Saturday Soup and Sandwich Program. Today it serves on average more than 140 people a day who come from all walks of life. Many have problems with addictions, mental and physical illnesses, lost homes, and low wages.

As soon as we arrived, we got right to work unloading a food truck. Some of the supplies go directly to the food pantry while the rest gets handed out to those in need—around 100 people. Many of those who volunteer at St. Peter's are also struggling with homelessness and hunger, but they show up to help.

After we unloaded most of the truck, we got lunch ready.



The chance to work alongside sisters and absorb their approach to ministry and life in general is a vocational strength of the SSJ Volunteer Corps. Here Sister Marion Greer, SSJ assists a student at Nazareth Hall.

Before we opened for lunch, we said grace with the volunteers and some of the guests; it was a beautiful way to get in the spirit of helping others. While I was working the line, a little girl told me how she loved the food in the box we gave her. I was struck by how many hungry people there are. Some people who came through the lines looked no different than me.

Thursday: Bethany House

On this morning the whole group worked at Bethany House, which is a Catholic Worker house for women and children. It serves lunch daily and is considered a safe house for women in need. When we arrived, we were greeted with a car full of donated food from FoodLink, the Feeding America regional food bank. After we unloaded the food, we organized it in the pantry and got our individual work assignments. Mine was helping paint the laundry room.

Bethany House is located in one of the highest-crime areas of Rochester, but I never felt unsafe working around the house. The women are grateful for a place that gives them not only a home but also love and support to move forward from addiction and abuse. Many women who sought out the House's services in the past come back to volunteer and talk



Volunteers from the neighborhood and from SSJ Volunteer Corps together unload a supply truck. The Sisters encourage a spirit of joining with the people who are served.

to other women who might be going through the same things. According to founder Donna Ecker, Bethany house “gives women hope.”

There's that word again: hope.

Friday: DayStar, Neighborhood Center

Daystar is a place for vulnerable infants and children up to age 3. It provides foster care, medical care, childcare, respite care, advocacy, and family support in a safe and stimulating home environment. One of the children I met was Joseph, a 2-year-old boy who was blind and had some heart problems. He was full of life and loved to listen to music. I played catch with him and read him books. These “medically fragile” children struggle to walk, see, hear, and even eat, and much time and patience goes into making sure they are provided with the proper medications, therapy, and tender care. I loved seeing how full of life they were despite their challenges.

After they ate lunch I headed over to the St. Joseph’s Neighborhood Center, which is a medical facility located near the convent. The center is committed to providing care and comprehensive services to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and the community.

Give the gift of yourself

By going to Rochester and witnessing the services the Sisters of St. Joseph provide, I gained a new appreciation of how

much I've been given—not just in terms of material goods, but health, educational opportunities, and the love and support of a strong family. I also saw up close just how much need there is in the world. I resolved to make a priority of incorporating the virtues of justice and peace into my daily life.

It starts with the individual—me—and then flows from me to others by my actions. The opportunity to be part of a community of women who work for the common good of all people out of sheer love was an experience I will never forget. To live with the sisters, interact with them, and see that they are a family were essential to my understanding of religious life, and to be a part of an experience like this is something anyone considering religious life should try.

“Living out your true vocation is being the best version of yourself,” Sister Donna and Sister Marilyn explained. The week with the sisters gave me a sense of what it means to be the best version of myself, which may not be the same for someone else, but for all of us it involves something greater than ourselves.

For the Sisters of St. Joseph it involves living lives of service, uniting neighbor to neighbor and neighbor to God, assisting all people without distinction, and reflecting daily on where God is in their lives. Above all, my time with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester allowed me to understand that the women and men who have been called to religious life strive daily to build the kingdom of God and live out the mission of Jesus, who is hope to all. ■

With committed and invigorated members, new ecclesial movements and communities are shaping the American church. Who are they? And how do they relate to religious communities?

Charisms old and new: new ecclesial movements and communities

BY FATHER BRENDAN LEAHY

IN RECENT YEARS interest has grown in new ecclesial movements and communities. Pope Benedict often refers to them. The day before the 2011 annual meeting of the U.S. bishop's conference, some 15 bishops attended a workshop about them, organized by Bishop Sam Jacobs and a group of the movements themselves.¹ John Allen, journalist and church analyst, has commented on their influence:

Seen as part of expanding lay roles in the Church, the movements can be understood as incubators and laboratories for new approaches to the lay vocation in its broadest sense, which means that they carry implications for virtually every member of the Church, whether they belong to a formal group or not.²

It has been pointed out on several occasions that the newness of the movements means their impact still needs to be adequately understood. In this short article, I offer a few

brief reflections with a focus particularly on the fact that consecrated men and women, as well as seminarians and priests, belong to movements.³

The big picture

It is useful to begin with a brief overview of what movements are and who joins them. In its publication, *Directory of International Associations of the Lay Faithful*, the Pontifical Council for Laity provides concise descriptions for 122 new movements. While the main and best-known movements were born in Europe, they have spread throughout the world, and many of them, to a greater or lesser extent, are found from North America to Australia, from Brazil to Sweden, from Ireland to Nigeria. There is a great variety among them in terms of self-understanding and spirituality, external structures and procedures, training or formation methods, goals and fields of work. Each movement has a website offering good information on its specific focus.

Although some see them as marginal to the main life of the church in the U.S., statistics do not bear that out.⁴ It is estimated, for instance, that more than 1.5 million Americans have benefitted from a Cursillo weekend, while more than 5 million U.S. Catholics have been impacted by the Charismatic Renewal's "Life in the Spirit" seminars. Marriage Encounter weekends have enhanced the vocations of around 3 million couples, as well as the priests who take part in their weekends. More than 30,000 people are currently deeply commit-

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Guide to lay ecclesial movements and communities

The Cursillo Movement consists of proclaiming that God, in Christ, loves us. It does so through “short courses” and regular gatherings in small communities.

The Neo-Catechumenate is a Way of conversion, providing a post-baptismal catechumenate in small parish-based communities with the New Evangelization as a major focus.

Life Teen is a Eucharist-based initiative aimed especially at young people. It aims to bring the message of Jesus Christ to young people in a way they can understand. In particular members run programs in high schools.

Catholic Charismatic Renewal is an umbrella movement of a variety of expressions and ministries sharing the same fundamental experience of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Marriage Encounter is a movement that helps married couples to discover God in their lives and improve their marriage. Primarily consisting of weekend gatherings for couples, there are also periodic meetings for couples to continue to keep in contact and in dialogue.

Focolare (from the Italian word for the “family fireside”) aims to contribute to the realization of Jesus’ last will and testament: “may they all be one” and so build up fraternal relations in society.

Communion and Liberation, with its focus on the Incarnation and the presence of Christ “here and now,” educates to Christian maturity and collaboration in the mission of the Church in all the spheres of life.

Sant’Egidio (based on the name of a church in Rome, its first permanent meeting place) is a community dedicated to prayer, spreading the Gospel, service of the poor, and dialogue.

ted to the Neo-Catechumenal Way’s catechesis in 900 U.S. parishes. Seven new seminaries in the U.S. are animated by the Neo-Catechumenal Way, while 30 percent of current U.S. seminarians cite Life Teen as an important catalyst that got them thinking about a priestly vocation. It is estimated that some 700,000 Catholics in the United States attend Life Teen liturgies in 1,700 parishes each week.

In the context of racial and ethnic variety, it is worth noting that all the larger movements—particularly Cursillo, the Charismatic Renewal, the Neo-Catechumenal Way and Marriage Encounter—thrive also among Hispanic and Asian Catholics. Beyond the boundaries of the parish, many movements have contact with members of other churches. Former Black Muslims, for instance, have come to appreciate and love the Catholic Church through contact with the Focolare Movement. Many of them even encourage Catholics to get to know their own Catholic faith better as a result of this friendship.⁵

In short, therefore, all kinds of people join movements, and this is precisely one of the characteristics of the new ecclesial movements—they represent the broad spectrum of church life. It’s not quite accurate, therefore, to call them “lay movements” because, though predominantly made up of lay members, priests, religious and bishops also participate.

Defining a movement

Those who belong to a movement or community, when speaking about their encounter with that community, often say it wasn’t so much that they met an association or group but rather a Person who changed their life. It was a new or deeper encounter, in the power of the Spirit, with Jesus Christ. Indeed, in many ways, the expression “baptism in the Spirit” is accurate. For those who were already Christian by baptism, Christianity suddenly comes alive for them in a new way. A new window onto the Gospel message opens up for them.

A good reference point for understanding what a movement is comes from the then Cardinal Ratzinger’s address at the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, held in Rome in May, 1998. Referring to the Franciscan movement of the 13th century as probably providing “the clearest instance of what a movement is,” he affirmed:

Movements generally derive their origin from a charismatic leader and take shape in concrete communities, inspired by the life of their founder; they attempt to live the Gospel anew, in its totality, and recognise the

Church without hesitation as the ground of their life without which they could not exist....⁶

According to this definition, movements are linked to “charisms” (meaning prophetic “gifts” of the Spirit that establish new ways of discipleship in the church) in the sense that others are attracted by what the charismatic leader is doing, promoting, saying and writing. This, in turn, leads to a spiritual affinity between persons which develops into friendships based on the Gospel. Eventually, movements are examined and officially recognized by authorities in the church, firstly at the local diocesan level and then by the competent office in Rome. The initiative for recognition sometimes is on the part of the movement, and other times church officials are spurred to take a stand because a group has become large and influential. Oftentimes, movements seek out recognition once they have become well-established. In the light of their approval by the church, they can offer themselves as forms or reflections of the one church.

The term “ecclesial movement” is, therefore, general enough to cover a wealth of forms produced by the life-giving creativity of the Spirit. It should be pointed out that the Charismatic Renewal is not a single unified worldwide movement but a shared fundamental experience of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷

In that same talk Ratzinger went on to distinguish movements from what he calls “currents,” such as the liturgical movement (a current of renewal in liturgical and related studies) or Marian movements, such as the wave of Marian devotion and study that characterized the first half of the 20th century. Movements can also be distinguished from trends or “actions,” such as petitions or campaigns for the collection of signatures pressing for a change in some teaching or practice of the church.

Movements not in competition with religious orders

When it comes to addressing the question of how these movements relate to or collaborate with religious communities or diocesan priests, we come to a central feature of what movements contribute and how they can strengthen those who are called to collaborate with God in a particular way. It should be stated straightaway that movements aren’t alternatives to religious orders or priestly vocations! Very often vocations to these orders and to the priesthood are born precisely through involvement in a movement.

To do justice to this topic, it would be necessary to trace the emergence in the Second Vatican Council of the relevancy of charism as constitutive of the church. We would also have to recall the Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion proposed at the Council: the church is a “sacrament and sign of unity,” a people “made one by the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”⁸ In this short article, I will assume the ecclesiology of communion as the basis of the following reflections.

In the years immediately after Vatican II, worldwide many religious, priests and seminarians came into contact with movements such as Charismatic Renewal and Focolare, and it helped them greatly. It was a time of a crisis in vocational and apostolic identity (in part, due to an insufficient initial reception of the Council’s teachings on issues like laity, mission, universal call to holiness). Many priests and religious today would say that belonging to a movement saved their vocation. It became the occasion for them to rediscover their own calling and charism. Movements have sometimes helped bring renewal to a whole order or community.⁹ In recent years, however, there has been a tendency in some countries for religious orders to say “we are grateful for what you did for us in times of crisis, but now we want to reclaim our own identity.”

It is certainly true that religious orders have their own formation itinerary, shaped by the charism of that order. Likewise, seminaries have their formation program. There can be no confusion on that level. It is true that a member of a religious order cannot simply identify his or her whole life with the spirituality, life and activities of a movement to the point of creating a separation from his or her own institute. Nevertheless, to retreat back into one’s own religious order only in the legitimate desire to underline identity, risks missing what “the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). Movements aren’t just for times of crisis in religious life or ordained ministry.

The Holy Spirit has raised up new founders and new movements for a purpose in our times too. They too are an expression of the church’s charismatic or prophetic profile, which Pope John called “co-essential” to the church’s hierarchical-institutional dimension.¹⁰ They can bring renewal and rediscovery of one’s specific vocation.

To see where movements fit in for consecrated men and women, priests and seminarians, it is worth recalling the affirmation in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, that took up the Vatican Council’s ecclesiology of communion and emphasized the *perichoresis* among all the vocations of the church:

In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service.... While different in expression, they are deeply united in the church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission (#55).

The perspective offered is that a greater communion among the vocations will lead to a more effective mission. In this circular dynamic, priests and religious certainly have to help lay faithful in their formation. This is very much the traditional role we are accustomed to. But *Christifideles Laici* also points out "In turn, the lay faithful themselves can and should help priests and religious in the course of their spiritual and pastoral journey" (# 61). Lay people in movements can and must help priests and religious in their spiritual journey and pastoral initiative. The Spirit is always at work in the church, and we should not be surprised if today spiritual and pastoral renewal can be awakened also through ecclesial movements.

What do movements contribute?

Through contact with them, members of religious orders are helped to open to a deep communion with lay people and with members of other religious orders and people in other vocations. The Vatican recognized and encouraged mutual exchange between movements and religious orders in a 2002 document put forth by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, "Starting Afresh":

Finally, a new richness can spring from an encounter and communion with the charisms of ecclesial movements. Movements can often offer the example of evangelical and charismatic freshness, such as the generous, creative initiatives in evangelization. On the other hand, movements as well as new forms of evangelical life can learn a great deal from the faithful, joyful and charismatic witness of consecrated life, which bears a very rich spiritual patrimony, the many treasures of

experience and wisdom and a great variety of apostolates and missionary commitments (#30).

So there is mutuality between "old and new charisms," as this document puts it. Older charisms provide the wisdom distilled from years of experience. But they can also gain from movements' new spiritual perspectives, formation methodologies and renewed expressions of apostolate that they can then integrate into the patrimony of their own religious order.

Members of religious orders belonging to a movement are, therefore, not engaging in a "double-belonging" or parallel formation, but rather they are opening to an expression of communion and mutual enrichment that today's ecclesiology of communion encourages. This mutual enrichment comes in forms provided by the Holy Spirit. We can learn from Teresa of Lisieux who, faithful to her contemplative vocation, wanted to live all the ecclesial vocations! As already stated a consecrated person (and by analogy a priest or seminarian) has, of course, to be well inserted into his or her religious order, obeying the rule and regulations of the superior.

My own experience of meeting members of religious orders who have had contact with the Focolare movement is that they benefit from such contact in a number of ways. This was confirmed for me recently in a correspondence with Father Julian Stead, OSB. Focolare has helped him rediscover the Gospel and the commitment to live the Gospel as the first rule of all religious life. In other words, Focolare has helped him rediscover the essence of his own Gospel vocation. Meeting with others who are living the evangelical counsels in the midst of the world confirmed and strengthened fidelity to his own religious consecration.

The Focolare's focus on living in mutual love "with Jesus in the midst," sheds light for members of religious orders on the meaning and demands of living in community. The charisms of founders are appreciated in a new way. The Focolare perspective of unity, "that all may be one" (John 17:21) has helped many in religious orders to open to new horizons and avoid the risk of reducing their consecration or mission in the church. It has also prompted greater communion among charisms and movements.¹¹

The Spirit outpoured

Ecclesial movements and communities are a new outpouring of the Spirit. They are not the whole church, but they have come to life in our time to respond to specific needs. Pope Benedict, while still Cardinal, shared what they meant for him:

My life in the Focolare movement

I ALWAYS WANTED to live for something big! I grew up in the suburbs of the very Catholic city of New Orleans. I searched for happiness in high school and college, setting my sights on academic achievement in my computer science degree and for a time thinking my total commitment would be to marry my boyfriend and live for him and our family.

I owe a lot to the women religious who helped me find my vocation. I was active at the Newman Center, attended retreats, and met regularly with a sister to talk and seek guidance. I explored the idea of becoming a sister myself; in the end, I felt it was a beautiful vocation but not for me.

I graduated with honors and landed a good job in Houston, still looking for “something.” Through a classmate, I met a community of families living the Focolare spirituality of unity in Houston. There I felt I had found an example of the first Christians.

They invited me to their Mariopolis retreat, and after that experience, I began trying “to be the first to love” and “to love everyone.” This radically changed my life. For instance, I found myself at work one day poised for an argument with my boss. I saw him coming down the hall, and I was prepared in my bones to stand my ground and resist writing an explanation he had asked for. In a flash, I realized I had a choice: to let God live in me by loving my boss or arguing my point. I decided to love. My boss was surprised and happy, and so was I.

Thus began a year of living and growing in my understanding of the spirituality of the Focolare and of my vocation within the movement. Focolare has various levels of commitment, and it encompasses various vocations: single, married, ordained and consecrated. We have 22 different branches that express different ways of belonging, including volunteers and informal associations with no formal commitment. For my part, after seven years of renewing annual vows of consecration, I took final vows in 2000. I have made my life choice to marry Jesus.

Today I live in Chicago in a Focolare house with



Betsy Dugas, left, with Focolare members.

four other consecrated women. Our house has members from different parts of the world. Two of us hold secular professional jobs, two work in church ministry, and one is a student.

The whole movement lives what we call “the communion of goods,” in that we share our surplus. My extra is determined by the need of my neighbor. We practice these principles according to our state in life. Our household, for instance, shares its surplus to cover the budget in Focolare houses in other countries. The movement has elected leaders at different levels, with our international headquarters located in Rome.

Life in our Chicago household is very connected, like a family. We take turns cooking and have dinner together every night. When possible, we say our prayers together and try to attend the same Mass, although our work schedules make that difficult. Once a week we gather to share how we are living the Gospel, and each month we have a day of retreat and a day of rest together.

We really try to live for each other and for what each other is doing. We have our ups and downs, but for the most part there is a real supernatural joy to being together. I’ve had the chance to visit Focolare houses in different part of the country and the world, and in each of them I’ve experienced the same sense of family.

In Focolare I found my “something big”—an answer to how I could cooperate with God and others to make a difference in the world. ■

—Betsy Dugas

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"The desert will lead you to your heart where I will speak" Hosea 2:14

For me personally it was a wonderful experience when, in the early 1970s, I came into closer contact with movements ... and so experienced the energy and enthusiasm with which they lived their faith and the joy of their faith, which impelled them to share with others the gift they had received. That was the period in which Karl Rahner and others were speaking of a winter in the church... Rahner's remarks about a winter in the church were perfectly understandable; they expressed an experience we all shared. But then something suddenly happened which no one had planned. The Holy Spirit had, so to say, once again made his voice heard. The faith was reawakened, especially in young people, who eagerly embraced it without ifs and buts, without subterfuges and reservations, and experienced it in its totality as a precious, life-giving gift.¹²

Today's need, as Blessed Pope John Paul put it, is to make the church a "school and home of communion."¹³ Indeed, he underlined this as a priority as we move forward, and that

means promoting a spirituality of communion at every level of the church. In our day, the ecclesial movements are a valuable expression of the Spirit enabling us to do that. ■

1. The group was made up of Charismatic Renewal, Cursillo, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Focolare, Neo-Catechumenal Way, Life Teen and Arise International.
2. John Allen. *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 2009, p. 425.
3. On the involvement of diocesan priests and seminarians see Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities*. New York: New City Press, 2011, p. 150-160. See Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, #68.
4. I am grateful to William Neu for these statistics that were prepared for the November 2011 workshop of the "Catholic Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in the U.S. in Conversation" meeting with some 15 bishops.
5. See Thomas Masters and Amy Uelman, *Living a Spirituality of Unity in the United States*. New York: New City Press, 2011.
6. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. "The Ecclesial Movements: A Theological Reflection on Their Place in the Church." *Pontificium Consilium Pro Laicis, Movements in the Church*. Vatican City, 1999, p. 23-51. This article was also reproduced as "The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements" in *Communio* 25, Fall (1998): 480-504. See also, Joseph Ratzinger's book, *New Outpourings of the Spirit*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007.
7. See Charles Whitehead. *What is the Nature of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?* Locust Grove, VA: Chariscentre, 2003.
8. See Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1-4.
9. See the example of an Oblate of Mary community in Marino, Italy in Fabio Ciardi's, "Renouveau communautaire et renaissance des vocations. L'expérience de la communauté de Marino," *Vie Oblate Life* 44 (1985): 105-120.
10. C. García Andrade. "El principio mariano." Suplemento al *Diccionario Teológico de la Vida Consagrada*. Ed. A. Aparicio. Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 2005.
11. On the contribution of the Focolare charism of unity and its reception in Magisterial documents, see the late Jesus Castellano's article, "Il Carisma dell'unità e i carismi della vita consacrata" in *Unità e Carismi* 16 (2006): 3-4, 18-24.
12. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesial Movements," p. 24.
13. As quoted by Dennis Billy. *Living in the Gap: Religious Life and the Call to Communion*. New York: New City Press, 2011.

The way we envision God affects our vocational discernment, and simply talking about those images deepens our theology. Here are ideas on exploring this rich venue.

Exploring images of God during discernment

By FATHER HARRY HAGAN, OSB

REFLECTION QUESTIONS BY CAROL SCHUCK SCHEIBER

THE PROCESS OF DISCERNING one's vocation should bring a growing theology. That word "theology" can make people nervous, but it is simply an understanding of God. It deals with questions of God's being and action, as well as our relationship to God in Christ and more. As people enlarge their understanding of God and explore various understandings, they become better able to imagine the Kingdom of God and so to discover how God is drawing them to serve.

While we can develop our theology by studying the works of the classic theologians (which I recommend), we

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can also inform our understanding by exploring the images of God in Scripture and tradition. Below I name some of these images and suggest how people in discernment might explore this way of the imagination and enrich their theology.

Old Testament images of God

The Bible offers us a paradox. In the 10 commandments, we are told: "You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth" (NAB Exodus 20:4). The word *pесel*—idol—could as easily be translated "image." We are commanded not to make images of God, and this commandment has perhaps its clearest expression in the Jerusalem temple with its cherubim throne but with no image of God. This commandment protects God's transcendence and emphasizes that God is beyond this world and beyond any box that we may make for him.

At the same time, the Scriptures are full of word images describing God as hero, king, judge, father and also mother, etc. In part these images are based on Genesis 1:27—God created man in his image; in the divine image he created

him; male and female he created them.

Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we can look to ourselves for an understanding of God. The images mentioned above draw on our human experience to

God in our mind's eye affects our vocation journey

If we think of God as the Cosmic Taskmaster, we might think we have to do the hardest, most grueling thing to please God. If we think of God as Creator, we might want to unleash our own creativity and name it our “calling.” If we think of God as Father, and we have a fraught relationship with our dad, we may find it hard to follow God at all.

Our understanding of God is central to our theology and central to our vocation. Thus it stands to reason that a serious journey toward our calling must travel through our image of God. “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked his disciples. It is the question that arises when we look deeply at our calling.

Vocation ministers have the privilege of walking with those who are answering that question for themselves as they ask what it is that God calls them to. While wrestling with the questions, “Who is God to me?” and, “What is my image of God?” it is important that we allow God to reveal God’s self through Scripture, nature, art, etc. so that our understanding of God somehow encompasses the communion and power of the Triune God. In some ways, we can never completely wrap our minds around God because God is so much bigger than we are: deeper, more loving, more wise, more true.

Still, vocation ministers and discerners must keep asking good questions, knowing that complete answers may always be just out of reach. If we remain open, God will continue to be revealed to us for a lifetime.

—Carol Schuck Scheiber

illumine our ideas of God. However, there is always a part of these human images that does not fit the reality of God, and so we must be careful that we do not make God just in our own human image and likeness. We must explore these images in a way that allows for God’s transcendence, for God to be God. With this caution, let us turn to some of the images of God and then to images of Christ in the Scriptures.

God as hero and warrior

“The LORD is a warrior; LORD is his name.” — Exodus 15:3. The Exodus stands as the central story of the Old Testament, telling of the journey from land of bondage to land flowing with milk and honey. Though the story has many pieces, the climax of the escape comes at the Red Sea with Pharaoh pursuing a people becoming more and more afraid and wishing they had never left the safety of their slavery. Moses, however, says to them: “The LORD himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still” (Exodus 14:14). This story proclaims that God will act for us against the forces that will enslave us. In other stories, human beings become the manifestation of God’s power. The women Deborah and Jael are the heroes in Judges 4-5; the boy David defeats Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. The heroes of these and other stories are not the expected strong warrior of Greek mythology; rather they overturn our expectation that human strength alone will bring the victory. These unexpected biblical heroes point to God at work in these victories. The Book of Judges is full of these unexpected heroes.

The image of God as hero means that we do not have to accomplish God’s work on our own. On the one hand, we must let God be the hero, and on the other we, like Deborah and David, must join with God to carry the day.

✓ Does “God as hero” resonate with me? Do I see my calling in helping God fight the good fight? Sharing in the warrior’s struggle for righteousness and justice?

God as king

“The LORD is king!” —Psalm 97:1 The image of God as king pervades the Old Testament because it reflected the common experience of power and authority in the ancient world. The king served as both the lawgiver and the judge, and he was the designated hero with the responsibility to protect his people and promote their peace and welfare. Indeed the ancient Near Eastern king was supposed to act as a deity would act, and Egypt considered its pharaoh to be divine. Though



we know kingship mainly from reading about it and not as a lived experience, the image of kingship remains a powerful vision—perhaps because it belongs particularly to our God. Even so, God's kingdom in the Old Testament is radically different from the regimes of Israel's neighbors and even from the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Moreover, Jesus redefines the Kingdom of God in parables where the kingdom is likened to a mustard seed or the yeast a woman takes to make bread (Matthew 13:31-33; Luke 13:19-21). I like to invite people to make up a modern day parable. To what would you compare the kingdom of God? "The Kingdom of God is like my mother's cooking—always different."

✓ While some aspects of God as a benevolent king are positive—caring for his subjects, fairly weighing all their conflicting needs, desiring peace and prosperity for his people—there can be a dark side to the king image. Lawgiver and judge can conjure a harsh and unforgiving authority. If God is king for me, what is he asking of me? Am I fearful of a king with authority to punish? Do I delight in turning over cares to One with greater control and authority? What is my role in God's kingdom?

God as Lord

"O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth!" —Psalm 8:1 In order to protect the holiness of God's name and to avoid any possibility of taking it in vain, Israel stopped using YWHW, the proper name of God, and substituted the title *adonay* which means "my lord." This continues in English translations as you can see in the opening of Psalm 8.

If the Hebrew word is YHWH, then the English reads "LORD" in small caps; if the Hebrew word is "adon—lord," then the English reads "Lord."

The word "adon—lord" comes from the language of covenant, which we can define simply as a relationship sealed by an oath with mutual responsibilities and blessings. Marriage is the pervasive and powerful example of covenant. Covenant also shaped the relationships between kingdoms large and small, and, in these political relationships, the great king was designated as the "lord," and the lesser party a "servant." The servant swears to serve and act for the "lord" who in turn promises to protect the life of the servant. As we read in Exodus 19:3-8, God makes a covenant with Israel promising the blessing that they will be "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" if they "keep my covenant." Israel swears to do this and so becomes the servant of YHWH their Lord.

The use of the words "lord" and "servant" therefore evokes covenant. We see this, perhaps most importantly, at the end of the annunciation where Mary says: "'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'" The word "handmaid" is a technical covenant word indicating that Mary accepts the responsibility of her covenant relationship to the "Lord" and so agrees to accept this commission to be the Mother of God.

✓ Do I see God as Lord and myself as servant ? What does that mean for how I live my life? What does God want of God's servants? What is a positive servant-and-master relationship like? What must I do to be a faithful servant of God?

God as father

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on the faithful." —Psalm 103:13 Although we find the image of father in this lovely psalm and in some other places, it is not an especially prominent image of God in the Old Testament. The image of God as father is important to us because it is a central image for Jesus. The Aramaic form, *abba* (Mark 14:36), has a very familiar sense, and some would translate it "daddy," which may seem almost funny, and yet it reveals the intimacy between Jesus and the Father. Jesus invites us to share this intimacy when he teaches us to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven."

An exploration of this word typically demands an exploration of the relationship with our own father and with the people in our lives who have taken the role of father for us. The goodness and blessing of that relationship reveals

something of God to us. The distortion and complications sometimes involved in that relationship can also distort our relationship with God. It is important to sort that out, especially for those who want to be a priest and have “father” as a primary image for themselves.

✓ Do I see God as father? What is or was my relationship like with my father? Are there people in my life who have been like a loving father to me? How can a sense of God as father bring out the best or worst in my sense of calling?

God as mother

As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you.—Isaiah 66:13 The image of God as mother does not appear often in the Old Testament, but we find it here in Isaiah 66:13, and the church brings this image to our attention by including this passage in the Liturgy of the Hours as a canticle for morning prayer (Week IV, Thursday). The image captures the depth of God’s compassion and love. Though we may divide the roles of justice and mercy, of strength and care, etc. between human fathers and mothers, our God holds all of these pieces together and invites us to be fully human in the divine image by holding them together in our own individual way. Therefore, our mothers also contribute to our understanding of how God moves in our lives. Likewise we must explore the impact our human mothers have had on our understanding of God.

✓ Do I ever think of God as mother? What is or was my relationship like with my mother? What does “Mother God” want most for me?

God as shepherd and banquet giver

The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.—Psalm 23:1 In the ancient Near East, the shepherd was an important image for the king because it brings strength and protection together with care and concern. Psalm 23 uses these dimensions to underline “my” personal relationship with God, which it extends with the often overlooked image of God as the host who spreads a banquet before “me” and takes “me” into his house. In that world, eating with others created a covenant bond of friendship which comes to fullness in the Eucharist.

✓ Is God a shepherd, a protector for me? If God is looking out for me, keeping the wolves at bay, what might God want in the way I live my life? Where might my Protec-

tor be leading me? If God is throwing a banquet, and I’m invited, what does that say about how I live my life?

God as creator

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.—Isaiah 40:28 As we learn more and more about creation, the image of God as Creator becomes more fascinating and more mysterious. Whether small at the microscopic and sub-atomic levels or great at the galactic and cosmic levels, creation “declares the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). Hebrew uses the word *bara’*—“to create” only for God. Only God can *bara’*, and Genesis 1 affirms that God has created all things good and has created us as stewards of this good earth (1:28). This should bring both wonder and a sense of responsibility.

✓ Is God creator and I one of God’s created ones?
✓ What might the Creator be asking of me? Is the Creator of the universe looking with pride and love on me, one of a multitude of handiworks? If “creating” is central to the divine, what does that mean for my calling?

Jesus as the image of God

Jesus: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*”—Colossians 1:15 To know Christ is to know God, and therefore everything that we do to expand and explore our knowledge of Christ helps us to understand and appreciate God. There are many ways to do this. We could review the images of Jesus in the New Testament as we have done with Old Testament images of God. However I would like to suggest two more approaches.

1. Using art to expand the imagination

Try preparing a PowerPoint presentation of images of Christ. On the Internet are many interesting art works that offer us a new and fresh vision of Christ (try an “image search” in Google.) A few examples of artwork appear with this article to give an idea. A painting or sculpture by a worthy artist not only calls an event to mind, the artwork conveys something unique, something that only this specific work of art is able to tell us about Christ and his life. Therefore, these images are worthy of close and careful examination.

For instance, it is easy to find many pictures of the crucifixion. Just search for “crucifixion” and add an artist’s name, such as Battló, Gero, Cimabue, Chartres, Grunewald,

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Michelangelo, El Greco, Rubens, Rembrandt, Gauguin ("Yellow Christ"), Nolde, Lambert-Rucki, Rouault, Stanley Spencer, Chagall ("White Crucifixion"), etc. It is important that people do not just stay with images which they like. Those comfortable images appeal to our present understanding but do not challenge us to expand our vision. For instance, George Rouault, who began as a stained glass artist, developed a modern style with color and strong black lines to express his deep Catholic piety. His art may challenge people, but sometimes we need to be challenged to expand our vision. The crucifixions of Matthias Grunewalt from the early 1500s may be even more challenging. While people can be expected to resist new images, unbending resistance, especially to different cultural expressions, might raise questions about a candidate's openness. People should come to distinguish between what they like and what they appreciate. Images can help us look at Christ in a new way, and this is exactly why art is important. Great art challenges us to see anew in ways that we had not imagined.

2. Choosing favorite images of Christ

I sometimes ask a group to take a list of images of Christ and do two things. First I ask them to pick the three or four images which are most important to them. Then I ask them to pick two or three that they would like to learn more about. There is no right answer, but the forced choice causes people to reflect on their understanding of Christ, on their personal Christology.

While it is possible to do this on one's own, it is more interesting to do it in a group. Sometimes I will tally the responses between conferences, and sometimes tally them right there, which can be fun. It is also possible to have the group generate this list; in those cases I am ready to add a couple of extras if need be.

I have always found it interesting to see what people choose, which images receive multiple votes. Sometimes the choices tell something about the group. I invite people to ex-

plain why they have chosen this or that image, and that gives them a chance to articulate their theology. Typically an interesting discussion arises. After looking at people's favorites, we turn to the images they would like to learn more about, and that can open new doors.

Since the title "Lord Jesus Christ" is so important, it is not included. At the end I give people a chance to add an image not included in the list.

All of our discussions and exercises bring us back to

some basic truths. A theology holds an understanding of God and his relationship to us in Christ. While systematic thinkers offer us an important way of expanding our understanding, we can also do this by considering the many images of God and Christ that come from the Scriptures and the tradition and explore the concrete expressions of these by artists. As an understanding of God in Christ grows, people develop a clearer sense of themselves before God and can imagine what God may be calling them to be and to do. ■

Images of Jesus in addition to Lord and Christ	Top 3-4 images	2-3 curious about
Alpha and Omega, Rev. 1:8		
Beloved, Song of Songs 1:13,14,16, etc.		
Beloved Son, Matt. 3:17		
Bread of Life, John 6:35		
Emmanuel, Isa. 7:14		
Friend, Luke 7:34		
Good Shepherd, John 10:11,14		
Infant of Prague		
King of Kings, 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16		
Lamb of God, John 1:29		
Light of the World, John 9:5		
Lion of Judah Rev. 5:5		
Messiah, Matt. 1:16		
Mother, St. Anselm and Julian of Norwich		
Only Begotten Son, Creed		

Images of Jesus in addition to Lord and Christ	Top 3-4 images	2-3 curious about
Prince of Peace, Isa. 9:6		
Rabbi, Mark 9:6		
Redeemer, cf. Luke 1:74		
Risen Savior, liturgy		
Sacred Heart, St. Gertrude the Great and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque		
Savior, John 4:42		
Son of God, Mark 15:39		
Son of Man, Mark 2:10		
Son of Mary, Luke 2:7		
Suffering Servant, Isa. 52-53		
Teacher, Mark 4:38		
The Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6		
Wonder Counselor, Isa. 9:6		
(Add your own image)		

Vocation ministry can place many demands on your inner resources. Here are practical ideas for replenishing yourself so you remain centered and joyful.

Nine ways to thrive as a vocation minister

By FATHER WILLIAM JAREMA

VOCACTION DIRECTORS HAVE a unique role that demands distinct skills in assessment, high-tech communication and the human formation process. They need to explore and understand the vocation candidate's family system; they must adapt to multi-cultural realities; they have to determine whether a candidate has the skills to engage in the formation process, and vocation directors need to employ various pathways in the discernment process. In these multiple roles, the vocation director will be stretched personally and professionally.

I've noted three main vocation ministry models, each demanding certain skills. The first is the vocation director who maintains two or more jobs while attempting to be

available for candidates who may be referred. The second (and the model promoted by the National Religious Vocation Conference) is a full-time vocation director with a budget, an office, and some support staff. These vocation directors offer workshops and programs to enlighten those discerning a vocation to priesthood or religious life. The third type of vocation director has limited availability and does limited vocation promotion, sometimes because of a contemplative or monastic lifestyle.

Each type of vocation director will feel the burden of performance pressure, with members asking: "How many candidates did you secure for our upcoming formation program?" When budget cuts occur, the vocation department is often one of the first to feel reductions. When a job or project needs an extra hand, the vocation director is many times the first to be tapped. Adding to the weight of the job, in today's society vocation candidates are less likely to come from healthy, functional and intact family systems. Many candidates will have attempted to find their identity by exploring other religions and non-Christian spiritualities. Many will come with financial debt. Still others own property and investments that make them savvy in their concerns for future stability within their desired affiliation.

In this context of varied pressures, in a job that demands multiple professional and interpersonal skills, significant

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investments must be made to nurture the vocation director's physical and mental health. From my many years in encouraging wholistic health, I offer these nine concrete ways a vocation director can thrive in vocation ministry.

1 Develop emotional support

The vocation director must have secure and dependable significant friendships that allow for daily, weekly, monthly and annual reunions. Developing healthy intimacy with trusted friends, community members, and co-workers will help sustain a vocation director who provides a great deal of personal and spiritual intimacy with those they journey with in the vocation discernment process. In the absence of a healthy emotional support system, vocation directors typically compensate with food, work or alcohol; or they may create emo-

tional dependencies with vocation candidates and create role reversal. Vocation candidates can begin to become a source of nurture and support for the vocation director.

The vocation director's personal close relationships are core to maintaining self-worth, self-esteem and sufficient nurturing. Family, friends and community members are needed to sustain the ongoing leaching of the core identity of a vocation director. The inexhaustible process of vocation discernment and the mixed signals given by candidates who lack an integrated identity can leach the vocation director's core identity. The same thing happens with vocation candidates who struggle with sexuality or who lack adult life skills. To loosen one's core will lead to compassion fatigue, a loss of identity, projections of love and lust, and the danger of one's shadow-side feeding off of entitlement, secrecy and deception. See the box on this page and on page 30 for help in evaluating your emotional support.

Intimacy checklist

While sexual intimacy is a powerful form of drawing close to another, there are many other forms of intimacy. Consider how you experience these forms of intimacy with friends, co-workers and family members.

- Emotional Intimacy: *friendship, shared affect*
- Intellectual Intimacy: *closeness in ideas*
- Aesthetic Intimacy: *shared experiences of beauty*
- Creative Intimacy: *closeness in creating together*
- Recreational Intimacy, *relate through fun and play*
- Work Intimacy: *closeness in sharing common tasks*
- Crisis Intimacy *closeness in coping with problems and pain*
- Conflict Intimacy: *encounter and struggle with differences*
- Commitment Intimacy: *mutual investments*
- Spiritual Intimacy: *shared religious and spiritual concerns*
- Communication Intimacy: *verbal and non-verbal exchange*

Adapted from *The Conscious Celibacy Workbook: Truth or Consequences* distributed by Mercy Center Inc. (719) 633-2302.

2 Seek out community support

The vocation director becomes a fluid member during his or her time on the road and between workshops, retreats, and other vocation programs. Leadership and local members will need to broaden their capacity for inclusion, keeping the door open while continuing to allow the vocation director to come and go as needed. The vocation director will need a home base that allows him or her to come home and relax without suffering the projections of other members working 8-to-5 who can't figure out what the vocation director is doing relaxing mid-week. Spiritual companions, a spiritual director, individual counseling, support groups, study groups, and congregational members who adjust their fixed work schedules to spend quality time with the transient vocation director—all of these contribute to the health and well-being of the vocation director.

3 Be part of a network

Creating a viable network with other professional men and women can contribute to the vocation director's knowledge so that easy and accessible information and assistance can be secured. Networking with other vocation directors who understand the pressures of the ministry can provide emotional support. In discerning the maturity and capacity of candidates for the formation process, vocation director should work closely with a psychologist familiar with the requirements of the admitting congregation. Access to professionals and resources to help create and maintain websites, chat

rooms and other communications tools can reduce the stress on the vocation director to be all things to all people. Others in a strong network can aid the candidates with whom vocation directors work. Spiritual directors can serve as guides for those in the discernment process. Other professionals might help candidates with adult life skill development required before formation begins. For instance mentors can assist candidates with financial planning and management.

4 Feed and nurture your soul

Some musts for nurturing the soul of a vocation director are making time for prayer with a local community, celebrating Eucharist and taking part in other devotions. A vocation director must maintain personal prayer and days of reflection. A designated time for silence and solitude is a must to regenerate the soul of a vocation director. Meaningful prayer experiences, both shared and private, will need to be negotiated, due to travel and the odd working hours that come from adapting to the vocation candidates' work and school schedules. Most of us who travel for a living have discovered that if something is in our calendar, then the time is safeguarded. Make an appointment daily and weekly to be with God in a place that feeds and fosters spiritual intimacy so that the well of life-giving waters flowing through you never dries up.

5 Stay in touch with your inner compass

While traveling along the way with those in vocation discernment, each vocation director will need to realign his or her own inner compass. The confusion, mixed feelings, spiritual chaos, dark nights of the soul, and messiness of the conversion process of vocation candidates can leak into the mind and heart of the vocation director. What keeps you grounded in the reality of your own vocation call? How do you renew your own consciousness to your particular call as priest, religious, missionary? Ask these questions and heed your answers.

6 Pray the Serenity Prayer

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and the courage to change the things that I can." Naturally vocation directors desire to see the fruits of their work and enjoy the entrance of new members. When the hopes of a few vocation candidates are shattered by unexpected life events, or when the decisions of others derail the vocation

director's investment of time, energy and hope, the need to practice and achieve serenity is a must.

7 Expect a little chaos

Vocation discernment can be likened to the story of creation. Chaos is the prelude to creativity becoming. Chaos comes from God's ingenuity to infuse each person with options, choices and possibilities. Each person's choice brings order to God's infusion. The journey with a vocation candidate allows the vocation director to be a co-artist as the candidate takes paint to canvas and with each choice designs who he or she is. Hairpin curves, unpredictable changes, derailment and confusion are the raw materials God will use to shape and re-shape the vocation candidate so as to achieve vulnerability that opens up to love, within which humans become what they are capable of becoming. God shapes and forms each vocation candidate through the bumps and bruises of life. As vocation directors we offer the eyes of mercy, a heart of hope, and a proclamation that God is in all this mess—just wait for the gift to be revealed in the pain.

8 Take frustrations to the Exalted Cross

Much suffering and much loss can be met along the way of vocation work. As you hope to bring in new members, some of your best friends may be departing, leaving your congregation or the priesthood all together. Each vocation director contributes to the midwifery of vocations, accomplishing the various levels of formation, and then the vocation candidate might decide to leave or might be prohibited from continuing for some reason. Redemptive suffering weaves itself throughout our lifetime only to reassure us that God is in the mess. Vocation directors need to take their frustrations and disappointments to the Exalted Cross. The Prayer of Surrender invites each of us to give to Him who has already conquered sin and death. Thus our petty concerns can be transformed into God's will and pleasure.

Prayer of Surrender

To you, Oh God,
I surrender
my thoughts,
feelings,
desires
and expectations
so that your will can be accomplished.

9 Nurture imagination and creativity

Color, beauty, dance, rhythm, poetry, music, art, hobbies, non-productive fun and recreation, laughter, comedy, and other opportunities to feed and nurture both creativity and imagination can help sustain a vocation director during the desert moments of his or her work. Spending time and money for these opportunities is essential to feeding and nurturing that sacred part of our personality that is in the image and likeness of God. Learn a craft or art expression that you can take along with you on your travels so that when you have time for self-care, you have a ready-made outlet within reach. Make time to learn about your trade, which is both an art and a science. Read or attend workshops, retreats or classes either online or in person to expand your knowledge of the human formation process and the adult life skills that so many of our youth are missing. Make time to play cards

or board games, eat some popcorn and have a beer or glass of wine with friends who will remind you that at the end of the day, it is not how much you got done, rather it is how well you loved and allowed yourself to be loved.

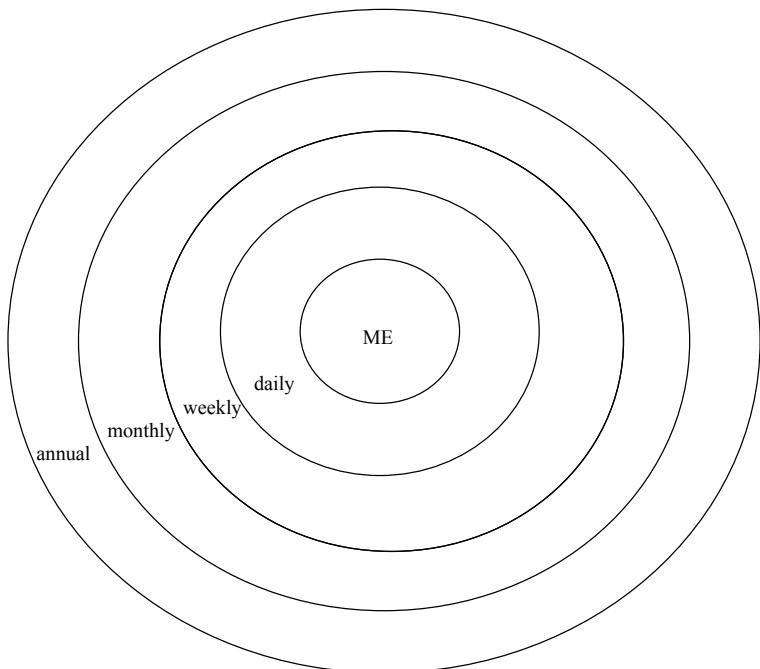
A friend of mine has been the vocation director of her congregation for over 18 years. She embodies health and well-being. Her congregation continues to invest time, money and resources into feeding and nurturing her body, mind and spirit. Her personal joy and love for life spills over into her work as a vocation director. Her friends are there when times get tough, and her family and local community have adapted their schedules to include her so that by phone, e-mail or Skype she feels connected and supported. A vocation director remains a student, always ready to learn and be stretched. In doing so, they can meet the needs of vocation candidates who long for meaning, purpose and connection to God. ■

Picture your support system

It can be helpful to create a visual of your support network by creating a “Social Atom.” Begin by listing those people, activities and events that feed and nurture you either daily, weekly, monthly or annually. Draw an arrow from your sources of nurturance to yourself in the center.

Then, using the concentric circles, list all the people, activities and events that require you to nurture and support them on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis. Remember family, friends, community members, co-workers, work-related duties and daily routines can either be energy provoking or a drain. The Social Atom gives a visual of how much energy you are putting out to other people and events and how much nurturance and support you are receiving.

Do you see a balance between those you care for and nurture and those that care for and nurture you? Do you have activities, hobbies, and other life experiences that feed and nurture you? Is this enough to keep you healthy and vibrant as a vocation director?



The Social Atom

Our human needs can be gateways to God's action in our lives and gateways to discovering our calling. Scripture stories of women and need offer a rich source of reflection for those in vocation discernment.

Vocation meditations on women and need in Scripture

BY SISTER LOU ELLA HICKMAN, IWBS

NOTHING MARKS US as creatures so much as our needs, and often our needs are very difficult: a barren wife, a very sick child, a dying man. Many of these human needs recorded in Scripture involve women—their own need or their response to the needs of others. Rather than being stereotypical pictures of needy and weak females, these women are complex creatures whose strengths, weaknesses and profound needs are the vessels of God's action. For many people who read the Bible, these women are the "invisibly obvious." That is, readers may think they know the stories, but it takes a sensitive reading of the storyline to see how a number of these women's lives changed the course of salvation history.

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How we respond to need, both in ourselves and in others, reveals the depth of our humanity. Not only that, need also summons us to our vocation. When I was in high school, I attended a vocation retreat, and I remember the retreat master telling the group, "Love is finding a need and filling it." Perhaps those you accompany in the discernment process might find reflection on these women helpful as a way to guide them in discovering what need they are called to fill. I've highlighted here a selection of women from both the Old and New Testament, along with a series of questions that discerners might consider. Vocation ministers themselves might reflect on these questions in light of their own stories in preparation for sharing with discerners. This list of women from Scripture is only partial. It is my hope that these reflections open the door to considering other women in Scripture whose lives and vocations helped salvation history unfold.

Sarah: Genesis 16:1-15

God promised an heir to Abraham, but after some 20 years of waiting, Sarah took matters into her own hands. As a result there was conflict within the family. However the promised heir is born. Sarah's vocation was one of waiting as well as being the matriarch of the Jewish people.

Reflection

How does Sarah's situation of need speak to you? In what ways do you allow the Lord to answer the needs of others as well as your own? How has God written straight with the crooked lines of your life? How do you wait?

The name Sarah means "princess." Sarah was young once, and she was most likely very beautiful. How does this information impact your understanding of her story and how could that information impact your discernment?

Lot's daughters

Genesis 19:5, 12-26, 30-38

After the destruction of Sodom, Lot's family hid in caves. Believing their family was the only one alive, the daughters go against the religious and cultural taboo of their day and have

sex with their father. They do this to fulfill their vocation as mothers and to insure that the legacy of life continues.

Ruth's name means "friend" or "companion," which describes her vocation. How is God calling you to the vocation of friend or companion?

Reflection

How do you make choices? How are your choices life-giving? What do you find life-giving?

Pharaoh's daughter, the unnamed girl, and Moses' mother: Exodus 2:5-10

The above three women form a "trinity" or triangle around Moses. They respond not only to his need but to theirs as well. Each woman in her own way was called to the vocation of mother to Moses.

The wealthy in ancient Egypt bathed in their houses; the poor went to the Nile to bathe. While the annual flooding of the Nile helped Egypt's farmers, the river was also a catch-all of sewage, laundry and bathing. As a result it carried a high risk of disease.

Reflection

Who do you identify with? Why do you think the pharaoh's daughter was willing to take the risk of bathing in the Nile? What risks are you willing to take in order to respond to what God is calling you to?

Moses' mother had to say good-by to her son twice. What

are you willing to let go of in order to take the next step in discernment?

The unnamed girl served as a bridge between the two adults. How is discernment a bridge? What needs to be bridged in your life?

The Book of Ruth

Ruth's name means "friend" or "companion," which describes her vocation. As the story unfolds, Ruth is not only Naomi's daughter-in-law but will companion her back to Israel. Naomi's great burden is that she has no one to care for her since her son has died. After they arrive, Ruth remains with Naomi as her friend, and together they learn to lean on each other in order to survive. Because of that loyalty, they do more than survive, they thrive. With her vocation of marriage to Boaz and the birth of a son, Ruth becomes the ancestor to King David.

Reflection

In what ways do your family members, especially your ancestors, help to shape your vocation?

Ruth made a choice to return with Naomi and be a part of her family. Sometimes people are family by choice rather than by birth. How could this situation be a blessing in vocation discernment?

Ruth helped Naomi carry her burden of being alone. One of the greatest burdens women carry today is that they must carry their difficulties alone. How is God calling you to the vocation of friend or companion?

Hannah: 1 Samuel 1:2-28, 2:1-21

Due to her culture's great stress on bearing children, Hannah was desperate to have a child, thus fulfilling her vocation as a mother. So she prays. After the priest, Eli, blesses her, she immediately returns to her husband. Sometime later she returns to the Temple and brings with her the son she promised to give to the Lord. The child will grow up to be the great prophet, Samuel. Thus Hannah's need for a child moves the storyline of salvation closer to Jesus, as her son, Samuel, will anoint King David, beginning the Davidic line.

Reflection

The rabbis taught that Hannah was a paradigm of a person at prayer. How might Hannah be a role model of prayer for you? How do you pray? What in Hannah's story might help you pray better?

During your reflection, you might ask yourself if God is calling you to be a contemplative religious.

Hannah was also a faith filled person—she believed Eli's words without question. Looking back over your faith story, what stands out for you? If you, like Hannah, could give people one thing to bring them to faith in Jesus, what would it be?

In what ways does the culture try to tell you what it means to have a "vocation"?

Abigail

1 Samuel 25:2-44; 27:3, 30:3, 15, 18

Abigail was the wife of Nabal whose name means "fool." She took food to David and his men who were hungry and in the process protected David from killing or being killed. As a result Abigail was a wisdom figure with her feast, as well as a person of wisdom who told David what to overlook. (Sister Martha Ann Kirk, CCVI, writes about Abigail in *Women of Bible Lands*, pp. 328-332.)

Reflection

Compare Nabal and David's actions. The term "fool" is used in Scripture to mean someone who does not believe in God. What does the men's action say about their faith?

Compare Nabal and Abigail's versions of feasting. What are the feasts in your life? How do you make time for feasting? Who do you invite to your table to share in your feasting? What is the place of feasting in your discernment?

Who are wisdom figures or mentors in your life? How would you define wisdom? What is nourishing for you or gives you energy?

The witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28:3-25

Even though King Saul outlawed magic, he was so desperate he went to this woman for help. Her "vocation" makes her not only an outcast but also someone who could have been arrested. Yet she will not disobey the great law of Jewish hospitality. Thus their encounter echoes Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors at Mamre. (It might be helpful to read the story of Abraham's encounter in order to see the parallels. See Genesis 18:1-15.)

Reflection

Many groups in our society are "invisibly obvious." I have a seminarian friend who wants to work with the deaf. Sign lan-

guage is the third most used language in the Western Hemisphere, yet the deaf are among the most underserved members in our church.

How was this woman's hospitality "sign language" to someone who was desperate to hear something about his situation? Saul heard bad news, but he did not leave without being fed.

Who are the "deaf" in our society? What kind of "sign language" can you learn to help "feed" them? In what ways are you learning to hear God's call and in turn hear those who are in need?

In what ways do Saul's actions reveal that he is "deaf"? Flannery O'Connor, the Southern Catholic writer, once wrote, "... you have to make your vision apparent by shock, to the hard of hearing you must shout, and to the almost blind, you draw large and startling figures." What is shocking about the story?

Hannah was a faith filled person—she believed Eli's words without question. Looking back over your faith story, what stands out for you?

Cure of the Canaanite woman's daughter Matthew 15:21-28

This mother interceded for her sick child and did so with a wisdom the Jews highly prized: a tit for tat conversion. Her vocation was to be a woman of faith. The Canaanites were a pagan people, and the Israelites often fell under their influence.

Reflection

If God seems to put you off when you pray, how might the Canaanite woman's approach help or encourage you to keep seeking?

Matthew wrote his Gospel for a Jewish community. What impact do you think this story had on this community? If you were a member of this community, how would the story impact your decision to follow Jesus?

Perhaps as a help to your discernment, you might consider joining an intercessory prayer group in your parish.

Mary Magdalene Matthew 27:55-56; John 20:1-18

Although Mary Magdalene was a woman of means, she was

also an outcast. In spite of being an outcast, she was a follower of Jesus, and the church honors her with the vocation title of Apostle to the Apostles because she announced Jesus' resurrection to the apostles.

Reflection

Many people consider themselves unworthy of a religious vocation. How could Mary Magdalene's story be an inspiration to them? Could you use her story to help someone who feels that way?

St. Teresa of Avila wrote a beautiful prayer beginning: "Christ has no body now but yours." The prayer might be a helpful tool during your prayer time.

priesthood. One of young men, Steve Horvath, went to Guatemala to live with the extremely poor. The young man had a very high paying job, and he could have easily sent large sums of money to help the poor people he was visiting. His discernment: do I send money or do I go myself? A missionary priest told him, "The most precious gift you can send is yourself." The young man chose to enter the seminary. While these poor people needed a better standard of living—something this young man's money could have given them—they had a greater need. What do you think it was?

"The most precious gift" in your life could be a call to a missionary vocation. Perhaps serving Jesus personally like Mary Magdalene could be a call to a cloister. Or perhaps God's is calling you to be a financial support to those who are the "invisibly obvious." How does "just writing a check" differ from a ministry of being a financial supporter?

Pilate's wife: Matthew 27:19

As the result of a dream, Pilate's wife spoke up on behalf of Jesus when all others deserted him before his crucifixion. While her vocation was being the wife of an important official, she had the singular calling of being an advocate on behalf of Jesus.

If a discerner is struggling with his or her decision, perhaps it would help to reflect on his or her night dreams. I remember having a number of dreams when I was struggling with my vocation decision, and I would have welcomed someone to share them with. Vocation ministers who don't feel qualified in this area, could suggest someone who might be. However, sometimes all it takes is someone willing to listen.

Reflection

How could your dreams "speak up" on behalf of a vocation you are discerning?

The woman seeking a lost coin Luke 15:8-10

Jesus uses the image of the feminine in a story to help reveal who he is. While her need to search for the coin is not clear, the fact she goes to great lengths to find it highlights the storyline. She may be searching because she is poor, and a lost coin would make her that much poorer. The coins could also represent the monetary dowry she wears as part of her clothing and a lost coin would make marriage impossible. The lamp she lights could be a wisdom symbol or one of faith. Whatever the reason, the story centers on Jesus' vocation to seek out those who most greatly need him: the poor and the lost. Perhaps the need resides in Jesus—it was his need to seek out the lost. The parable is also a practical reminder that most of the poor are women.

Reflection

What does it mean to be lost? Who would Jesus seek out today? In what ways does Jesus "need" to seek out the poor and the lost? St. Teresa of Avila wrote a beautiful prayer beginning: "Christ has no body now but yours." The prayer might be a helpful tool during your prayer time.

What could this story help you discern about how you might be able to empower women to get out of poverty? This type of support also strengthens the vocation of family life.

Mary at the wedding in Cana: John 2:1-11

Mary's vocation is that she is the first and the perfect disciple. This story also concerns the vocation of marriage as Jesus honors it with his presence.

Reflection

Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI in his book *Our One Great Act*

of Fidelity observed that “Wine is both a festive drink, the drink of celebration, of wedding, even as it is the product of crushed grapes and represents the blood of Jesus and the blood and suffering of all that is crushed in our world and in our lives” (p. 29).

This echoes Frederick Buechner’s famous quote that vocation is, “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep need meet.” How is the Eucharist the source of your joy? What is the world’s deep need? In what ways can you give the Eucharist to everyone you meet?

Mary told the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Bring that statement to prayer, especially during some time before the Blessed Sacrament.

On a regular basis, you might use this Scripture passage as a starting point in prayer and ask Mary to help guide you to where her Son wants you to serve.

The passage ends with the statement, “... the disciples began to believe in him.” What does that statement tell you about discernment? How can it help you as you discern your vocation?

As preparation for your prayer, watch the movie *Romero*. There is a 10-minute section in which the archbishop goes to a church to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament. How does this scene reflect Father Rolheiser’s statement about the Eucharist?

The woman at the well: John 4:5-42

Jesus met this woman just a few verses after his encounter with Nicodemus, who came to him at night. Light and dark are symbols John used to signify faith or lack of it. Both Nicodemus and the woman were both in need of faith, and it is interesting to note their responses. Nicodemus doesn’t appear again until he brings a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus’ body. (John 19:39) The woman’s vocational response was immediate—the whole town was brought to Jesus.

Reflection

Many people believe that being a missionary means leaving one’s country and going to another to spread the Gospel. While this is true in part, being a missionary is a basic element in being Catholic. Vatican II declared, “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature.” (*Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, 1.2) How is your daily life one of being a missionary? Could you see yourself as a religious missionary for the home missions?

Women at the cross and tomb: John 19:25, John 20:1-18, Matthew 28:1-10

Their vocation was one of witness—both as eye-witnesses and in the meaning of the word martyr. Because of their love of Jesus, they were willing to “die” with him.

Reflection

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom shares the last words of her sister, Betsie. “... (we) must tell them what we’ve learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that his is not deeper still. They will listen to us, Corrie, because we’ve been here” (p. 217). Corrie and her sister were prisoners in German concentration camps after they were arrested for hiding Jews. Betsie knew their message would be credible because of their experiences.

One of the major questions second career discerners ask is about ministry if they choose a religious vocation. Perhaps the question could be posed, “Because of your life experiences would you feel comfortable ministering in difficult places such as a hospital, a homeless shelter or a prison?”

Hannah was a faith filled person—she believed Eli’s words without question. Looking back over your faith story, what stands out for you?

Lydia: Acts 16:11-15

Lydia was a successful businesswoman dealing in purple cloth. That meant she dealt with the wealthy. Her vocation was that of being a professional. Because there is no mention of a male figure in the story, she may have been single after the death of her husband.

Reflection

Once I met a young police officer who believed his job was his vocation. In fact many people—artists, teachers, social workers, etc.—view their work as a vocation. How do vocation and a profession impact each other? How does one make a job a ministry? How might professional vocations help the church spread the Gospel?

Lydia gave hospitality to Paul the missionary. How might you give “hospitality” to a missionary? Or can you see yourself as the missionary in this story?

General questions and approaches

Many other stories of women in need or responding to need appear in Scripture. Here are some questions that apply to any of these narratives. How might the story I am reflecting on help me to be a freer person? What is my deepest desire? What might God's desires be for me? How might the storyline I'm reflecting on be a clue to my desire or God's desire?

St. Ignatius dreamt of doing great things for God. What are your dreams? He also utilized three questions to help people to discover God's will. These questions can be considered in the context of reflection on a Scripture story.

1. What have I done for God?
2. What am I doing for God?
3. What can I do for God?

Another approach to prayerful reflection on a Scripture story is to find a painting depicting the scene to use as a visual during meditation. A great deal of artwork can be found on the Internet, particularly by using a Google image search. (Open Google.com, select "image" from along the top bar, and

enter your search terms, such as "Woman at the well." A host of famous and lesser-known images will appear.)

The opening scenes of the movie *Godspell* are an apt visual metaphor for our society. The film begins with a traffic jam. While the clothes and the cars shout the sixties, the reality of society's noise not only hasn't changed but has gotten worse. Yet the scenes also show that the call of God is heard and heeded. Perhaps a final question needs to be asked: how did the women of Scripture hear the "still, small voice" of God in their lives? Perhaps this remark by Stephen J. Duffy speaks to that question. "The extraordinary, therefore, is encountered in the ordinary; biography and history are the medium of divine/human dialogue" (from "Grace," *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 350).

They heard God's call because of grace. In fact, all is grace. The very needs we have are voids that God wants to enter and use for his own purposes. For those who are discerning their calling, and for those of you who walk with discerners, may these women's stories help you both in the great adventure of God's friendship. ■

lydia: the dealer in purple goods

Acts 16:1-15

I took his business and ran with it
making good even better
then voted best of the best
now
my profit margin is more than good risk management ...

it is an investment called everything

lady hope's riddle and the call to holiness

"You are all called into one hope"

Ephesians 4:4

i am today as well as tomorrow

i am the whisper in the shimmering silence:
this the secret you have been longing for
yet did not know—until now

— Sister Lou Ella Hickman, IWBS

FILM NOTES

Film delivers a loving but incomplete portrait

By CAROL SCHUCK SCHEIBER

Band of Sisters is a lovingly rendered documentary that tells the story of many American sisters over the last 50 years. For members of apostolic women's communities, or for laity like myself who have warm friendships and work relationships with sisters, this movie is fascinating and revealing. I relished the stories of brave new ministries, the archival footage of the old days in long habits, and the war stories of women who challenged injustices. From the understanding I've acquired working with religious communities for the past two decades, however, the film is also somewhat incomplete. It shows a single, albeit vocal, point of view. But to show all the nuances, to show the complexity of today's controversies, to depict the entire nine yards of sisters today and yesterday ... that may very well be beyond the abilities of any single film. In fact, as a

laywoman on the outside looking in, I have often felt over the years that as soon as I think I've figured out religious life, I discover a new layer, a new wrinkle, a new storyline that disrupts what I previously understood. In other words, the story of American sisters is not an easy story to tell.

I call this film "incomplete," but I do so with great respect for the work that has been accomplished. This documentarian has pulled off quite a feat in managing to capture 50+ years of history, the emotional feel of many of the dramatic changes that today's older sisters lived through, a complex portrait of contemporary ministry, and an exploration of today's overlaps in theology, cosmology and ecology. On top of all that, filmmaker (and architect) Mary Fishman has inserted riveting footage of IHM Sister Theresa Kane's historic encounter with Pope John Paul II, as well as an intriguing discussion by sisters who were there of what took place behind the scenes on the day of Kane's act of dissent. Furthermore, I have to commend this production for managing to also show the great sense of humor and fun that these church women have.

To accomplish so much in two hours of film is impressive, and I tip my hat to the filmmaker, the editor, and everyone involved. (I loved, by the way, that the film has an original musical score, a detail that embellishes everything else.)

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Sister Pat Murphy, RSM (center) and Sister JoAnn Persch, RSM (right) with other supporters of immigrant rights. These two sisters are prominently featured in *Band of Sisters*.

Throughout the length of *Band of Sisters*, viewers get to know a wonderful pair of Sisters of Mercy, who apparently live together in the Chicago area and are involved in a ministry to undocumented people on the verge of being deported. We see Sisters Pat Murphy, RSM and JoAnn Persch, RSM lobbying their state congressman to allow ministerial visits to undocumented persons held in prison. We see the two on freezing cold picket lines protesting deportations that render families asunder. These two sisters are, by my estimation, in their 70s and 80s (64 and 59 years in religious life), but they are indefatigable.

We also meet a Mercy sister who is involved in low-income housing. We hear from a woman who had been homeless and who now lives in a well-maintained apartment; she talks about the thrill of having her own place, the joy of being able to take a bath for the first time in months. A Sister of Mercy (or perhaps several sisters) can take some credit for this woman having finally achieved a semblance of dignity. This film lets us see faces, up close, of the previously homeless, the families of those being deported, the faces of those whose help “has come from the Lord” via Roman Catholic sisters.

Seeing the faces of the poor whose suffering has been assuaged by sisters ought to make every Catholic in this country feel proud. Yes, those are our sisters; that’s our church!

In addition to watching this film as a friend and admirer of nuns, I also watched this film from my lens as *HORIZON* editor. In reading books and watching films related to religious life, I often consider the question of new membership

and how to build a future for consecrated life. From that vantage point, this film comes up short. If I were a vocation minister, I might show this film to young women considering religious life, but I’d also need to editorialize plenty. I might mention that the film does not portray one of the strengths of American sisters: their great diversity in lifestyle, prayer forms, history, theology, etc. The resulting picture one has of religious life is incomplete. The stories in *Band of Sisters* are gripping, but religious life is more complex, bigger, and more diverse than is shown here.

If I were showing this film to young adults interested in religious life, I might also say that although the numbers are small, there are young people still entering religious communities. Not everyone in religious life is a senior citizen. Ultimately, *Band of Sisters* is more about the senior members and their fascinating past, their compelling social ministries, and their theological innovations than it is about today’s younger religious women and their future—that is to say, the future of American religious life.

That will have to be a different film. In fact *Band of Sisters* ends with a scene of Sisters Murphy and Persch sitting alone in a living room with several empty chairs. They are chatting good humoredly, throwing in some “senior” jokes about confusing technology. This is not a scene of robust new life.

In terms of vocations, that essential topic is left almost untouched in *Band of Sisters*. One sister, the warm, articulate Sister Nancy Sylvester, IHM, does point out that the post-war throngs who poured into religious life in the 1950s and 1960s were an anomaly. This is accurate, but it is an incomplete explanation of why new membership in some women’s communities is suffering.

This documentary includes a lot of discussion of sustainability in terms of ecology, but nothing about the sustainability of religious life. What sustains a community? What attracts new members? Newer members are not large in number, but they, too, are dedicated, smart, energetic women of the church. We see very few of them outside of archival footage (although we do see the innovative podcasting of younger IHM Sisters Julie Vieira and Maxine Kollasch, IHM, as they take radio calls from individuals considering religious life).

In the end, then, *Band of Sisters* affectionately and skillfully tells the story of many women religious. There is a great deal to relish. And perhaps it is the task of other films to someday explore the stories of the full range of sisters in all their diversity, both old and young. ■

Learn more about *Band of Sisters*, including screenings, at bandofsistersmovie.com

BOOK NOTES

Book helps discerners of all types hear God's voice amid the noise

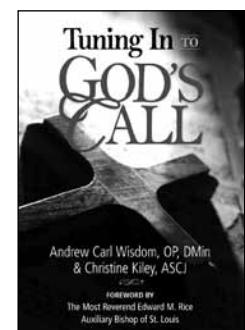
BY SISTER SUSAN ROSE FRANCOIS, CSJP

I love hearing the vocation stories of my elder sisters, in particular how they first tuned in to God's call and discovered our community. In many stories, the sister first discovered an inkling of a call in prayer or service, which she then discussed with her pastor or a wise friend who gave her a brochure or suggested she visit the sisters. Other stories revolve around personal relationships with our sisters, either through family connections or our ministries. A few more are unexpected, such as the sister who accompanied a friend to a vocation retreat for moral support, only to find her own heart pulled toward religious life instead. Each story is unique, but the vast majority took place in a 20th century context, in the midst of a decidedly Catholic culture that supported the call.

Sister Susan Rose Francois, CSJP recently professed perpetual vows with the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. She is a graduate student at Catholic Theological Union and is a member of the national core team for Giving Voice. Prior to entrance, Sister Susan served as the city elections officer in Portland, Oregon. Her blog is Musings of a Discerning Woman (www.actjustly.blogspot.com)



While I often ask my sisters about their call, they are equally curious about mine, which they suspect to be quite different. Indeed, in my 21st century story my first contact with the community was via our website. Nonetheless our stories have much in common. While I explored communities online, it was a conversation with my pastor that first opened me to the possibility of the unexpected path that now gives my life such meaning, joy and hope.



Filtering out the noise

It seems to me that what makes contemporary vocation stories most distinct from those of my elder sisters is not the mechanics but the context of the call. Many young women and men discerning a religious vocation today do not have personal relationships with religious sisters, brothers or priests. Unless they were raised in a very devout family, they most likely have never been invited to consider religious life as a viable option.

Moreover, our secular culture, with its cornucopia of value-neutral options (think of how many channels are on your television set) makes it challenging to filter through all of the noise and tune in to God's call. For

the most part, our 21st century reality lacks the spiritual and cultural context to help young adults sort through the mix of thoughts, feelings, dreams, worries and desires that is vocational discernment.

I wonder if the particular vocational challenge of our era isn't just this—how to filter out the cacophony of voices that interfere with our ability to listen deeply to God's call. This is especially true for young men and women considering the unexpected call to religious life. Father Andrew Carl Wisdom, OP and Sister Christine Kiley, ASCJ provide a helpful tool to help filter out the noise in *Tuning in to God's Call* (Ligouri, 2012). *Tuning In* is not a how-to-guide or a Discernment 101 textbook. Rather it is spiritual reading that gently provides the reader with a mix of prayer, reflection and action prompts centered on discernment.

Organized into five parts, *Tuning In* introduces the reader to the various building blocks of tuning in to God's call, from the what, why and how of discernment to the fruits and signs of a good discernment. Each part is divided into discrete sections—many of which might well stand alone for a discussion or faith sharing group—with a Scripture passage, brief reflection, quote, action prompt and prayer. The authors draw from the rich well of Catholic tradition, including Scripture, insights from saints, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Many reflections include real life vocation and personal stories that help make the abstract real. Wisdom and Kiley immerse the reader in a spiritual and cultural context that orients him or her along the roller coaster ride of discernment.

The end result is an accessible book that is grounded in the Catholic tradition but doesn't hit readers over the head with the enormity of what they might be discerning. While the overall direction of the book is toward a religious vocation, the authors also invite readers to seriously consider whether they might be called to marriage or an intentional single life instead. The authors make it clear that each of these vocations is a call to holiness and an invitation to discover how our story best fits into the overarching story of God.

Action-oriented and holistic

While *Tuning In* does not overwhelm the reader, the authors do encourage the reader to move from a state of perpetual discernment to some sort of decision. One way the authors accomplish this is through the short action prompts included in each section. I suspect that young adults will find many of these actions both doable and fruitful. In fact, more than one of the book's suggestions mirrored some of the more helpful

parts of my own vocation discernment process.

There is something here for everyone. Some discerners will be drawn by the invitation to sit in adoration before the Holy Eucharist, placing their desires on the altar before God. Thinkers may draw insights from an opportunity to make a list of their top five priorities and reflect on how that impacts their relationship to God and their call. Multi-taskers might be called to slow down through the exercise of "wasting time" with God in prayer. Extroverts will no doubt gain insights from the suggested conversations with a friend about faith and call. The techno-savvy discerner will be able to make room for God's data in their discernment through a technology fast. The wide variety of prompts will help the 21st century discerners break through all the noise and tune in to God's call.

I especially appreciated that these action prompts come within the context of Scripture, wisdom sayings of saints, reflection and prayer. This is a holistic approach that I believe will also help readers develop a regular practice of prayer and spiritual reflection, if they do not already have one. Wisdom and Kiley draw upon a wealth of resources that provide a healthy and holistic representation of Catholic spirituality. They include insights from the best of the traditional and progressive aspects of our faith, as well as everything in between. As I prayed my way through the book, I found myself resonating with some aspects more than others. Yet I could also see how they might be deeply meaningful for others. Vocation ministers should feel comfortable recommending this book to serious discerners on any spot on the Catholic spectrum.

This is not a book to be read in one sitting or assigned for a reflection paper. Rather, each section should be savored, one or two at a time, with breaks for reflection and action. Some readers might skip a section or two, only to return to it later on their journey. No vocational discernment is the same, and the flexibility of this book allows readers to spend more time on aspects that are more pertinent to them at that moment, while also inviting them to consider elements around which they might have more resistance.

While it is geared towards those in active discernment, vocation ministers might also gain some insights from *Tuning In*. For example the action prompts and prayers could easily be adapted for a variety of purposes. The main audience of the book, however, is those embarking on a vocation discernment journey themselves. As promised by the authors, *Tuning In* discerns along with them, inviting them to take unexpected turns and even stop from time to time to take stock, open their hearts, and listen for the voice of God in the midst of the noise of daily life. ■

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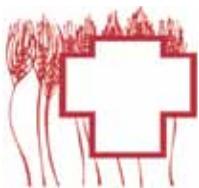
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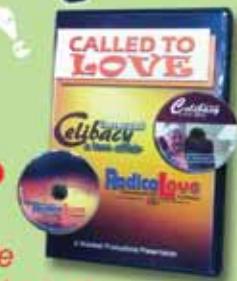
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