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CASTING THE NET

VOCATION MINISTRY IN A GLOBAL CHURCH AND WORLD

CONVOCATION 2010

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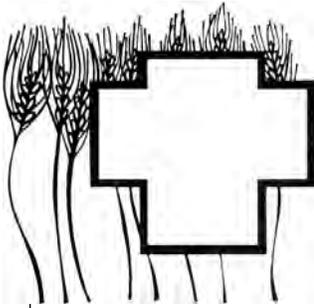
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HORIZON

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

Finding joy as we cast the net in new ways

IF YOU HATE WINTERTIME, you might not get this, but to me one of the many pleasures of the season is one that I'm partaking in right now. I'm writing this in a warm office, cup of tea steaming on my desk, while three feet away, on the other side of the window, snow is gently coating every living and non-living thing. Nothing will be spared. All will be transformed.

Not me, though. I'm here with my tea. Matter of fact, I just pulled a chocolate cake out of the oven. (I'm not making this up! My college student daughter who likes to bake is here on break.)

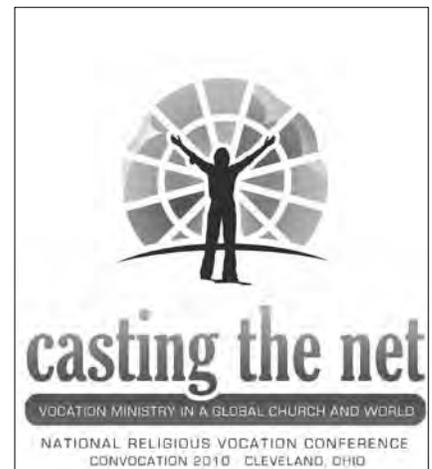
The point is, it feels great sometimes to retreat from the world and let the storms and snow blast and swirl elsewhere. But one message was loud and clear in Cleveland when we gathered for the November 2010 Convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference: we're each called to "cast the net" in a world that can seem as off-putting as a blizzard. Rapid technological and communication changes, a church that now reflects the changing racial face of America, injustices, ecological ruin: these can make the world outside (and even inside) the motherhouse uninviting. But just as surely as the snow will cover my driveway, as surely as I'll eat that cake and shovel my front drive—just as surely, I'm confident that we will rise above our fears, leave behind our comforts and do what it takes to cast the net effectively in 2011. We'll stretch ourselves a bit, but we'll find joy in casting the net in new ways.

In fact, vocation ministers are already doing it. Communities are talking to young adults, learning how

they communicate and adapting their vocation outreach accordingly. Communities are rediscovering their charisms by tackling injustice and racism.

With Jesus always before us and our brother and sister vocation ministers at our side, we are ready to act on the stirring words of the convocation keynote speakers. We can deepen our spirits to equip ourselves to both invite new members and challenge the excesses of globalization, as Brother David Andrews, CSC suggested. We can accept the digital revolution and harness new technologies for good, as Sister Angela Zukowski, MSHS encouraged. We can study and pray over the vocation messages of Pope Benedict XVI, as suggested by Archbishop Pietro Sambi. And we can make our communities truly welcoming by working toward racial reconciliation, as Father Bryan Massingale urged. It's hard to set aside the tea and the coziness, but Jesus has no feet but ours, no hands but ours. We may even find that the snows transform us and make us sparkle in the sun.

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



Why must something so beautiful—seeking God’s call—so frequently be difficult? The paradoxes of vocation ministry are resolved in surrendering to God, who bestows and sustains each person’s vocation.

Renew the glory of your vocation by clinging to the hand of God

BY BROTHER PAUL BEDNARCZYK, CSC

I willingly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong. — 2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

IT CAPTIVATED THE WORLD’S ATTENTION for months—33 miners trapped in a Chilean mine over 2,000 feet below the earth’s surface. Prayer vigils, shrines, statues dotted the landscape at the San Jose mine. Rosaries blessed by Pope Benedict were sent down the mine shaft to the men. They, in turn, signed a Chilean flag for the Holy Father, which he eventually displayed in the papal apartment. The world gasped when after 69 days of captivity, the first miner literally rose out

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC has been a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Eastern Province of Brothers, since 1978. He has over 17 years of experience in vocation ministry, eight of which have been as NRVC executive director. He also served on his provincial council for nine years. In addition to publishing several articles on vocation ministry, he has spoken to numerous religious groups on vocations and has been invited to give workshops on vocation ministry in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

of the ashes and emerged into the light of a new day from a rescue capsule appropriately called the “Phoenix.” Miner after miner surfaced and was greeted by the welcoming arms of his family and of his God. As one man said in a televised interview, “God held my hand.” The Chilean Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops was right when it announced that a second Easter is being celebrated in Chile this year. Clearly, this was more than a rescue mission—this was a display of religious faith and the power of prayer in a time of distress in the face of overwhelming odds.

It is a paradox. How can people endure such suffering and heartache, only to have their faith strengthened and renewed? Whether we look at Scripture, theology or the writings of the saints, this paradox, this union of opposites, is a common image. The evangelist, John, speaks of God as both the beginning and the end; our faith tells us that God is both immanent and transcendent; Jesus Christ is both divine and human. St. Francis said that we will find richness in our poverty; St. Therese of Lisieux pointed to a “little way” that leads to God’s munificent grace; and St. Ignatius of Loyola spoke of consolation in the midst of desolation.

In many ways, the reading from St. Paul this morning epitomizes this union of opposites. St. Paul knew suffering—he was imprisoned, chained, persecuted and exiled, but he never looked back. Instead, he always kept his eyes on the goal, straining ahead “for the prize to which God calls us

upwards to receive in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:15). Much like God held the hand of the miner, so too did God extend his hand to Paul, for he writes “For when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong.”

Choose life

What does this paradox of faith say to us vocation ministers, men and women who promote consecrated religious life and priesthood in a time of uncertainty and change in the distressful face of overwhelming odds?

As some of you may know, one of my favorite things to do as executive director is to present at our annual orientation for new vocation directors. I have done this for 12 years, and I have had the privilege of meeting an amazing group of women and men who have inspired me both in their faith and in their commitment to religious life. I will never forget a discussion I had with one sister, a member of a small community of only 10 women, the youngest of whom was in her late 60s. This sister was approaching 80, and their community agreed that they would no longer accept candidates. The sisters knew that they had served well, but they made a conscious choice not to give in to their grief that their community was diminishing. Instead, they chose life and decided to live and serve to their fullest as long as they were able.

Of course, I asked the logical question: “Sister, if you



Photo: Brother John O'Hara, SA

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC encouraged his listeners to keep the dream of religious life alive. He spoke during morning prayer at the NRVC convocation in Cleveland, November 5, 2010.

have chosen not to accept any candidates in the future, then why are you here at an orientation for new vocation directors?” I will never forget her response. She looked at me with her lovely blue eyes and said, “Because we have chosen not to accept, does not exempt us from the responsibility of promoting what is most precious to us, which is the gift of our vocation. Even though my community will some day no longer be here, my community will live on in other communities through the men and women I hope to send to them. This isn’t about my congregation. It’s about the church. It’s about religious life.” Powerless? Yes, possibly, in some ways, but I heard the strength and conviction of a phoenix in her voice. This sister epitomized the paradox of St. Paul’s words, but it was a union of opposites that can only come from the hand of God.

I am reminded of a quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer who spoke about his own experience of God’s calling. He said, “It is only through the call which I have heard in Christ, the call

of the grace which lays claim to me, that...I can live justified before God. From the standpoint of Christ this life is now my calling; from my own standpoint, it is my responsibility.”¹

A sacred responsibility

All of us here in some capacity have been entrusted with the sacred responsibility of discerning with men and women their own calling as they desire to fulfill their deepest longing for God. They come to us because they find something lacking in their lives; they yearn for something more, and they wonder

whether or not that something more is a life as a religious brother, sister, or priest. They lay before us their histories, hopes, dreams, joys, sinfulness and wounds, and invite us to wonder and to discern with them. This is no easy task—in fact, it is quite humbling, because we too have our own histories and our own vulnerabilities and sinfulness that

prompt us to question our own worthiness of this ministry. There are times that we ask the same question as Moses when God summoned him to go before Pharaoh. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?” Moses pondered (Exodus 3:11). In other words, who am I to do this? Although we may question our worthiness, we don’t give up doing what we do.

And then there are days when we can easily identify with the experience of the Chilean miners. We find ourselves in the pits, blinded by the darkness of not knowing the future of our own congregations, much less that of religious life. We feel trapped by the apathy of some of our own religious, the demographics of our own community, or the issues within the church over which we have no control. We long for that glimmer of light that assures us that things will get better and that all of our hope is not in vain. Like the psalmist, we ask, “How long, Lord? Will you utterly forget me? How long will you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1). And despite our inability to see, we still don’t give up doing what we do.

In some similar ways, we can identify with the isolation

felt by the miners, for we too have experienced the loneliness of this ministry. Whether it is traveling alone, working alone, or praying alone, it is not uncommon to feel cut off from others. We know the experience of planning “Come and See” weekends, the investment of time and energy in coordinating what we hope will be a positive, prayerful community experience for the men or women we have invited. We call, we advertise, we promote, we encourage, we cajole, we pray ... only to be forced to cancel the weekend because of few, if any, participants. Although on an intellectual level we accept this as part and parcel of vocation ministry, nevertheless, emotionally we still struggle with our need for productivity, our feelings of failure and rejection, all of which contribute to our loneliness and isolation. In these times we find ourselves praying the words of Esther as we cry out: “My Lord, you alone are God. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you” (Esther 4:14). Amazingly, even in the midst of our despair, we don’t give up doing what we do.

I vividly recall an experience of speaking to a particular religious community of men, when one of their religious came up to me at the end of the day and asked me, “How do you do it?” “How do I do what?” I asked. “How can you speak of the virtue of religious life and talk about new candidates when so much is working against us?” Without giving it much thought, I simply said, “Because I believe in it.”

Become the paradox

There is no one in this room who does not believe in religious life. If we did not believe in religious life, we would not be here. And we all know that if we believe in something with our entire being, we don’t give up, no matter what mistreatment, distress, persecution, or difficulty we encounter. St. Paul knew this, Bonhoeffer knew this, the elderly sister at my workshop knew this, the Chilean miners knew this. By forsaking doubt, embracing hope, and surrendering to God’s promise of unconditional fidelity, as St. Paul tells us in his letter, we soon find that God’s power remains with us. Our weakness becomes transformed into strength. By accepting our difficulties for the sake of Christ, we can do what we do with joy, contentment and even laughter. In so doing, we become the paradox. We become the mysterious union of opposites.

I have often said that one of our primary tasks as vocation directors is to keep the dream of religious life alive, not just for those who follow us, but for the church, for those in our institutes, the people we encounter and those to

whom we minister. We are entrusted with the responsibility of preserving a valuable and holy legacy that is constitutive to the life of the church. As vocation ministers, we strive for what could be, for what is meant to be, while being fully aware of the humanity that is contained in this life. The weakness of this humanity, however, does not prevent us from being empowered to speak of the dream and to witness it with integrity and conviction. Our faith produces perseverance. Our faith enables our powerlessness to become our strength. We must never assume, however, that this power and strength is of our own accord. St. Paul reminds us that it is the power of Christ that rests upon us. Remember the words of the miner: "God held my hand." It is Christ who holds the hands of all of us.

Our strength is in the Lord

As women and men committed to the Gospel, like Paul, we have much to boast about. It is true—the faith we proclaim and the life that we lead is a paradox, for in Christ there is no weakness, distress, persecution, or difficulty. Much like neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39), there is only the power of Christ in our lives.

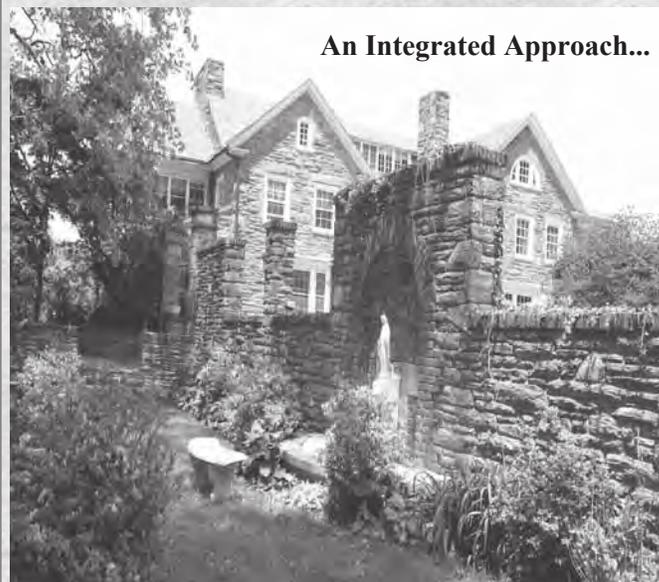
Let us witness to one another in the coming days this sacred power of Christ that rests upon all of us. May our time together strengthen us to embrace the paradox of our lives, so that we may carry out our vocation ministry, our sacred responsibility, with joy, contentment and even laughter. For it is only by living this paradox, that we avoid the temptation of falling into the deep abyss of despair and the darkness of doubt. Let us never forget that it is the power of Christ that lives in us and enables us to rise into the light, like a phoenix, boasting of the glory of God and the glory of our vocations.

The Chilean miner said, "God held my hand." May all of us cling to those reassuring hands of God with firmness and delight. ■

1. *Ethics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. p. 251.

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The powerful force of globalization has potential for good and ill in a world that teeters on the edge of environmental ruin. Vocation ministry, in its quest for a meaningful life, can help form a sustainable future.

Vocation ministry in a connected, ecologically fragile world

BY BROTHER DAVID ANDREWS, CSC

WHAT IS GLOBALIZATION? The word seems to be on every new book jacket. It is a word that seems to some to account for every upward or downward trend in the stock market. It is a term that to Christians has some religious resonance; after all, is not the command of the Lord to go out to the world to preach the good news? “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). How does the globalizing process of encouraging discipleship within Christianity, including religious life, coincide with the economic globalization process?

Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells’ three volume work, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (1998), states:

A new world is taking shape in this end of

the millennium. It originated in the historical coincidence around the late 1960s and mid-1970s of three independent processes: the information technology revolution, the economic crisis of both capitalism and statism, and their subsequent restructuring; and the blooming of cultural social movements, such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism ... the interactions between these processes and the reactions they triggered brought into being a new dominant social structure, the network society ... and the new information/global economy and a new culture.¹

Thus Facebook claims the attention of millions of us. While some claim that globalization is primarily an economic phenomenon, some, such as the British social theorist Anthony Giddens, claim otherwise. Here are three insights he provides about globalization.

1) **Globalization is not only, or even primarily, an economic phenomenon;** and it should not be equated with the emergence of a “world system.” Globalization is really about the transformation of space and time. I define it as action at distance, and relate its intensifying over recent years to the emergence of means of instantaneous global communication and mass transportation.

2) **Globalization does not only concern the**

Brother David Andrews, CSC has been a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Eastern Brothers’ Province for more than 45 years. He is the senior representative at Food & Water Watch, a consumer organization dedicated to ensuring healthy food and water. Brother David has advocated for and written about food, water, farming and development issues at a national and international level, including a period of service as senior advisor on food, water and development to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

creation of large-scale systems, but also the transformation of local, and even personal, contexts of social experience. Our day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the world.

Conversely, lifestyle habits have become globally consequential. Thus my decision to buy a certain item of clothing has implications not only for the international division of labour but for the earth's ecosystem.²

Giddens captures this dialectical process when he writes:

3) **Globalization is not a single process but a complex mixture of processes**, which often act in contradictory ways, producing conflicts, disjunctures and new forms of stratification. Thus, for instance, the revival of local nationalisms, and an accentuating of local identities, are directly bound up with globalizing influences, to which they stand in opposition.³

Catholics are getting greener

This understanding of the complex network of cause and response seems to have influenced the church's approach to education and environmentalism. In a conscious response to the environmental and cultural issues created



Photo: Brother John O'Hara, SA

Brother David Andrews, CSC suggested that vocation ministers—by helping people go deeper with their faith—assist in creating a spiritual climate that supports sustainability.

by globalization, the church has encouraged intellectual engagement with cultural and environmental issues at the regional level:

In its service to society, a Catholic university will relate especially to the academic, cultural and scientific world of the region in which it is located. Original forms of dialogue and collaboration are to be encouraged between the Catholic universities and other universities of a nation on behalf of development, of understanding between cultures and of the *defense of nature* [my emphasis] in accordance with an awareness of the international ecological situation.⁴

Seemingly in response to this charge, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education just held its fifth annual meeting in Denver, with 2,500 people in attendance and among them a growing representation of faith-based institutions. Last year in October, Notre Dame held its own Catholic campus sustainability meeting, and it was over-subscribed, with more than 250 people from 25 institutions attending.

The notion of sustainability is growing in the face of globalization. John Paul II, in the face of globalization, conducted a series of ecclesio-geographic studies of the status of the church in its different regions. Globalization has given rise to localization, and localization recognizes that there are planetary challenges that can only be met by local action.

Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe and the Americas merited different levels of attention in John Paul II's initiative. In *The Church in America*, his 1999 study of the Americas, John Paul said: "However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative.

The way forward is to follow the directions mapped out by Benedict XVI ... by following the way of sustainability through the defense of nature, by going deep, by invoking an intensified spirituality of sustainability.

These are, for example, the absolutizing of the economy, unemployment, the reduction and deterioration of public services, the destruction of the environment and natural resources, the growing distance between the rich and the poor, unfair competition which puts the poor nations in a situation of ever increasing inferiority" (#20). John Paul II links

social equity, the ecology and economic development, these elements of sustainability, to the globalization process.

The Holy Father underlined the moral responsibility of the church before the growing phenomenon of globalization: "The Church in America is called ... to cooperate with every legitimate means in reducing the negative effects of globalization, such as the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of values of local cultures in favor of a misconstrued homogenization" (#55).

In the same document, the Holy Father went on to indicate clearly the erroneous view of humanity that underlies certain social and political structures in our day: "More and more, in many countries of America, a system known as 'neo-liberalism' prevails; based on a purely economic conception of man, this system considers

profit and the laws of the market as its only parameters, to the detriment of the dignity of and the respect due to individuals and peoples" (#56).

Concern throughout the faith

This vision of striving for the common good in a globalized world is shared by other Christian denominations. In a similar vein, on February 2, 1999 the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, of Constantinople spoke to the annual Davos, Switzerland meeting of the World Economic Forum. His theme was "The Moral Dilemmas of Globalization." He presented a moral framework for the world's leading economists, politicians and dignitaries to consider:

When ranking values, the human person occupies a place higher than economic activity; neither is there any doubt that economic progress, which is present when there is growth in economic activity, becomes useful when—and only when—it serves to enhance the non-economic values that make up human culture. The advance of humanity towards globalization is a fact arising primarily out of the private sector, in particular they are the desires of multinational economic giants.

Christian ecumenicity differs substantially from globalization. The former is based on love for one's brother and sister and respects the human person whom it also seeks to serve. The latter is primarily motivated by the desire to enlarge the market and to merge different cultures into a new one, in accordance with the convictions of those who are in a position to influence the world-wide public.

Unfortunately, globalization tends to evolve from a means of bringing the peoples of the world together as brothers and sisters, to a means of expanding economic dominance of the financial giants even over peoples to whom access was denied because of national borders and cultural barriers.

The Gospel saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4), should be more broadly understood. We cannot live by economic development alone, but we must seek the "word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4); that is, the values and principles that transcend economic concerns. Once we accept these, the

Connected in love

Love in truth—*caritas in veritate*—is a great challenge for the church in a world that is becoming progressively and pervasively globalized. The risk for our time is that the de facto interdependence of people and nations is not matched by ethical interaction of consciences and minds that would give rise to truly human development.

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, June, 2009

economy becomes a servant of humanity, not its master.⁵

The Patriarch indicates that the Christian faithful should seek an alternative path for the new global village, one that works for a world cultural community that respects the human person, the environment and seeks a value rather than a profit oriented standard for global integration. In part this is what the late Pope John Paul II referred to when he spoke about the “globalization of solidarity.”

I suggest that the way forward is to follow the directions mapped out by Benedict XVI in his *Caritas in Veritate* by the Catholic Coalition for Climate Change and the National Religious Partnership on the Environment as well as in the global perspective of many youth—that is by following the way of sustainability through the defense of nature, by going deep, by invoking an intensified spirituality of sustainability.

What is spirituality? What is sustainability? What would a spirituality for sustainability be? How can we fashion a “still point in a turning world?” What can respond effectively to the increasing reach of globalization is the intensification of spiritual depth. This is something that can answer to bewildering globalization: a spirituality and an interiority awake to the context of sustainability.

Spiritual growth can soften globalization

Before we can advance spiritually—and thus perhaps assuage the coarser effects of globalizing—we must

understand spirituality. It is a steepening, like soaking tea leaves. It is a steepening of the mind and heart, body and soul. We are the leaves, the bodies immersed in a broth of mystery, absorbing the way of nature and the way of transcendence.

Spirituality is a way of living. It is an attitude, a motivation, a feeling practiced and a practiced feeling. A feeling practiced becomes a habitual way of feeling. And a practiced feeling points to the recurrence as well as the deepening that comes with

a process of valuation, recurrent integration and sustained conviction. Spirituality is not the end or purpose of living, the goal for which one lives. It is a manner, a style, process or method by which one lives in light of the goal. It is the stuff of character by which one creates character. Spirituality shows itself in the seasoning, which accompanies one’s way of being. Like tea, one can be steeped! It is the steepening which gives character to one’s spirituality.

Like tea, one can be steeped! It is the steepening which gives character to one’s spirituality. How are you steeped? Are you steeped into some tradition, a way of life and being which has informed your thoughts, your words, your choices and actions?

How are you steeped? Are you steeped into some tradition, a way of life and being which has informed your thoughts, your words, your choices and actions? How have you steeped yourself? Lightly or thoroughly?

One can be steeped deeply or weakly as tea can be. Steepening is a matter of the mind and heart, body and behavior. It is a deepening, like a descent into a cool, refreshing spring. It is a thickening, like the fashioning of a community. A community can be profound as well as superficial; it can be intimate in its deep ecology and deep economy, or it can be all surface. Community is the achievement of common meaning ... what meanings are shared among the new religious to be? Are they developed and fashioned into a depth, or are they undeveloped and only surface ... like strangers passing in the night, like a veneer that is removed with ease, that doesn’t get absorbed for longevity and sustainability?

Spirituality for sustainability

Some elements of a spirituality for sustainability might be the following.

- **Long term perspectives** A spirituality of sustainability looks toward the long term as the focus of one's perspective. Such a consciousness can be immersed in the here and now, but only for the time being; it's general orientation is for the long haul, and the perspective is generational. Our goal is that the next generation benefit from earth's generosity as have previous ones.

- **Self-transcendent** A spirituality of sustainability is oriented to personal and communal growth, toward self transcendence and group transcendence, not the exponential growth of markets, but the growth that allows insight and emotion to shift with the broadening perspective of what is for the common good.

- **Communal** Communion with nature, communion with God is our purpose. The rhythms of cosmic process lose our allegiance completely when our partnership with them is transmuted beyond recognition by our passion for mastery, control, and instrumental exploitation. We need to nurture a meditative spirit that balances reason's will to power with the soul's innate place within the beauty already bestowed as gift: that is, with friends, family, our garden, our land.

- **Gentleness** This quality is captured in the notion that we should walk lightly upon the earth, or live simply so that others may simply live.

—*Brother David Andrews, CSC*

Vocation ministers discern depth

We are not alone in our endeavors. This, I believe, is the truth of our existence. We are not alone, atoms. We are part of a community. The poet John Donne wrote: "No man is an island, no man stands alone. Each man's joy is joy to me, each man's peace is my own." Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote: "I am a part of all that I have met." We are not alone. We are participants in a communal venture or search. That search for direction in life is something that may be found or missed. This is our work as vocation ministers, to accompany the search, to help discover the direction authentic for the day, to discern depth, potential for depth.

I propose that our searching and finding is one where we discover that we have partners along the way. The search for direction is a partnership: with the energetic rhythms of the cosmos and with the transcendent measure drawing us, luring us, to attune with itself. The vocation minister is a partner in this process. We are discerners. So the deepening is a thorough and grounded finding. We in vocation ministry assist in searching and in finding—searching and finding the truth about existence.

As Christians we find the world-transcendent measure in Christ: incarnate, crucified and raised from the dead. In him the search for the truth about existence finds the searcher becoming the one who is searched for. As Saint Augustine put it: "You would not be seeking me had you not already found me."

A spirituality is a being-in-love. It is being in love with nature. Being in love with God. Loving our neighbors as ourselves and including in the circle of friendship animate and inanimate life.

The cosmological way is the way of the earth. It is the way of kinship with the earth, with the springs, the fountains, the water courses, with the flowers, birds, two and four footed creatures. This is the way of an original blessing, a partnership with the cosmos by which we see ourselves as a part of the garden and accept the directive to "care for and to tend the garden" (Genesis 2:15). We are part of all creation, which itself "groans for its completion."

We are one with the biotic community: "No less than the trees and the stars, we have a right to be here." Such a way is at one with the Transcendent Being: authentic partnership with nature is partnership with God. "We are one in the web of life." This is how the American hierarchy put it in "Renewing the Earth." Sustainability sees the integration of economic, social justice and environmental

concerns as the integral bottom line. Social ecology and natural ecology belong together, said the American bishops in *Renewing the Earth*. This is not just a matter of greening religious conviction, it is a matter of seeing social equity, planetary ethics and economic viability as an integrated whole.

The transcendent way is the way of going beyond the senses, the imagination, concepts and judgments to a realm beyond—mystery properly so called. The cosmological way and the transcendent way are not contradictory. Transcendence can encompass the cosmos without disruption. The cosmos is God's word, just as the Scripture is.

Broadly speaking, I understand religion as a conscious orientation by human beings toward an incomprehensible, gracious and saving mystery which in our cultural context we usually call "God," but which others may call by different names. Muslims call it Allah, Hindus Brahman, Buddhists nirvana or dharma, Lakota Indians wakan, Taoists the Tao. My own preference is to think of religions generally as ways of orienting us toward the inexhaustible, enlivening and liberating depth of reality that is the context of our seeking we may call by the name "mystery."

Here is the context of steepening. There is in the world a charged field of love and meaning we enter through some such steepening process. For some of us, the contemplation of nature is God's silent communion with us. The cosmos becomes a portal for mystery, while retaining its own beauty and attraction. Our care for creation is linked to the Creator's care for the community of the cosmos that is habitat, home. We Christians speak of a sacramental vision of the universe. A sacramental perspective is a sustainable perspective. "Natural and social ecologies belong together." The web of life is one. Partnership with nature and partnership with God are related elements in an integral spiritual vision. This vision can be deepened over time, and that can sustain us for the long haul as we seek, as Tennyson said, "a newer world"—what Christians call "the Reign of God."

Vocation search connected to spirit of sustainability

Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher at McGill University has written a book about secularity. He explores the possibility of religious conviction in a secular age where the fundamental conditions of faith are questioned.

He has a significant insight into motivation that I think is relevant to our interest in sustainable spirituality, especially for those of us in the field of answering human hungers or heart's desires. His book, *A Secular Age*, addresses what he calls the notion of "fullness."

I believe this can be said about us, those of us here today: "We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be."⁶ This is true in lives of generous service, in the place where spiritual provisioning is the goal, especially providing hope for the long haul. This is surely part of vocation ministry, opening doors to a full, rich, deep life.

I think this motivating fullness characterizes a spirituality of sustainability. The more we enter into the complexities involved in our efforts, the more deeply we move into the desires and fears associated with the contexts of our service. We then recognize the fullness inherent in our intentional quest, even without the realization of a satisfaction. We don't live always in the *pleroma*, the fullness, but we do have glimpses from time to time, and that sustains us.

A spirituality of sustainability can inform our perspectives as the bishops of Appalachia wrote in *At Home in the Web of Life*:

In our present times, we believe,
the mighty wind of God's Spirit is stirring up
people's imaginations
to find new ways of living together,
based especially on the full community
of all life, including

love of nature, and
love of the poor.

We call these new ways
The rooted path of sustainable communities.

These sustainable communities will
Conserve and not waste,
Be simpler but better,
Keep most resources circulating locally,
Create sustainable livelihoods,

Support family life,
Protect the richness of nature,
Develop people spiritually,
And follow God's values.

Sustainable Development:

In the judgment of many people,
A sustainable society would build primarily
On the rooted informal local economy,
All in communion with the local ecosystem.

In sustainable development,
All businesses new or old,

Local or from the outside,
Need to respect the divine order
Of social and natural ecology.

We can learn to be partners with nature and God, to abide in the dynamics of globalization without losing our footing in mystery, depth, fullness, with a spirituality steeped in an integral communion that sees no contradiction between the wedding of Spirit and Earth, a spirituality of sustainability—of communion. We can participate in the seeking and finding as vocation ministers, accompanying those who are engaging in the search for direction in the meaning of life. In this age of globalization, we need to recognize our responsibility to earth and to each other. We are all beginners in a new age of spirituality and sustainability, as the poet Denise Levertov hinted in her poem, "Beginners." And so I bring to an end this reflection on vocation ministry, globalization and spiritual steepening with a few words from Ms. Levertov's poem:

Hope and desire set free,
Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere to the sea—

But we have only begun
To love the earth.

We have only begun
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?
—so much is in bud. ■

Looking to go deeper?

To further explore the ideas presented in this article, see the following resources.

"Sustainability: new membership through an ecological lens," by Sister Mary Pellegrino, CSJ, *HORIZON*, Summer 2006, p. 3. (NRVC members can download this issue of *HORIZON* from www.nrv.net. Click on "publications;" then click "*HORIZON* archives.")

The Circle of Life, by Sister Joyce Rupp, OSM, Sorin Books, 2005

The Green Bible, by Stephen Bede Scharper, Lantern Books, 2002

The Sacred Universe: Earth Spirituality and Religion (Columbia University Press, 2009) and **The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth** (Orbis Books, 2009), by Father Thomas Berry, CP.

Eco Catholic blog, by Rich Heffern of the *National Catholic Reporter*; nronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic

Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
catholicsandclimatechange.org/

1. Quoted by Hazel Henderson. *Beyond Globalization: Shaping a Sustainable Global Economy*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1999.
2. Anthony Giddens. *Beyond Left and Right*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994. p. 4-5.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Vatican Press, 1996, #37.
5. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. "The Moral Dilemmas of Globalization." www.patriarchate.org. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.
6. Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. p. 5.

The Internet is not just a handy tool for reaching out to prospective members. If we are to understand, evangelize and invite younger generations, we must grasp how the digital age is shaping the whole culture.

Reframing religious presence in a digital culture

BY SISTER ANGELA ANN ZUKOWSKI, MSHH

CASTING THE NET IS A TIMELY THEME for this convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). The digital age creates new opportunities to virtually cast the net, for religious communities to position themselves within what Pope Benedict XVI calls an “expanding digital civilization.” The virtual landscape is an escalating new frontier for communication. It is fluid, dynamic and growing every minute, every nanosecond. Spending time with you to explore a few specific dimensions of the virtual landscape is an overwhelming challenge. The Internet is a dynamic culture. It is changing as I am speaking with you. Each and every technological advancement is estimated to have a short life span because once unleashed, a new application or technology is already being designed

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In her 2010 address to the National Religious Vocation Conference Sister Angela Zukowski, MSHH emphasized the seismic cultural shift that digital communication is creating around the world.

to replace it. The idea of waiting until the innovations settle down in order to discern which technology, application or program an individual, or a community should embrace is out of the question. The time is now. No matter where one is in developing a media and social networking plan of action, waiting is not the solution!

The Vatican document *Aetatis Novae* (1992) initiated a new perspective for contemplating the role of media, or new communications technologies at the service of dialogue and ministry within both the church and the world. The document states:

The Church therefore must maintain an active,

listening presence in relation to the world—a kind of presence which both nurtures community and supports people in seeking acceptable solutions to personal and social problems. Moreover, as the Church always must communicate its message in a manner suited to each age and to the cultures of particular nations and peoples, so today it must communicate in and to the media culture.¹

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications consciously selected the phrase “an active, listening presence in relation to the world” to define the stance those in ministry and church leadership need to assume for proclaiming the Good News. We are to be prophetic witnesses to the Good News by weaving our presence into every aspect of the new media culture. We are encouraged to embrace this new reality as a culture. It is more than a tool, a technique, or a pathway but, rather, a *culture*. As a culture, it reflects a creed (belief), code (ethics/behavior), cult (rituals) and a sense of community (belonging/presence). This perspective makes all the difference when we, as religious communities discern our engagement, or plan of action within its borders. It is within this spirit, I plan to focus our attention today.

Our iceberg is melting

Some of you may be familiar with John Kotter’s fable entitled *Our Iceberg is Melting*,² about a penguin colony in Antarctica. A group of emperor penguins live as they have for many years. Then one curious bird discovers a potentially devastating problem threatening their home—and no one listens. As far back as they could remember, these penguins had a comfortable home on their iceberg.

The story unfolds as Fred attempts to convince the others of their situation. There are a few who cannot accept the reality of Fred’s message. Others are not so sure but definitely do not want to panic their community. There were those who thought they should simply be silent and maybe the perceived reality would disappear. The story unfolds with drama, doubt, fear and finally a decision that they need to discover a solution. After much deliberation they face their reality and embark on a solution that calls for courage: to plunge into unfamiliar and dangerous waters without the surety of a well-defined compass. They even may be eaten by sea lions eagerly waiting to devour them. Once their new iceberg home is discovered they realize there is “no perfect iceberg.” In order to survive, they need to be always ready to change, to adapt.

We, like the penguin colony, discover ourselves within a media cultural shift. A few of us may be experiencing the so called Rip Van Winkle Syndrome: that is, one day we awoke, and the world of communications had radically changed. The familiar tools, skills and even language that were so carefully crafted in our formation years to support us in our ministry, service and life in community had been altered. Several may still remember particular communication tools, or applications that were revolutionary in our own time: from manual to electric typewriters; from erasers to correction fluid; from mimeographs and stencils to copy machines; from electric typewriters to word processors.

Oh, and remember rotary dial-up phones and party lines? Why are we so concerned about social networking today? We had our own form of social networking way back then!

Rapid adaptation to new technology

Technology is not only changing—it’s doing so at quantum speed. It took radio over 35 years before its audience reached 50 million users; cable TV about 13 years; Facebook three years; and YouTube three months! Yes, one day we awoke, and the dawning of a new digital era created a new landscape within which cultures were redefining the meaning of borders, contexts, relationships and even “what it means to be human.”

A new culture with an evolving new language, psychology and techniques embraces us. There are a number here who may feel quite comfortable with the new digital era. Marc Prensky coined the generation that is right at home with the new culture as “digital natives.” Those who continue to find the new digital terrain unfamiliar and uncomfortable he identified as “digital immigrants.”

As I look around this audience, I see both digital natives and immigrants. We members of religious communities do not stand alone but in community to make the difference. We need to use the wisdom and perspective of our years in dialogue with the entrepreneurial spirit of the present age.

In the seminal book: *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued that people are happiest when they can reach a state of “flow.” If we consider what it means to be “in flow” in an information landscape defined by social networking media, we come to appreciate that Web 2.0 has led us into “the flow,” a channel for being tuned in, attentive to where the information is, which is everywhere. The swelling media landscape is capturing the attention of younger generations with a sense of

their being “in the flow” of information—the urgency of being connected all the time!

Sower and the seed go digital

The parable of the sower and the seed, from Matthew, chapter 14, is a perfect metaphor for ministry within a digital culture. Imagine interpreting the significance of the parable within the context of the digital landscape. How would the parable read? Can you sense sowing the Word throughout the digital landscape of Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Texting, YouTube, Chat Rooms, etc? This is our ministry and challenge as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century. It is as simple as the parable of the sower and the seed in a digital era.

The new global digital cultural context is shifting how we understand everything around us, not only how and where we resource information, but even more how we think, live and interact with one another, thus influencing a new way of being human in the 21st century. If the point still is not clear, recall science fiction films, such as *Star Wars*, *The Matrix* and more. Stephen Spielberg, George Lucas and a host of others are teasing the ethical and moral dimensions of technology and humanity into what appear inconceivable realities. Yet, in truth, they are predicting a future that demands our full attention for moral critical reflection, meaning and impact.

Lightening fast rate of change

With or without us the new digital era is informing, forming and transforming us with alarming speed. In the mid-90s a collaborative effort of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain (Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies) and the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives (University of Dayton) began the Caribbean School for Catholic Communications. Our primary media tools were an overhead projector, VCR and radio programming equipment (alongside a blackboard, chalk and eraser!). As the years unfolded we added new communications technologies as we observed them becoming accessible to our students within their specific cultural contexts across the Caribbean Islands. Seven years ago we intended to introduce the Internet, Web design, etc. While most students were interested, they found the workshops impractical, due to low access to these tools and applications.

Change comes quickly! Over the past four years our students now arrive fully prepared with personal digital cameras, iPads, cell phones, laptops, a vast array of applications and more. Each one carries a complete

production center in his or her backpack. The Caribbean digital natives had arrived! They are the ones sharing insights on the most recent electronics and applications to support their productions and ministry experiences. We, the instructors, are trying to keep up with them!

Alvin Toffler, in his book *Future Shock* and later in *The Third Wave*, chronicled his view of how technology has changed society. He depicted change as coming in waves. Each succeeding wave marks the introduction of a technological change that transforms the world and the way humans understand themselves, not only in relationship to their immediate context but within the world context. Everything shifts. What we are discovering is that so-called

second or third world countries are leapfrogging ahead of some Western cultures when technology is introduced into their culture. It basically means that they enter into the digital age with the newer (up-to-date) technologies and not by using outdated items—an approach we tend to use in cash-strapped circumstances in the West (such as in our Catholic schools and parishes). I continue to observe this flourishing reality when I am in Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Caribbean. The digital age vibrates through every fiber of these diverse cultural contexts in one way or another, and the digital reality is picking up momentum and speed.

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Catholic perspective and mandate

In June 2010 Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, addressed the Catholic Media Convention in New Orleans with the following words:

When I reflect on the theme of the new media at the service of the Gospel, I am always reminded of the Gospel exhortation that “new wine needs new wineskins” (Luke 5:38). For all of us who grew up with old media and old patterns of media

consumption, it can be a challenge to appreciate the radical newness of the emerging digital culture. It requires us to change our way of thinking and working. The phenomenon of convergence, the fact that the traditional distinctions between print media, radio and television are fading and the synergies are increasing, requires new forms of cooperation.³

Cardinal Donald Wuerl's 2010 pastoral letter on the new evangelization encourages a robust disposition for employing the new social communications within our ministries and service to the church:

What steps are religious communities embracing to project a robust presence into cyberspace—one that makes a profound statement of the beauty, value and meaning of religious life?

How we communicate must gain access to hearts in a way that the Holy Spirit can reacquaint our sisters and brothers to friendship with Jesus, who alone is the key, the center and the purpose of all human history.... We need to ensure the widest diffusion of our message by means

that reflect the current state of social communications. The development of a more engaging Web site that is designed to help Catholics deepen their relationship with Christ...the goal is to use the new media to invite, engage and to teach.⁴

Pope John Paul II's last writing, entitled *Rapid Development*, (2005) focused our attention on the gift, breadth and depth of communications media for addressing the needs of the church and the world:

In the communications media the Church finds a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values, for promoting dialogue, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation, and also for defending those solid principles which are indispensable for building a society which respects the dignity of the human person and is attentive to the common good. The church willingly employs these media to furnish information about itself and to expand the boundaries of evangelization, of catechesis and of formation, considering their use as a response to the command of the Lord: "Go into

the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature"(Mark 16:15).⁵

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI encourages the church to embrace the gifts and perspectives young people bring for fostering the church's presence in the digital civilization:

Young people in particular, have grasped the enormous capacity of the new media to foster connectedness, communication and understanding between individuals and communities, and they are turning to them as means of communication with existing friends, of meeting new friends, of forming communities and networks of seeking information and news, and of sharing their ideas and opinions.⁶

Key words and ideas are prominent in these statements and demand our consideration as we contemplate our digital mission: "new wine needs new wine skins," radical newness, and phenomenon of convergence, new forms of cooperation, engagement, precious aid, communication and understanding. Do we have the sagacity to accept this reality as a gift evoking a call, or does it seem more like a threat provoking fear?

Where are we as religious communities of women and men in the digital age? What difference is our engagement with digital resources having on our sense of community, our presence to one another, our outreach to those in need, the awakening of the searching soul to discover God in wintry seasons of the heart? What collaborative, or joint-cooperative steps are religious communities embracing to project a robust presence into cyberspace—one that makes a profound statement of the beauty, value and meaning of religious life in the 21st century?

In an article in a recent *Review for Religious* entitled "Koinonia in a Digital Age,"⁷ Daniel P. Horan offers us an appealing perspective contrasting koinonia in the early church with the modern times. He sees that Christianity in the early church was unified through four aspects of koinonia that contributed to unity and diversity within the church. Fellowship existed among persons, strengthened by writings, complimentary material resources and resilient convictions of a community of faith. There existed a strong sense of *communio* among the faithful that was reflected in their presence and communication. Horan projects the early aspects of koinonia toward our present digital reality. Today people are discovering expressions of koinonia in social networking, texting, blogging, twittering—supported by digital resources available through iGoogle, Web sites, Skype

and other applications. Faith communities find form on discussion boards, chat rooms, e-mail, Facebook, etc. These are contemporary means for contributing to the unity and diversity of the church in a digital age.

Wanted: cyber-missionaries

We are living in virtual pioneering times calling for cyber disciples and missionaries. How do we prepare ourselves, our communities and those in formation for these new callings? What are we willing, or required to invest of our personnel, time and resources to ensure that we are adequately equipped to perform the tasks of our new digital mission?

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications has stated: "As a new culture (digital culture), the church needs to position herself within this culture and develop an Internet presence."⁸ If you want to understand a culture, you have to enter into the culture. You have to observe and listen to the dynamics evolving within the culture, even if you feel uncomfortable with the experience. What clues present themselves to your community in order to understand how you or the community is to create your own quality presence within the digital cultural context?

Our response is not simply about engaging in Facebook, Twitter, texting, etc. because everyone else is doing it. (Remember these particular aspects of digital culture will soon disappear. Their replacements are coming off the design boards as you read these words!)

What is essential is to comprehend the digital cultural clues that are holding the attention of the digital natives and immigrants. We need to grasp the language, psychology and techniques of the culture, not as a luxury or a trend, but as a necessity if our presence is to have meaning and impact. Each one of us internalizes the cultures of which we are a part. We carry this forward into our spirituality and ministry experiences. Cultures exist as we bring them into being moment by moment.⁹ This is happening in cyberspace! This new digital civilization is resilient to the digital shifts. Individually we may not feel capable, interested or confident for fitting into this new digital place. However, we can invite, commission and support those who are informed, skilled and enthused to become our digital designers, partners and ambassadors within the digital civilization.

The shadow side of the new culture

There is another dimension of the digital culture we cannot



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ignore. One of my undergraduate students clearly identified it in her term paper entitled: "Immersed in a Culture of Distraction." Her reflections centered on the constant demand of being connected all the time, multitasking through a diversity of applications while lacking the courage to be attentive to the creativity and potential of silence. There was a time when a screen meant something in your living room, but now it is in your pocket, so it goes everywhere you go. It is vibrating, buzzing, demanding our attention. A *New York Times* article reported that the average computer user checks 40 Web sites a day and can switch programs 36 times an hour. My student's question was: Is there an alternative to this demanding presence? She discovered in the writings of philosopher Paul Tillich the difference between loneliness and solitude. He stated that the word loneliness exists to express "the pain of being alone," while solitude expresses

“the glory of being alone.” My student felt that the pressure to be 24/7 digitally available was creating a “loss of self.” “Who am I when I am not connected? Am I held hostage to the immediacy of each digital moment? Who really are my ‘friends’? What constitutes authentic friendship? Is it the number of friends or the quality of friends that matters in my life? How can I be free?”

I teach a college honors course entitled: Vocation and the Arts. The highlight of the course is a 15-day pilgrimage to Italy to immerse ourselves in aesthetic, spiritual and theological experiences of creativity, beauty and wonder. On one trip, during the second evening of theological reflection a student said: “I can’t believe I can actually live without being connected 24/7 on Facebook! I am experiencing a kind of freedom that is releasing me to embark on a new way of

While we need to cultivate a robust cyber presence, we can also create experiences in cyberspace that can encourage and lead to the value for solitude and disconnectedness in order to be more fully in communion with God and one another.

seeing and being present to our pilgrimage. I find myself undergoing a new encounter with time! I wake up with anticipation for a new discovery in the coming day! I look forward to simply being in conversation, or silent with one another.” That student’s reflection resonated with others as one student after another strove to articulate his or her experience of freedom.

I share these stories only to confirm that our engagement with the digital world is not an either/or but a both/and. While we need to cultivate a robust cyber presence, we can also create experiences in cyberspace that can encourage and lead to the value for solitude and disconnectedness in order to be more fully in communion with God and one another. Nurturing a balance in the lives of our community members, particularly those in formation, is essential if religious communities are to be a prophetic witness in the digital age.

As the global reality unfolds, weaving new tapestries of understanding humanity and religious beliefs, we also discover the rising dilemmas of paradoxes and challenges to the Gospel. A clue may rest in the message of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. It calls us to re-discover the

“hidden energy of the Good News” within the challenge of the evolving global, cyber-missionary space. This statement encourages religious communities to take on a mission to project a robust and vibrant presence within this new “place.”

A prophetic voice from the past

This challenge of embracing new technology is not entirely new. If you are not familiar with the name, Pierre Babin, OMI, I would like to briefly introduce you to him. In addition to co-authoring a book with me (*The Gospel in Cyberspace: Nurturing Faith in the Internet Age*), he was a prophetic leader, sensing that a new approach for stimulating the religious imagination of young people was required if they were to have a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. The traditional catechism approach no longer attracted the youth. The audio-visual era had dawned and offered expansive new methodologies for sparking interest, imagination and commitment to Jesus. In the 60’s, he began paving the way for the conversation we are having today. Babin’s research and praxis with typical uses of audiovisuals back then—that of sprinkling a few slides, video cassettes and songs into existing forms of religious education—led him to conclude that this approach was only a palliative that might even prevent us from seeing the real changes in contemporary culture and communication. Thus he was disposed for a significant encounter with Marshall McLuhan, who would awaken him to a more radical paradigm shift. In an interview I conducted with him, Babin said,

Originally, I had regarded media as external instruments. Little by little, my conventional understanding of media and audiovisual methods changed. The more I contemplated this new revelation, the more aware I became that people were audio visually oriented, so that we could no longer speak to them as we had spoken in the past.

There were three characteristics of modern life in the younger generation that Babin felt the church needed to realize: (1) the resurgence of the imagination; (2) the importance of affective relationships and values and (3) the dissolution of national and cultural frontiers. McLuhan had inspired him to re-examine the function of communication, including the communication of faith. For Babin, the new awakening “was an insistence that was sometimes difficult to bear.” McLuhan managed to help him understand that

technology, or more specifically the audiovisual medium of communication, is the key to understanding our contemporary culture and the evolution of a new human consciousness.

Later in life (late 1990s to early 2000) Babin became intrigued with the emergence, meaning and impact of the Internet within cultures. His perpetually curious mind struggled with the rapid evolution of the Internet. He knew that something radically different was transforming how people think, communicate, act and experience community in a virtual world. Babin strove to make sense of the new reality and encouraged religious who were students at his workshops around the world or at his Center for Religious Communications Formation (in Lyon, France) to embrace the new dimension as their prophetic calling in the 21st century.

Missionary view of shifting realities

Turning from the pioneering of Pierre Babin, I modestly reiterate that a crucial perspective is the realization that we are immersed in a new digital culture or digital civilization. This is no minor concept. The media or digital techniques and resources being employed by immense numbers of people around the world are primarily tools or conduits for individuals or groups to urge advocacy, share information or express opinions, beliefs and perspectives. The evolving digital civilization's creeds, codes, rituals and sense of virtual community defines the culture along the way and will always create new challenges and opportunities to contemplate.

What does it mean to be a religious community in a digital age? What is our specific contribution to the formation and transformation of a new digital world order? How can we release the "hidden energy" of the Good News via expanding digital portals and conduits? How do we cultivate a perennially creative disposition for encouraging and supporting digital literacy as an essential characteristic of our basic formation, ongoing formation and vocation programs?

Remember the digital context is a culture where people spend quality time. Sixty-one percent of adults who regularly go online and 73 percent of online teens interact with one another on social networking Web sites. People spend 500 billion minutes per month on Facebook. The average Facebook user spends 55 minutes per day on the site. Fifty million messages daily (or 600 messages per second) are posted on Twitter, a micro-blogging site with 145 million users. YouTube has 24 hours of new video uploaded every minute and receives two billion daily page views.¹⁰

Creating a digital presence, posturing ourselves in the

8 ways to get noticed online

1) Create engaging virtual environments The various forms of online presence for your religious community can be developed with an eye toward drawing people in and engaging them. Can people interact with you? Can they ask questions, share ideas, get involved? People with social media and Internet skills can help you manage this aspect of engagement so that there are appropriate boundaries alongside interaction.

2) Promote digital environmental flexibility Can your various online presences be updated and adapted to changing ministries and needs?

3) Make your presence aesthetically attractive Is your presence adapted to the age of the desired audience? Is your online presence attractive to those you want to attract?

4) Allow human and material resources to interact Does your online presence let you share the riches of your community? What do you have to offer? Gospel reflections? Prayer for intentions offered virtually? Help with discernment? Can digital media help your community to live its charism more fully?

5) Nurture a sense of community and presence Can you bring people together virtually? Can you offer a "safe place" to talk about vocation within a community of kindred spirits?

6) Be available 24/7 You cannot make yourself perpetually available, but technology may allow you to connect in spite of the day or hour.

7) Create a sense of a living space Is your online presence regularly updated, with fresh information, new photos and occasionally a new design?

8) Stimulate the religious and spiritual imagination Virtual guests should desire to return often to your virtual site or experience.

—Sister Angela Zukowski, MSHS

various venues of cyberspace is “casting the net” in the 21st century. Over the years I have worked with religious communities as they have designed visionary multimedia communication plans. As the planning team became familiar with the limitless possibilities, a concern for creative

The breadth and depth of our spiritual traditions and religious lives hold a treasure house of wisdom experiences. We only need to re-imagine how to position these into the digital milieu.

personnel, time, digital resources and funds became barriers to stellar plans. There are times a religious community will opt for a design that is nice, simple, non-interactive and cost effective. Yet, as indicated earlier, there are characteristics that digital natives are now accustomed to that cannot be ignored if a community’s digital presence is to have

impact and stimulate return visits and engagements.

There is so much richness within religious communities in our dedication to proclaiming the Good News and serving the People of God. If our digital presence does not reflect

using multiple modalities of communication with dynamic options, our virtual site may be visited once but then ignored. Hit indicators (telling how many times someone has navigated to our site) do not always offer sound data about whether individuals have spent *quality* time exploring us. The quantity of “hits” only indicates that they bumped into us unconsciously, consciously or accidentally.

What might happen if religious communities banded together to create a vibrant, collaborative Digital Communications Plan for promoting their life? By putting our limited resources into a stellar design, we may be able to turn the tide of conversation from “fewer, grayer and smaller communities” and “few individuals contemplating religious life” into an energetic discussion of the thousands of women and men serving God in diverse ministries and lifestyles. In effect we could turn around the spiraling down conversation and contemplate a spiraling up of strengths, gifts, numbers and diversity with an expansive common goal.

Building bridges, forming bonds

As we look at ways to engage with digital media, we will continue to have the digitally poor and rich within our church, civic and world communities. Yet the gap is closing rapidly as other cultures leapfrog ahead of the West. As the Internet and digital tools become more available, affordable and more comprehensive, with a plethora of apps (applications) and become more compact and more sustained by solar power, they will become better integrated into all cultural contexts. One morning this past October a discussion on National Public Radio concerning the future of social media captured my attention. In reference to the recent elections in which social media (interactive, “friend”-driven platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter) were dramatically employed, a commentator stated: “The next time around, the practice of social media may be such an integral part of the process we won’t even notice it.” The knowledge that immediate access to information is power is driving the momentum. The realization that effective communication can be a bridge, bond and balm is an essential ingredient for refining digital awareness and skills within our ministries.

Re-imagining religious life calls for both a contemplative way of being and nurturing cyber apostolic communities and ministries. As mentioned earlier, there is a value for disconnecting, as well as connecting in a digital age. Religious communities can create immense digital pathways for plugging into the sacred. The breadth and depth of our

Get your geek on at these Web sites

Mashable.com Media site covers news in digital and social media, technology and web culture.

Ncnwr.org National Communicators Network for Women Religious shares news, tips, resources.

Anunslife.org/podcasts/digital-ministry Women’s vocation site includes a weekly podcast interview with church experts in digital media.

virtualvins.org/learn-the-tools The Vincentian Family provides guidance into social media.

nonprofitorgs.wordpress.com Blog by social media guru Heather Mansfield is packed with helpful tips.

spiritual traditions and religious lives hold a treasure house of wisdom experiences. We only need to re-imagine how to position these into the digital milieu. Nevertheless, defining the new boundaries for cyber-apostolic communities to traverse the vast frontier is the imaginative challenge today.

Future vocation ministry scenario

Imagine the following scene on an iPad, Smartphone, or laptop computer—anywhere, anytime. A prospective member is inspired by a personal, one-on-one informal encounter with a sister, brother, or priest. Or, he or she was enlightened by a film, song or a prayer experience that awakened his or her inner spirit to question: “I wonder if I have a vocation?” Or, this person has googled “Catholic vocation” and linked to NRVC’s virtual community. If you have seen the movie *Avatar*, you have a sense of what I refer to as an avatar.

Scenario: a person googles “religious community,” or “Catholic vocation” and connects to the virtual community of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). There is a cartoonish character (called an avatar, a sort of three-dimensional “alter ego,” or persona for individuals to identify themselves with along the journey). An NRVC Avatar Team Member welcomes the guest; the inquiring avatar glides through a vast virtual field, past a series of multicolored buildings. Each building reflects a state of life: lay, religious, married, clergy, single. The avatar inquirer turns and reads a glowing amber sign that reads: “Welcome to the Franciscan Brothers and Sisters!” On his or her left and down the line he or she sees the Mercys, Benedictines, Mission Helpers, Marianists, Carmelites, Sisters of St. Joseph, the Dominicans, Glenmarys and more. The inquiring avatar opens the door and sees avatars of two other young people in conversation with a sister, brother or priest avatar concerning spirituality, vocation and ministry. A sister avatar invites the small group to visit her community chapel for prayer and then journey to the community’s ministries around the country or world. The inquiring avatar can also pursue other doors to participate in spiritual exercises or encounters with the community.

If the inquiring avatar feels the need for personal help, all she or he needs to do is “ask” the religious avatar by typing a question. Or if this is a virtual religious community wired for sound, simply voicing the question aloud elicits a response. If the inquiring avatar feels like taking a break, he or she walks to the virtual gardens or stops by the chapel or community room to chat with other avatars who are considering religious life. The inquiring avatar is invited to join a virtual inquiry

prayer community with the virtual religious community. The inquiring avatar may request to have a real life, one-on-one visit with the community vocation director. Or he or she could spend a weekend with the religious community.

The inquiring avatar may visit as many virtual religious communities as are present on the NRVC site—thus capturing the breadth, depth and richness of religious life. This is just one example of what NRVC might imagine for the future. The virtual experience never replaces real-time, personal encounters. But before people are ready for more direct contact, a virtual tour such as I’ve described could give people a sense of religious life. The benefits of such an experience could be endless. Can you imagine it?

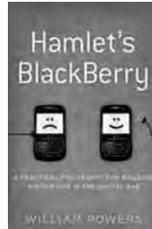
Our future is limited only by our lack of imagination. Graced with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we have confidence to navigate into the digital frontier. Trusting in this Divine Presence, we dare to go where we never dreamt of going before because we have faith and hope and are grounded in love! We know who we are, who we are called to become, and we courageously cast our net into the future! ■

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Good reads for grasping digital culture

by Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS

HAMLET'S BLACKBERRY: A PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY FOR BUILDING A GOOD LIFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE, by William Powers—Powers summons us to reflect upon what he calls the conundrum of connectedness. Our computers and mobile devices can be wonderful tools, but they also impose burdens, making it harder to focus, do our best work, establish stronger relationships and find depth and meaning in our lives. Powers delves into the past and illustrates how new technologies have always brought the mix of excitement and stress that we feel today. Drawing on seven historical figures, he shows that digital connectedness serves us best when it is balanced by its opposite, disconnectedness.



BORN DIGITAL, by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser—This book can especially guide us in our vocation ministry. Digital natives, the authors tell us, are a different kind of people. They think of the world as a canvas to paint with words, sights, sounds, video, music, Web pages. Multimedia means using multiple modalities to communicate with “friends.” They study, work, write and interact with each other in ways that are very different from earlier generations. They read blogs rather than newspapers. They meet each other online, and their research is on iGoogle.com, or wiki.com. They are more likely to send an instant message than pick up a phone. They connect to one another by a common culture.

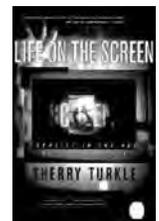


The authors acknowledge their contribution is only the beginning of the conversation concerning the future opportunities and challenges associated with the Internet as a social space. The debate over the promises, limits and potential of an escalating global network is in an embryonic phase. What better entry point than now for religious communities to exercise their wisdom and insight within this new missionary territory?

THE FACEBOOK EFFECT, by David Kirkpatrick — This book offers the inside story of how Facebook is connecting the world. The author chronicles the successes and missteps, offering a complete assessment of the company. When TIME named Mark Zuckerberg Person of the Year for 2010, the editors wrote: “Facebook has shown a peculiar durability. It continues to grow and expand in services linking over 600 million users. In a single day, about a billion new pieces of content are posted on Facebook. It is the connective tissue for nearly a tenth of the planet. It is the third largest country on earth.” Many vocation directors are using Facebook, striving to cultivate a robust vocation presence online. The significance of Kirkpatrick’s book is the insight one gleans for how innovators are entering the digital culture, influencing the character, identity, presence, behavior, language and means of communication in order to nurture a new sense of global community. The new, cyber world-order is democratic, dynamic, evolutionary, sophisticated and full of complex networking systems.



LIFE ON THE SCREEN: IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET, by Sherry Turkle—This book predicted that we would see eroding boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unity and the multiple self in the future. Ten years before the emergence of social networking, Turkle foretold the impending change in the way children and teens would come to distinguish between their real life (RL) and their screen life (SL) Internet personas. Her prediction is today’s reality.



Therefore, religious women and men need to ensure that our presence is vigorously reflected within this “place,” capturing the religious and spiritual imagination of the “cyberzens.” On the Internet faith is being shaped and defined by a new collective spirit. ■

Young people in every age hunger for a life of meaning, a life rooted in God. The Holy Father suggests a way for vocation ministers today to “move forward in hope.”

Cast the net from a firm foundation

BY ARCHBISHOP PIETRO SAMBI

AS A DIPLOMAT OF THE HOLY SEE for over 40 years, I am happy to share some of my thoughts with you, women and men religious, dedicated to the promotion of religious vocations in the United States “in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization” (Pope Benedict XVI—Letter to Seminarians). Thank you for your dedication, and thank you for your invitation.

My assignments have been on four continents and in more than a dozen countries. I can say—by experience and by faith—that even though the vocational “climate” varies around the world, nevertheless the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere at work, directing hearts “to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5), who calls many to follow him, and to serve in his name.

Archbishop Pietro Sambì has served as apostolic nuncio to the United States since 2005. He holds doctorates in theology and canon law and has served in the nunciatures or apostolic delegations to Cameroon, Jerusalem, Cuba, Algeria, Nicaragua, Belgium and India. In 1991 he was appointed apostolic nuncio to Indonesia and in 1998 was appointed apostolic nuncio to Israel and Apostolic Delegate to Jerusalem and Palestine.



Photo: Brother John O'Hara, SA

Archbishop Pietro Sambì noted the major findings of the NRVC-CARA study and showed how vocation messages from Pope Benedict XVI provide guidance in moving forward.

The Lord is faithful to his promise

My first thought for this reflection turns to the Lord and the promises of the Lord. He promises to make of us “fishers of men” and he also blesses us to yield a “bountiful catch” in his church. Since you have chosen the beautiful Gospel image of “Casting the Net” as the theme of your convocation, I will begin there.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, walking by the sea of Galilee (the shore where I, too, often walked when I was Apostolic Nuncio to Israel and Cyprus and Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem and Palestine), Jesus encountered Simon and Andrew fishing. They were fishermen, and they were casting a net (Matthew 4:18) or casting their nets (Mark 1: 16) into

the sea. To the two of them, Jesus said, “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.” In Mark it is written that they left their nets and followed him; in Matthew’s Gospel, it is said that they followed him “at once.”

In the Gospel of Luke, we find a much more detailed Gospel account of the call of Simon the fisherman, and it revolves around a miraculous catch of fish. Here Jesus instructs Simon and his partners, James and John, to, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” We know what happened when they listened to the Lord. “They caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.”

Jesus reassured them: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men,” and they followed him (Luke 5: 1-11).

John’s Gospel is a post-resurrection account in which the Risen Christ asks the apostles: “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.” They cast it, and they were not able to pull it in because

of the number of fish.” “Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn” (John 21: 1-14).

So your theme, “Casting the Net,” is one that appears throughout all the Holy Gospels. And it is a Gospel passage filled, abounding, with hope in the promise of the Lord. On one level, Jesus is promising and providing fish for the fishermen. On another level he is promising and providing vocations for his church. And he calls us, as he did Peter, Andrew, James and John, to assist in that apostolic and evangelical work, especially you who make up the National Religious Vocation Conference.

Thank you for your work. Thank you for “casting the net.” I invite you to remember in your ministry that Jesus is faithful to his promise today in the church, just as he was faithful when he taught the fishermen apostles at the School of Galilee. Let us renew our trust in his promise. Jesus, we trust in you!

Grounded in our trust in Jesus, we look at the 2009 study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) for the National Religious Vocation

Conference (NRVC). It merits attention for your work in “casting the net.” I am sure you have reflected upon these findings this past year. We want to derive guidance from it so we can move forward in hope. One part of the study that I believe speaks to us clearly is the question of what attracts young people today to religious life—the “net” if you will—as well as the particular manner of “casting the net.”

What attracts young adults?

The NRVC-CARA study’s findings on the attraction to religious life, revealed that new members (defined as those who have entered since 1993) were drawn to religious life primarily by a sense of call and a desire for prayer and spiritual growth. More than anything else, 85 percent said they were attracted to their particular religious institute by the example of its members, and especially by their sense of joy, their down to earth nature, and their commitment and zeal.

New members were also attracted to religious life, to a slightly lesser degree, by a desire to be of service and to be part of a community. They were attracted to their particular religious institute by its spirituality, community and prayer life. While ministries of the institute are important to most new members, they are less important than spirituality, prayer, community and lifestyle.

Younger respondents were attracted to religious life by a desire to be more committed to the church and to their particular institute by its fidelity to the church. Many also reported that their decision to enter their institute was influenced by its practice regarding a religious habit.

While men first encountered their religious institute in a school or other institution where its members served, women were more likely to learn about their institute through a friend or advisor. New members identified common prayer as one of the aspects of religious life that attracted them the most and that continues to sustain them the most. Other attractive elements are daily Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, the church’s liturgy, Eucharistic Adoration, Marian devotions, and other devotional practices.

When asked about their decision to enter a particular religious institute, new members cited the community life of an institute as the most influential factor in their decision, followed closely by prayer life.

Most new members want to live, work and pray with other members of their religious institute. Most new members preferred large communities (8 or more), over mid-sized communities (of 4-7) and want to live with other members of

the institute. New membership is negatively correlated with the number of members living alone.

These findings that I have mentioned, among others that comprise the CARA survey, are meant to help us “cast the net.” We want to be successful fishers of men and women for the Lord. The church wants you to be successful in your catch. Most of all, the Lord, who has called you—to whom you have said yes and followed—wants to give you this grace and blessing. Recall the Lord in the Gospel of Luke; he told those who had been night-fishing to cast their nets again in the morning. They listened, and they were blessed. To those in John’s Gospel who had been casting their nets in one direction, he said, “Cast your nets over the starboard side of the boat.” They listened, even though it might have been against their better judgment. And they were blessed.

This CARA report also reminds us of the following:

- **That religious life is a vital and indispensable gift**

to the life of the church. Your work not only supports the life of the religious institute, but it builds up the Body of Christ in the world. The church is grateful for all that vocation directors do to help religious life flourish.

- **That successful vocation ministry requires support** from all members of the church: bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and laity. Religious life is ecclesial in nature and must be rooted in the church, both in service and prophetic witness.

- **That young people are hungering spiritually.** They long for meaning, identification and community. Those who are committed to the Catholic faith want to deepen that relationship with Jesus Christ and the church. You, the National Religious Vocation Conference, help make religious life be seen as a possible life option to their yearnings through your vocations symposia, your journals, your vocation guide and other inspirations of the Spirit.

- **That religious life has a diversity of charisms, ministries and lifestyles, and the church supports this.** But religious life also has essential elements and core values, and the church also calls for a recommitment to these, overcoming polarization, finding unity. The church very much desires this.

I hope that the findings of the CARA study can assist

you in your ongoing self-evaluations, helping you answer the question summarized recently by one religious in this way: “How can we do a better job than we have done up to the present in being visible as women and men religious?” (Origins, October 2010).

The Holy Father as vocation director

I would like to propose to you a “way” to move toward the future in hope. It is the example recently set forth for us by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI in his “Letter to Seminarians.”

In October 2010, our Holy Father issued a “Letter to Seminarians.” It was in some ways an extension of messages he had given in the recent “Year for Priests,” which concluded in June 2010. Although this new letter was written to seminarians, it may also be applied to all who are discerning the Lord’s call today, whether to religious life or to priestly life. It is beautiful in its personal witness, in its call to embrace enduring truths, and in its hopeful focus. The “Letter to Seminarians” can be, I believe, a help for all of you in your vocation ministry. I propose it as a model, a “way,” for your ministry in the following five qualities:

Jesus said, “Cast your nets over the starboard side of the boat.” They listened, even though it might have been against their better judgment. And they were blessed.

- His personal approach
- His giving primacy to community life and prayer
- His call to study in fidelity to the church
- His acknowledgement of the need for growth in human maturity
- His plea for unity

1. The Holy Father’s letter and his words and phrases are very personal and very real Pope Benedict begins his letter reflecting on his own vocational call. He remembered an event that happened to him in 1944, when he was drafted for military service. The company commander asked him what he planned to do in the future. “I want to become a Catholic priest.” The lieutenant’s response was: “Then you

ought to look for something else. In the New Germany, priests are no longer needed.” The Holy Father said that he knew the ‘New Germany’ was already coming to an end, and after the enormous devastation that that madness had brought to the country, “that priests, (and we may add, by extension, religious vocations), would be needed more than ever.”

The pope sees a parallel to that encounter in the encounters of young people today. There are many today, like

“People will always have need of God, even in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization: they will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.”

—*Benedict XVI*

that lieutenant, who say to young people that Catholic priesthood (and religious life) are not vocations for the future but belong to the past. The Pope responds: “You, dear friends, have decided to enter the seminary [or novitiate] in spite of such opinions and objections.” He counsels them: “You have done a good thing. Because people will always have

need of God, even in an age marked by technical mastery of the world and globalization: they will always need the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God who gathers us together in the universal Church in order to learn with him and through him life’s true meaning and in order to uphold and apply the standards of true humanity” He reassures them, not only of the validity of their vocations, but of the truth that “God is alive.”

Pope Benedict reminds us, as the CARA study reminded us, of the importance of speaking in a personal tone, offering personal witness and doing so with a down-to-earth nature. He also weaves into this a sense of joy, commitment and zeal; I believe he “casts the net” effectively.

2. The Holy Father emphasizes the importance of community life, prayer and the reception of the sacraments

Pope Benedict begins with community first. “One does not become a priest [or religious] on one’s own. The “community of disciples” is essential, the fellowship of those who desire to serve the greater church.”

Coupled with community life is the absolute importance of prayer, “That is why it is so important, dear friends, that

you learn to live in constant intimacy with God. When the Lord tells us to “pray constantly,” he is obviously not asking us to recite endless prayers but urging us never to lose our inner closeness to God. Praying means growing in this intimacy.

At the heart of all is prayer—the Eucharist, reconciliation, liturgy. He continues: “At the heart of our relationship with God and our way of life is the Eucharist. Celebrating it devoutly, and thus encountering Christ personally, should be the center of all our days. “In the liturgy we pray with the faithful of every age-- the past, the present and the future are joined in one great chorus of prayer.

“The sacrament of penance is also important. It teaches me to see myself as God sees me, and it forces me to be honest with myself. It leads me to humility.”

The Holy Father reminds us that popular devotion is also an element to a religious prayer mosaic. He says: I urge you to retain an appreciation for popular piety, which is different in every culture, yet remains very similar, for the human heart is ultimately one and the same.”

The pope’s letter acknowledges what the CARA study also revealed: young people are spiritually searching and hungry today, for community, spirituality and prayer.

3. The Holy Father highlights fidelity to study

Pope Benedict writes that the seminary (and the religious house or novitiate) is also a place for study. “The Christian faith has an essentially rational and intellectual dimension.” Also: “Learning how to make such a defense (of one’s Christian faith, 1 Peter 3: 15) is one of the primary responsibilities of one’s years in the seminary (or in religious formation).”

The Holy Father comments on the temptation that young people often fall into when asking about formation: “Will this be helpful to me in the future? Will it be practically or pastorally useful? The point is not simply to learn evidently useful things but to understand and appreciate the internal structure of the faith as a whole, so that it can become a response to people’s questions, which on the surface change from one generation to another, yet ultimately remain the same.”

The Pope invites the seminarian and religious candidate, to know and love sacred Scripture, the fathers of the church, the councils, dogmatic and moral theology, Catholic social teaching, ecumenical theology, philosophy and canon law. He exhorts them, “Love the study of theology and carry it out ... anchored in the living community of the church ... with her

authority ... with the believing church.”

Here the Pope echoes the CARA findings on new vocations to religious life as heeding a call to deeper commitment and greater fidelity to the church.

4. The Holy Father acknowledges the need for growth in human maturity The Holy Father speaks frankly, honestly and openly to priestly (and religious) candidates, as we must. He calls for a right balance of heart, mind, reason, feeling, body, soul and human integration. He reminds us of our need to grow in virtue—in the theological virtues and in the cardinal virtues.

Pope Benedict then adds: “This also involves the integration of sexuality into the whole personality.” He continues: “Sexuality is a gift of the Creator, yet it is also a task which relates to a person’s growth toward human maturity. When it is not integrated within the person, sexuality becomes banal and destructive.

Today we can see many examples of this in our society. Recently we have seen with great dismay that some priests disfigured their ministry by sexually abusing children and young people. Instead of guiding people to greater human maturity and setting an example, their abusive behavior caused great damage, for which we feel profound shame and regret.

He addresses how sexual abuse within the church might create a vocations crisis. As a result many people, perhaps even some of you, might ask whether it is good to become a priest (or religious); whether the choice of celibacy makes any sense as a truly human way of life. Yet even the most reprehensible abuse cannot discredit the priestly mission (and the religious life), which remains great and pure.”

The Holy Father challenges young people, and he gives them hope: “Admittedly, what has happened should make us all the more watchful and attentive, precisely in order to examine ourselves earnestly, before God, as we make our way toward priesthood (or vows), so as to understand whether this is his will for me.”

5. The Holy Father calls us to unity, amid varied vocational paths Our Holy Father, pleading for unity in this letter, speaks to us all. He speaks about the Unity of Christ’s Body, despite various vocational paths. He begins by acknowledging the diversity of calls and varied individual paths: “The origins of a priestly (or religious) vocation are nowadays more varied and disparate than in the past.”

Pope Benedict, at the same time, reminds young people

that their call is to serve the same church ... the same Lord ... in the Unity of Christ’s Body: “The seminary (and religious formation) is a time when you learn with one another and from one another. In community life, which can at times be difficult, you should learn generosity and tolerance, not only bearing with but also enriching one another, so that each of you will be able to continue his (or her) own gifts to the whole, even as all serve the same church, the same Lord. The school of tolerance, indeed, of mutual acceptance and mutual understanding in the unity of Christ’s body, is an important part of your years in the seminary (and in religious formation).”

The Holy Father’s plea for unity—for moving beyond division and polarization, which are often a source of scandal for young people, as the CARA study revealed—is both personal and impassioned.

Truly through this letter Pope Benedict is, with you, participating in the ministry of “casting the net.” It is true that successful vocation ministry does require the support of all members of the church, including the Holy Father, as we have heard through his “Letter to Seminarians.”

As the Holy Father’s representative in the United States, I offer to you, women and men religious, these thoughts and words of Pope Benedict XVI, which I believe can assist you in your work of vocation ministry, in the often challenging work of “casting the net.” I invite you to read for yourselves this “Letter to Seminarians” (see www.vatican.va) to pray over it, and to reflect on how it may speak to your hearts, and to the hearts of the young people whom we will encounter in the future.

Dear sisters and brothers, I pray that the Lord will bless you abundantly as he blessed the first apostles when they were casting the net. May he also bless each of your religious institutes. And may he bless the church with a “bountiful catch.” Know that my prayers and good wishes are with all of you now and always. ■

Pope Benedict reminds us, as the CARA study reminded us, of the importance of speaking in a personal tone, offering personal witness and doing so with a down-to-earth nature. He also weaves into this a sense of joy, commitment and zeal.

The planet is more connected than ever, and yet we remain racially and economically divided at home and abroad. How do we proceed as vocation ministers in such a world?

Transformative love, passion for justice belong in vocation ministry

BY FATHER BRYAN MASSINGALE

IT IS A JOY TO BE WITH YOU today. I thank you for this invitation. One of my commitments as a theologian is to be of service to leadership groups in the church. So it is an honor to accompany you in this way as you guide and help discern future leaders and servants for the people of God.

I bring with me 27 years of priesthood and 14 years of ministry as a seminary professor, vice rector, admissions committee member, spiritual director and formation advisor for women and men preparing for ordained and lay ecclesial ministries. Yet my primary ministry is that of a social ethicist—examining, exploring and expanding the implications of our faith beliefs for presence, witness and action for the sake of social transformation on behalf of the poor, voiceless and marginalized.

So, I wondered why you would ask a social ethicist to

address a conference of vocation ministers. Clearly, I could tell you about the moral ambiguities of globalization and the challenges they pose for Christian reflection and action. But it seems that you would want and need more than that. Given a global world, church and nation—and we have yet to unpack and develop the meaning of “global”—who are we to be as men and women religious? Whom are we to seek, and how are we to form women and men for such a world, church and nation?

So let me begin with the questions that haunted me as I pondered this address, and that I will leave you as a concluding challenge: How do we cultivate a stance of unease with the world in which we live? And how do we facilitate a transformative love for the other?

These questions came to me as I pondered the words of the Uruguayan theologian, Juan Luis Segundo who, in speaking of the challenges of faith reflection in the midst of pervasive poverty, observed:

If you are at ease with the world as it is, if you feel morally at ease within it, you will never understand what we are about, for we are not satisfied with the way the world is, and we do not feel morally at ease with it. We see too much misery, too much exploitation, too many children with bloated stomachs, too many wretched slums, too many parents unable to care for

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their children, too many poor whose lives and deaths are determined by too few rich.¹

Thus, my questions:

- How do we cultivate a stance of unease with the world as it is?
- How do we facilitate a transformative love for the other?

To me these seem to be the challenges that arise for vocation ministers as we move more deeply into becoming what we already are—that is, a global church, a global world and a global nation. Taking these questions seriously will affect who we are to be, whom we are to seek, and how we are to form servant leaders for church and society.

I will develop my presentation in four movements or stages. First, I will present a more “visceral” account of globalization, one that stems from a retreat experience I had two years ago. Next, I will present a more formal overview of “globalization” and provide a summary of its salient characteristics as they are found in the theological literature. Then I will reflect upon the global church that we already are yet do not fully appreciate ... or even value or desire (truth be told). Finally, I will examine some implications that a global church, world and nation pose for vocational ministry and discernment—and indeed for religious life itself.



Photo: Brother John O'Hara, SA

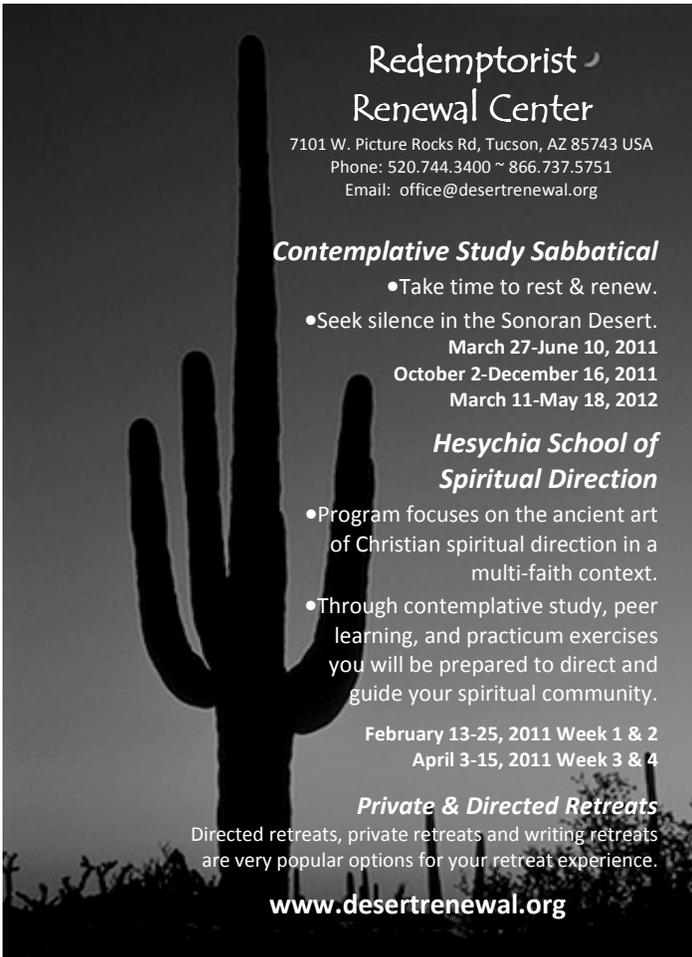
Father Bryan Massingale outlined what the shift into a global world has meant, especially for those left behind; and he exhorted vocation ministers to tend to issues of racial reconciliation and justice in their own ministry.

The cross over the globe

Two years ago, I made my annual retreat at the Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh, WI. At the front of the main chapel, there is a prayer corner, where a globe sits beneath the outstretched arm of the Crucified Christ. I often pondered Christ's agony as the shadow of the cross fell across the globe at various times of the day. As I prayed I became ever more aware of the abundance of misery, want and fragmentation which afflict the human community. Christ's agony and our human anguish became mirror reflections of each other as I took the globe in my hands and moved them over its surface.²

Over Darfur and Sudan, I pondered in sorrow the crucifixion of genocide. My mind reeled as I tried to comprehend how humanity could yet again allow such mass horror to unfold with such little outcry and so much indifference.

As my hands passed over Greenland, I became conscious of environmental crucifixion, as the melting of its ice shelves became a symbol of the ecological crisis. I grieved over our



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irresponsibility and shortsightedness with regard to creation itself.

Over Kenya, I remembered my visits to Turkana, in northwestern Kenya, and a village there where half of the children die before the age of 10, mostly of hunger (and yet in 2010 up to half of America's children struggle with obesity). Other children in that Kenyan village die from diseases such as polio and malaria, which have been eradicated or are unknown in the West. I also recalled a visit to a famine camp. Overwhelmed by the squalor and destitution of the place, I turned to my missionary friends and exclaimed, "How can this be! Doesn't anyone know or care?" My friend explained that people in the Kenyan government, the U.S. State Department and the United Nations knew of this camp and many others besides. He added: "But nobody gives a damn about Africa."

My hands moved over Congo, and I recalled a chilling story told by a Congolese sister at an AIDS conference. She related the severe social stigmas imposed upon those infected with this disease. (In my prayer, I struggled with the fact that last year over two million died in Africa of AIDS, while in the U.S., this disease is rapidly becoming a manageable chronic illness). But the real horror came when she concluded by saying, "We don't have gay people in my country. We kill them." My eyes filled with tears at that memory. For the Congo is not the only place where those who love differently are demonized ... scapegoats of deep-seated anxiety and rarely examined fear.

As my hands passed over Cuba, I thought of Guantanamo Bay, the unspeakable reality of torture, and the nameless and faceless victims who endured state-sanctioned brutality in the name of national security, otherwise known as fear. I reeled before the mutilated body of Christ Crucified and the broken bodies of the contemporary crucifixions that are being perpetrated in our name.

Over Israel and the Middle East, I pondered the enduring power of ancient hatreds, as those who have a common geographic origin and even shared faith roots are locked in bitter acrimony, intractable hostility and cycles of reprisal and revenge.

Destitution in many forms

As my hands embraced Asia, Africa and India, I tried to wrap my mind around the fact that I live in a world where two billion people live on less than \$2 a day. I couldn't do it. I wanted to escape the reality that some of these two billion make the clothes I wear and produce the food I eat in abundance—and sometimes waste so casually. Their exploited labor is the price of my enrichment.

My hands passed over the border between Mexico and the United States. I wondered, "What boundary would be visible from space? Is the Rio Grande so significant that it should determine the life fortunes of so many?" My fingers touched the Arizona desert, and I prayed for the many who died there in the search for a better life, a life of opportunity. I pondered these questions, "What desperation would drive someone to risk everything? Why should a river be the demarcation between opportunity and despair? Who are those who would wall out the desperate and have so little compassion for those who perish in a desolate desert?"

My fingers touched Milwaukee, Chicago and East St. Louis. East St. Louis: one of only two cities whose condition

was so dire that I wept. A city where there was not even a McDonald's. Sex clubs are a major source of employment, venues for a largely white and wealthy clientele (so-called "pillars" of church and society) who stream across the Mississippi River seeking exotic and forbidden pleasures from the poor and women of color, who bear the ostracism of being called sex workers, prostitutes and "ho's." I imagined the beams of the cross splitting our nation's cities, separating neighborhoods of despair and violence from enclaves of privilege and opportunity by a chasm of indifference.

My fingers paused over New Orleans, a city I know well, having taught there for many summers. The last time I taught there was only a month before the affliction of Katrina, whose storm waters revealed the silent crucifixion of racism and poverty so pervasive in our cities, the result of decades of accumulating and compounding social neglect, callousness and abandonment—all of which allowed this disaster to both unfold as it did and endure to this day.

This is the portrait I offer, a snapshot of a broken and divided world. It is a world of horror and misery for most, but of comfort and even extravagance for a few. Yet it is but one world, for the two worlds are more intertwined than they first appear. The misery of one is the result of the other's affluence. The desolation of one is the price of the other's comfort.

This insight echoes the teaching of Pope John Paul II. After surveying the many social divides in our world—he used the word, "gaps"—he declared: "One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many."³ This is the "global" world in which we live ... to which we are called.

After this more visceral portrait of our world, we can now move to a more formal consideration of the reality of globalization.

Globalization more formally considered

To speak of a "global" world, church and nation immediately brings us into complex discussions that surround globalization. Truly it seems to have become one of the major "buzzwords" in religious circles, and for that reason, it is almost trivialized and ignored. I offer the following salient points that are emerging in Catholic social ethical reflection on the reality and ambiguity of globalization. There are four:

First, globalization, simply put, "denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of trans-continental flows and patterns of social

interaction..."⁴ In other words, globalization represents an acute compression of time and space and an unprecedented relativizing of national borders and boundaries, driven chiefly by two factors: 1) the economic integration of the world's financial markets (e.g., the mobility of capital and labor); and 2) technology, in particular, the mobility of information transfer through an unprecedented and accelerated communications revolution (e.g., remember when a phone was primarily for making phone calls instead of accessing e-mails in the middle of a wilderness?).

Thus it is important to remember that globalization is as much a communications revolution as an economic one. Global connectivity, now available on an unprecedented scale, is key and essential to an expanding and intensifying global consciousness. As an example, look no further than the global outrage and political crisis created when an obscure fundamentalist minister in a rural backwater of Florida threatened to publicly burn Korans on the anniversary of 9-11. We have always been a global church and world. But now we have the means to be far more aware of it, as the globe impinges itself on our awareness.

Second, globalization has many positive effects, among them being this increased consciousness of being one world; the ready availability of information; the democratizing of information access and production (e.g., the phenomenon of blogging, whereby anyone can become a pundit and broadcast one's views, discoveries and vices to the entire online world); and the fact that human rights language has become the de facto ethical Esperanto, that is, the common ethical framework for discussing moral issues.

BUT ... (and it's a big "but"), third, there are major negative effects as well. Many commentators note that "trans-continental flows" of social interaction "do not necessarily prefigure the emergence of a harmonious world society. . . . Not only does the awareness of growing inter-connectedness create new animosities and conflicts, it can fuel reactionary politics and deep-seated xenophobia."⁵ Let me repeat and

Globalization represents an acute compression of time and space, and an unprecedented relativizing of national borders and boundaries, driven chiefly by two factors: 1) the economic integration of the world's financial markets and 2) technology.

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elect from the state of Wisconsin, who responded to Obama's call to transform America: "That's when I decided to run for office. I don't want to transform America. I want to reclaim America."

Thus among the negative effects noted in Catholic social reflection upon globalization are: an insensitivity, even callousness, to human suffering; inattention to ecological sustainability; economic and political polarization between and within cultures (e.g., the gap between the poorest and richest nations has been growing, not declining, and in our own country we have experienced the greatest transfer of wealth between the richest and the poorest in our history); and indeed the triumph of tribalism over a concern for the common good. As one author notes, "The buzzword is globalization, but we live in a divided world."⁶

Fourth, and finally, the global world in which we live is one of acute paradox. The world is more integrated and interconnected than ever before ... and yet there are many so-called "lost societies" that are almost completely left out in a kind of globalized apartheid. For example, "less than one percent of Africans have ever used the Internet, and Tokyo has more telephones than all of Africa."⁷ And while many lament our national unemployment rate of 10 percent, few seem to notice or care that the unemployment rate for working age African American men in Milwaukee hovers around 53 percent. Thus, a global world and nation is marked by gross disparity and structural violence ... and a callousness or indifference to the silent despair and hidden misery that afflict the vast majority of the world's inhabitants ... and an ever-expanding portion of our own population.

A global church?

I call your attention to the question mark in this section's title. In one sense, it would seem obvious that the Catholic Church is "global." It is one of the largest multinational institutions in the world, with "outposts" and "establishments" in every known country and territory. Its diplomatic corps is as far-flung as any nation's. Its creed and beliefs are taught in languages that range from the commonplace to the obscure. Yet, there is more to this so-called "global" community than meets the eye.

I want to approach this through considering what I call "the browning of the church." A global church is a "browning" church. This is the term I use to describe the facts that 1) the vast majority of the Catholic Church now lives in the Southern Hemisphere; and 2) the majority of

underscore that point: global social interaction can fuel reactionary politics and deep-seated xenophobia.

In making the world more present to us, globalization challenges our familiar, comfortable, taken-for-granted social identities that are often formed "over against" some other group: "We are not like them; they are not us." But now, the "them"—"those people"—butt up against "us" more constantly and insistently. This fuels "reactionary politics and deep-seated xenophobia." Consider the vilification of foreigners (that is, anyone not indisputably "American," that is, white) often heard in our country during the just concluded political campaign: "He (meaning President Obama) doesn't see America the way we do" (as if it is self-evident who "we" are and how "we" see America); "We need to take back our country" (from whom is left unspecified, as well as who the "we" is?); and the comments of my Senator-

Catholics in the United States are no longer white Anglos (or in the language of the Census Bureau, the majority of U.S. Catholics are now “Hispanic or nonwhite”). Every Sunday in this country, Mass is celebrated in dozens of languages; among these are English, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese and Polish. By God’s grace, the church in the United States is now a microcosm of the world’s peoples. In other words, we do not have “diversity in the church” (as an office of the Bishop’s Conference is named). We *are* a diverse church.

And yet, the diversity of the Catholic faith community is not always seen as a cause for celebration; too often it is a source of tension and division. Many U.S. Catholics resent having to pray in multicultural or multilingual ways. So often one hears complaints such as, “Why do we have to sing in Spanish?” “Don’t they have their own church?” (That “they” again!) “Gospel music isn’t really Catholic, is it?” Such unease and resentment over our global Catholicism received a dramatic and painful expression during Pope Benedict’s May 2008 Mass in Washington, DC. After the Prayer of the Faithful and Presentation of the Gifts marked by diverse languages and spirited Gospel and Spanish singing, a noted Catholic commentator remarked: “We have just been subjected to an over-preening display of multicultural chatter. And now, the Holy Father will begin the sacred part of the Mass.”⁸

Moreover, although the majority of its members are persons of color, the power of the church still resides in the Northern Hemisphere (as evidenced in the predominance of Europeans recently named as cardinals by Pope Benedict XVI). And the vast majority of U.S. Catholic Church leaders—the conference of bishops, the members of diocesan staffs, the senior executives of Catholic agencies and organizations, the major superiors of religious orders and the faculties of Catholic seminaries and educational institutions—are white. As in the world, this “global” church is marked by gross disparities of power and influence.

In other words, despite the deep “browning” of the church, the Catholic Church remains a “white” institution, marked by the pervasive belief that European aesthetics, music, theology and persons—and *only* these—are standard, normative, universal and truly “catholic.” Only European aesthetics, theology and persons are truly Catholic, despite the Church’s actual demography and rhetorical commitment to universality.⁹

The challenge, to put it bluntly, is this: a “white” church is not and cannot be a “catholic” church, much less a global one. This is the challenge that faces the church of the present

and future: the difficult acknowledgment of its captivity to the idol of “whiteness,” and a conversion to a genuine cross-racial solidarity that would enable us to actually become, as well as profess to be, a “catholic” faith community.

Thus in the church, as in the world, globalization is a mixed blessing. We are far more diverse in language, culture and color than ever before ... and also more conflicted and torn and divided as well.

Implications for vocation ministry

I return now to the two questions with which I began, hoping that the reasons for them are now a bit more apparent: How do we cultivate a stance of unease with the world in which we live? And how do we facilitate a transformative love for the other?

In a global world and church, with its potential for good and yet threatened by an encroaching tribalism, isolation, apartheid and callous indifference, I believe that women and men religious are called to be agents of social reconciliation, healing a divided church and world and witnessing to the compassion of Christ for the outcast, despised and ostracized. To do that, religious need a cultivated stance of unease—a deep sense of visceral distance, outrage, lament and grief at the state of the world and the church—rooted in a deep transformative love for the outcast, despised and ostracized ... a transformative love that the Christian tradition calls “compassion” and that Catholic social teaching calls “solidarity.”

The challenge, to put it bluntly, is this: a “white” church is not and cannot be a “catholic” church, much less a global one.

If this vision is true, then what are its vocational implications? I offer three main points here.

1) Relate equally to people of color

First, as a negative criterion and absolute minimum: If candidates for religious life are unwilling or unable to relate to people of color and other socially stigmatized groups as equals—and not just as paternalistic benefactors—this is an indisputable sign that they do not have a vocation to serve the church as it exists today.

This criterion is harshly expressed and deliberately so.

It is necessary for the credibility of the church's identity, for the happiness of the candidate in her or his future ministry and for the harmony of the community's own life. Your own commissioned study of young religious showed that those in initial formation are more likely to come from nonwhite or non-Anglo backgrounds. As one male religious remarked to me: "We aren't a community of O'Briens and O'Malleys

If candidates for religious life are unwilling or unable to relate to people of color and other socially stigmatized groups as equals ... this is an indisputable sign that they do not have a vocation to serve the church as it exists today.

anymore." Those days are gone forever, given the demographic shift that is occurring in society and that has already happened in the church. For your own integrity, communal well-being, and for the sake of service to a global world, church and nation, a candidate who cannot thrive in a multiracial and multiethnic environment and relate to the "other" as an equal is unfit for religious life.

I know that this is a hard sell to a group of vocation ministers and perhaps especially for many of your communities. Many of you face the pressure of numbers, as you are constantly asked, "How many do we have?" But we don't need numbers, we need witnesses! We need agents of healing for a divided church, world and nation. If our candidates are not up for that challenge, then no "number" of them will be adequate for our mission and identity.

2) Tackle the issue of unconscious racism

Here is a second vocational implication that flows from my thoughts. Vocation discernment and formation programs in a global world, church and nation will have to develop ways to help candidates name and struggle against their unconscious racism. Unconscious racism connotes how race can operate as a negative—yet not conscious, deliberate or intentional—decision-making factor, due to the pervasive cultural stigma attached to dark skin color in Western culture. We have all been socialized, in tacit and hidden ways, to associate dark skin color with danger, stupidity, incompetence, immorality, promiscuity, criminality and—to be honest—exotic thrill

and erotic excitement. Through our socialization in U.S. society, we have learned at a preconscious level to attach negative associations with dark skin color which induce negative feelings about nonwhites. We know better; yet, for example, we still tense up as a black man or Latino approaches us. We then react with shame and embarrassment, wondering, "Where did that come from?" Such associations are transmitted through unconscious socialization, the "tacit understandings" that are expressed in "what everybody knows" but won't publicly admit.

Such unconscious racism also manifests itself in the spontaneous surprise that arises in the face of black ability and accomplishment. For example, after a presentation for a group of women religious, one of them came to me and said:, "Father, you are so intelligent and articulate. You must have been taught by one of our sisters." I responded, "No, I was taught by my mother and father." She looked at me with confusion, so I explained, "Sister, would you have ever told a white priest, 'You are so intelligent you must have been taught by one of us?' Didn't you assume that the only way I could be so intelligent was because a white person taught me?" She didn't speak to me for the rest of the conference.

But note: I was not calling her a "racist"—not in the sense of deliberate or callous bigotry. She did not deliberately, consciously, intentionally set out to malign, denigrate or insult me. She had been malformed and deformed by being in America, by absorbing the racial "code" of our society, in ways she never realized or was even aware of.

My point is that such unconscious racism is both unavoidable in candidates from the dominant culture ... and a serious impediment for ministry in a global world, church and nation. Awareness of one's malformation in U.S. society, and thus for the need of on-going repentance and conversion, are essential for authentic vocational flourishing and commitment in today's world and church.

3) Change begins with compassion

A third implication of our globalized world and the injustices within it is this: the antidote for such culturally-induced callousness or indifference is the cultivation of transformative love, also known as compassion. The Gospels relate how Jesus was often moved with compassion by the anguish and misery he encountered. The Greek word for compassion often used in this context, *splanchnizesthai*, connotes a visceral response of profound feeling and strong emotion; it emanates from one's bowels or guts.¹⁰ Compassion, then, is the response

stirred within one's deepest humanity when confronted with human agony or need.

The Gospels further relate how such compassion is the motive for many of Jesus' miracles and parables. Jesus raises the only son of a widowed mother, out of compassion not only for her human grief, but also for the severe social vulnerability to which the death of her only male protector exposed her. The Samaritan comes to the aid of a sworn enemy, because he was moved to compassion at the sight of injury and violation. An elderly father hastens to welcome his estranged son, being moved to compassion by his humiliation and outcast status.

In each of these situations, the Gospels say that compassion is the motive for moving beyond the social boundaries decreed by culture and custom. They describe compassion as something visceral, as an inner stirring and a movement of one's innards. This profound emotion and deep

visceral reaction is the hallmark of authentic compassion. Moral outrage and indignation are essential components of biblical compassion. Compassion arises not through an avoidance of suffering, but from a deeper entering into it. Compassion is a gut-wrenching response to human suffering and anguish which propels one to act beyond the limits of what is considered reasonable and acceptable. As Maureen O'Connell rightly notes, "Compassion overrides social, cultural, racial, economic and religious boundaries."¹¹

Seen in this light, compassion is an essential dimension of racial reconciliation and justice making. Insofar as racism is characterized by a systemic indifference or social callousness based on skin color differences, compassion is its polar opposite.

Compassion is an essential dimension of racial reconciliation and justice making. Insofar as racism is characterized by a systemic indifference or social callousness based on skin color differences, compassion is its polar opposite.

I believe compassion is a decisive Christian attitude. Without it, the Jesus story is incoherent, and a life inspired by the Gospels is impossible. I also believe that without a stirring of compassion, without a deeply-felt response to the agony of racial crucifixions and the scandal of social ostracism, we will not be moved to justice and the repair of social divisions. We act justly, not because we are intellectually convinced, but because we are passionately moved. Compassion moves the will to justice. Compassion makes one profoundly ill at ease within the world, and thus opens one to the possibility of living authentically in a global world and church.

Therefore, vocational ministry and formation programs for a global world, church and nation have to assess the candidate's ability and potential for authentic compassion. Do they have a capacity for righteous anger? Can they be moved interiorly at the plight of the "other?" (I know that many of you are saying, "We don't need any more angry people in our community!" But Thomas Aquinas would remind us that we need to distinguish healthy from unhealthy and even immoral angers, and that a deficit of anger in the face of injustice is sinful, because anger is the passion that moves the will to justice).¹²

First steps toward racial reconciliation

UNDERSTAND Read, listen or view the ethnic media in your area. Attend events and festivals of other culture groups. Read the author's book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis Books, 2010). Watch films that explore themes of racial justice, such as *Crash*, *The Long Walk Home*, etc.

ACT Establish an anti-racism team in your community: Communities with active anti-racism teams include: Sisters of Providence (contact Sister Jenny Howard, JHoward@spsmw.org), Sinsinawa Dominicans (contact opjustice@aol.com), Congregation of St. Joseph, LaGrange, IL (contact InfoLaGrange@csjoseph.org) Work with leadership to help your community take part in a process of healing racial wounds. One process is the Cultural Audit, available through March 2011 at www.nccvocations.org. Another process is Racial Sobriety, developed by Father Clarence Williams, CPPS, www.racialsobriety.org.

Granted, such compassion is uncommon in our society, but it is not unknown. I meet young women and men every day at my university who possess the rudiments of compassion and a genuine desire for solidarity with the outcast. Our task is to make our communities attractive places for them to consider. That task requires another talk on the future of religious life (and I'm willing to make a return trip to address that subject!).

Called to be the compassion of Christ

I began by recounting my retreat reflection, considering our world under the shadow of the Cross. During that meditation, as I pondered the chasms of suffering that wound the human community, I asked myself: "Where is the compassion of the Risen Christ? Where is the compassion for the world's griefs,

Our faith calls us and empowers us to be the compassion of the Risen Christ.

despair, fear, guilt and sorrow? Who gives a damn about Africa?"

Then the answer came from within: the compassion of the Risen One continues in the women and men who

intervene to bring reconciliation, hope, truth, consolation, food, care and attention to the world's hungers, pain and anguish—people like Desmond Tutu, people like Helen Prejean, people like me ... and you ... and us all.

Our faith calls us and empowers us to be the compassion of the Risen Christ, who even now moves among us, in us and through us, making us agents of reconciliation in healing a divided world, church and nation.

And so, I conclude with two messages of faith. The first is taken from the Eucharistic Prayer entitled, "Christ, the Compassion of God," where the presider prays on behalf of us all: "Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new."

"The hope of a world made new:" a world reconciled, healed and made one through the power of the Risen One at work in us, moving us to depths of compassion and acts of justice we hardly believe possible. Our task and our joy as vocation ministers is to seek and call forth women and men who radiate the hope of a world made new.

This leads to my concluding word of hopeful faith, the words of the apostle Paul. As we go forth from this conference, let us return home inspired and sustained by this

confidence: "To him whose power now at work in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, world without end" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Let the church say, AMEN! ■

1. I am unable to trace the exact source for this citation. It is consistent with many of the thoughts contained in Juan Luis Segundo's *Signs of the Times*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

2. A earlier version of this section appears in my article "Healing a Divided World," *Origins* 37:11 (August 16, 2007), p. 161-168. Here those thoughts are expanded and used to a different purpose.

3. Emphasis in the original. See John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), #28.

4. David Held and Anthony McGrew. *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*. Madden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. 1. Cited in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*. John A. Coleman, author and editor, and William E. Ryan, ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001. 14. I am much indebted to Coleman's presentation of globalization in Catholic social reflection.

5. Held and McGrew, p. 1; cited in Coleman, p. 14.

6. John A. Coleman, writing in *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*. Madden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. 13.

7. John A. Coleman and William Ryan. *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*. Madden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. 13.

8. This moment is important because EWTN is the self-styled "media presence" of the U.S. Catholic Church. That such a remark could be aired on a network renowned for its orthodoxy, and that it was not officially repudiated or challenged suggests that standing against racism is not a major marker of Catholic identity, and that cultural products other than European ones cannot truly mediate the divine. In other words, as I argue in my book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010) in the U.S., "Catholic" = "white."

9. I develop this point at length in chapter 2 of my book, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*.

10. Maureen O'Connell. *Compassion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009. p. 68; also Joseph A. Fitzmeyer. *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX*. Doubleday, 1981. p. 658-659.

11. O'Connell. *Compassion*. p. 70.

12. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. I-II, Q. 47, a. 2; and II-II, Q. 158, aa. 1, 2 and 8.

BOOK NOTES

Book offers discernment help in a user-friendly way

BY SISTER LINDA BECHEN, RSM

DECISIONS ARE A CONSTANT in our lives. Each day is an arena for many choices and options. Some are critical and paramount; others seem insignificant and ordinary. Often they are time sensitive and immediate; infrequently, they can be mused and pondered. All, however, shape who we are and reveal our values, priorities and preferences. Nothing in life prepares or teaches one “how” to make decisions. It is our life experience that is the teacher.

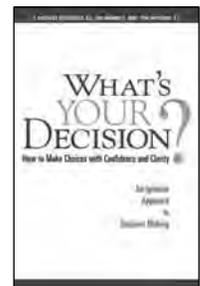
Young adults are bombarded with a multiplicity of choices and options. This multiplicity, coupled with the need to make choices in a timely fashion, at times overwhelms and complicates. Often the best outcome is compromised because a clear decision making process is

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lacking. Young adults may not have developed sifting and sorting skills or a capacity to assess the choices they have already made..

Into this muddled situation comes *What's Your Decision?* by J. Michael Sparough, SJ, Jim Manney and Tim Hipskind, SJ as a welcome and much needed resource. Its clear, concise and user-friendly chapters offer rich and useful insights. This is a gem of a text, for it weds a practical and pragmatic approach with a spiritual methodology that has been tried and true for over 500 years.



The process it presents is underpinned by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as its core and foundation. Many who have not experienced the wisdom and knowledge of St. Ignatius may shy away from the text. The authors in the preface assure its reader that “you don’t have to be a spiritual giant to make use of this book” (preface, p. ix). I agree one doesn’t have to be a giant to read this book. It, however, does have the potential to impress and imprint itself profoundly over one’s lifetime.

The author introduces the text by presenting two basic Ignatian principles as the core in approaching decision-making. The first is, “God cares about our decisions” (p. 3) and the second is, “We can know God’s will” (p. 6). Understanding and seeking God’s will can be

an enigma. The authors clarify that God's will is not puppetry. Rather it is the union of our will and our desire with God's desire for us. Simply stated, they find "doing God's will is more a matter of growing into the person we're meant to be" (p. 7). It is a relational process that invites and involves the whole person with God to consider choices with a spirit of openness rooted in freedom, while being attentive to our feelings and responses.

Paramount to Ignatius is that the goal of decision-making

The barometer of good decision-making is how well our choice leads us to a deeper relationship with God and brings us to a deeper understanding of who we are as one of God's own.

is not simply to get to a choice. Rather, how does our decision making strengthen, enhance and deepen our relationship with God? The litmus test for the decision does not become fixated on an outcome. The barometer of good decision-making is how well our choice leads us to a deeper relationship with God and brings us to a deeper understanding of who we are as one of God's own.

With this as their horizon, the authors articulate a working definition of discernment that is clear and purposeful: discernment of God's will is the act of distinguishing between options while consciously calling on God for assistance (p. 51). Attentiveness to one's emotions and feelings is paramount during discernment. Ignatius refers to consolation and desolation as this response. The authors note that consolation is anything that moves us toward God, and desolation is anything that moves us or keeps us from God. They recommend praying the St. Ignatius' Examen with regularity (e.g. daily) in examining one's life. They highlight this practice as a way to hone one's skills in being attentive to the on-going movement of God in one's life.

With this understanding, they name five pillars of decision making: discernment of spirit, a reflective mind-set, importance of an emotional calm, getting help from others and the use of imagination (p. 97). Each of these carefully and systematically utilize the Ignatian principles and tools which have been discussed previously.

Their last chapter, "Signs of a Good Decision" is one I especially applaud. In my days as a vocation minister when I spent time discerning with young adults, I would often ask

them—what is a good decision you have made, and how do you know it was a good decision? Their responses naturally varied, but the common thread was the measurable personal gain (physical, emotional or material) that they attained. This chapter notes a good decision (1) leads to movement; (2) is made in freedom; (3) is balanced and involves the whole person; and (4) is a spiral into deeper knowledge. Each of these could be framed into a question to invite reflection and offer the needed assessment in reviewing a decision. They serve as a reminder that our decision-making is not about "me." Rather it is about deepening our relationship with God.

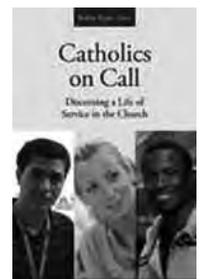
I received this book as I was making a personal ministry decision. Even though I have engaged in discernment often in my life, I found myself using the "Handy Reference: How the Rules of Discernment Help Us Make Good Decisions" as a personal guide in my own discernment. These references should not be overlooked.

Simply put...I like this book! I highly recommend it to people who are making life decisions, as well as those who journey with them. The importance of having someone (e.g. a spiritual director or companion) with whom you can share this process was understated in the book and is a point that needs to be underscored. I have found articulating my experience with another can clarify and affirm it, and I see this process as critical for serious discerners.

This book is a "must have," especially for those who work with young adults in a parish or campus setting. I would endorse having multiple copies available, as it is a book to give to others to use and reuse, time and again. To not to use this book would indeed be a missed opportunity. ■

CATHOLICS ON CALL: DISCERNING A LIFE OF SERVICE IN THE CHURCH, edited by Father Robin Ryan, CP. This

collection of nine essays on topics related to vocation discernment (including an excellent one by NRVC's own Sister Charlene Diorka, SSJ) is aimed at both pastoral ministers and young adults themselves. The sophistication of some essays may be daunting for a portion of the latter readers, but this work presents serious reflection on many foundational aspects of vocation ministry, making it a book vocation ministers might read for their own enrichment or mine for conversation starters with discerners.—Carol Schuck Scheiber





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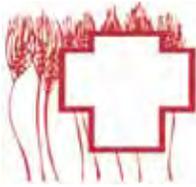
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