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ENCOURAGING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION, PRACTICING DISCERNMENT

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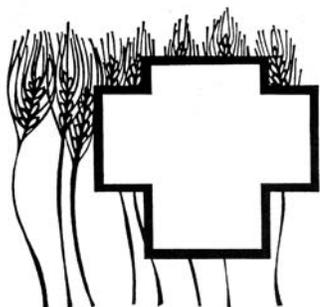
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HORIZON

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

In light of the Gospel

JUST BEYOND my office window, stalks of asparagus are shooting up with adolescent speed and lankiness. The scent of peonies and lilacs is in the air. Unbidden green sneaks out of concrete cracks. It's a gardener's favorite time of year, and none of it could happen without light. Air, water and sunlight are basic.

And just as the burgeoning plants in my backyard need light to grow and develop, we Christians need the light of the Gospel to grow and develop. It takes a lifetime to get good at shining the light of the Gospel on our lives and understanding what we see. For those who plan a life in the church, that skill of letting in the light and seeing what it reveals especially needs cultivating. We don't get baptized and automatically get good at it. Even confirmation doesn't confer instant powers. We all need help from the larger community of believers.

For those looking into religious life, you, the vocation minister, often *are* the larger community that must help. This edition of HORIZON is aimed at

helping you assist discerners in improving their ability to seek God's light and understanding. Our writers try to answer the questions: how can we encourage theological reflection? What attitudes, stances and programs promote theological reflection? How can young adults draw connections between doing and believing? What is discernment and how can we get better at it?

The very fact that theological reflection can be complex and painted in shades of gray makes the pursuit all the richer. And done in earnest, theological reflection can enhance discernment. The left hand helps the right. The more our hearts are disposed toward God, the more we cultivate a Gospel view of the world, and the better we can walk our own vocation journey.

So open these pages, and let a little light in.

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



Helping young adults to go deeper in their understanding of the faith requires entering into the young adult world, listening deeply and guiding from a solid foundation.

Encouraging theological reflection among young adults

BY EILEEN P. DOHERTY

IN TODAY'S HIGH-TECH WORLD, it is not unusual for a young adult, on any given day, to send and receive 50 text messages, check a Facebook or MySpace account three or four times, watch a couple YouTube videos, and participate in a gaming session online. They are tuned in through the I-Touch, Blackberry, computer and TV. We're moving more and more into a digitized world. In colleges and universities, we have realized that changes in characteristics of students develop much more quickly than before. It used to be that we focused mainly on "generations"—X, Y, Millennials. Now we know that significant changes to our student bodies are occurring every 2-3 years, as the world spins through its light-speed technological changes.

It might seem that today's young adults would not be interested in slowing down the speed of their existence to engage in reflection. Theological reflection may seem unrealistic. Yet, from my many years working in campus ministry and in my current position as a dean of students, I have come to see the real need among young adults for quiet, slowing down and going deeper instead of broader. Now, more than ever, they need to find the space, time and tools to listen to the still, small voice within themselves, to hear the all-too-often muffled voice of God.

Eileen P. Doherty is the dean of students at Saint Xavier University in Chicago and previously spent 15 years working in campus ministry. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in higher education at Loyola University of Chicago, where she also earned a master of divinity degree. Her research interests include the spiritual and leadership development of college students. She lives in Evergreen Park, IL with her husband and four children.



Easier said than done? Perhaps. But successful youth and young adults groups, as well as campus ministry centers, have found ways to engage men and women in reflection, including theological reflection. The key lies in finding out what is important to the individual. What issues, problems, experiences, dreams or joys are central to that person? Too often we can make the mistake of thinking that what worked for us will work for them. This is not likely, unless we are very close in age or experience. At 40 years old, I avoid reflecting back to "when I was in college" because of course, that was before most of my students were born.

We must engage their experience. In sitting with a student one-on-one, or listening to a group of students brainstorm about a retreat program, I know it is important to pay close attention to their experience. It usually involves reading between the lines and asking a number of probing questions to help them clarify the real issues. Too often, even in my own experience of working with a mentor, a spiritual director, or a counselor, he or she has jumped too quickly to conclusions about what the real issues are, instead of listening carefully and getting the fuller picture. I, too, have done this same thing—thinking that I know what the experience of the person has been, only to find out later that I reacted far too quickly. We must not forget the uniqueness of each person, as an individual living in a particular place and time, from a particular culture, with a personal history that can belong to no one else. We must pay close attention and pray that God helps us see clearly.

With an important experience in hand, we can then pull out our set of tools to work that experience into an opportunity for theological reflection. The significant experience can be anything: a family issue, a friendship, a romance, competition in school or on the ball field, fitting in, feeling inadequate, fearful or homesick, etc.

An important next step, one that can be easily overlooked, is to help the individual name feelings that are associated with this experience. If we jump straight from experience to the intellectual side of theology, we will miss the doorway to bring us there—the affect. It is our feelings that open the doorway to deep reflection and allow images to surface that will bring us further into it. In fact, conversion, in its most genuine form, is an emotional experience. I doubt any of us have come to faith in God because it sounds good on paper. Rather, we have been transformed somehow by the beauty or goodness of God, which has opened the door to accepting the truth of God.

From an experience, and accompanying feelings, the work of theological reflection begins. I sometimes ask students, if they have any sense of Scripture, about Bible stories that stand out for them. What parables or stories come to mind? And do any of them resonate with their experience? If students can't think of any, I throw out some of my own ideas. Is it like the loaves and fishes? Or the betrayal of Peter? Or the woman at the well? Or Jonah and the whale? If one seems like it might fit, we read it together and explore it further. If none come to mind, I might give them some citations to read on their own later.

Of course, a working knowledge of Scripture cannot always be assumed. Another approach is to ask questions about the image of God they hold most dear: Who is God to you? Who told you about God and what did they tell you? Do you believe it? What do you picture when you think about God? Everyone has an image or images of God. It might be appropriate to ask them to explore a different image of God as they work through an experience. For example, someone who judges him or herself harshly might benefit from a more tender image of God, and for someone who lacks direction or motivation a strong father image might be appropriate.

Textual sources, either from Scripture or other spiritual writings, will help in offering a differing image of God.

Additionally, the lives of the saints can be a source of profound reflection for young adults. Most young

adults are not, of their own initiative, going to venture into the study of saints. Yet, in my experience, a good story can reel them slowly in—both into the normal, very human side of the saints' lives and into the story of what made others recognize their holiness and close relationship with God. Young people are desperate for good heroes, and the saints provide such an opportunity. The mystical lives of John of the Cross or Hildegard of Bingen, the heroic acts of Joan of Arc, the redemption of Augustine, the ordinariness of Therese of Lisieux, or the compassion of Teresa of Calcutta—all of these are opportunities for a person to think about his or her own life of faith and where God might be calling him or her to share God's gifts with the world.

If we jump straight from experience to the intellectual side of theology, we will miss the doorway to bring us there—the affect. It is our feelings that open the doorway to deep reflection and allow images to surface that bring us further into it.

Social justice opens door to faith

Certainly we must not forget that social justice is a significant doorway to faith for many young people. Volunteering at a homeless shelter, marching for the rights of the unborn, or advocating for fair trade, environmentalism or health care reform—these types of passions in young people are admirable and can lead to a much deeper faith life and commitment to the Gospel once explored and integrated. Catholic social teaching provides ample material to connect

the passions of social justice with Scripture and the rich tradition of the church. There are many published resources on the social teaching of the church that are written to be easily accessible to this age group. In the past I have taught courses on Catholic social teaching and have observed in wonderment as my students' eyes lit up, comprehending the impact of this teaching. "The church wrote this?" Yes, our church teaches so much more than what the media tells us in sound bites, I tell them. The richness of the social justice tradition resonates well with some young adults.

It may not be easy or even appropriate to begin the theological reflection cycle starting with an experience. We can also begin with a Scripture passage, a story of a saint or saint-like person, or a social justice teaching. Many a good discussion has begun first with source material, as cited above. However, this can be a little trickier, since we have to choose ahead of time what the material will be. I can't count the number of times that I have used what I thought was a great source for reflection, only to discover that it didn't resonate well

with the person or group. So, if you want to try this route, I suggest asking others in ministry about things they have used successfully. Alternatively, choosing a movie or YouTube clip on a salient contemporary issue might be a good resource, and applicable material from the tradition can be brought into the discussion later as the video is opened up through dialogue.

A final word to the wise for engaging in theological reflection with young adults: individuals in the 18-30 age range are not all in the same stages of development. Particularly important for theological reflection is cognitive development, which has been shown to be closely related to both faith and moral development. There are many cognitive theorists who have explored this kind of development, but I like the work of Marcia Baxter Magolda (1992). Baxter Magolda, who bases her work largely on that of theorists Jean Piaget and William Perry, offers four stages of development. The first is *absolute knowing*. Someone at this stage relies

heavily, if not exclusively, on authority figures to arrive at conclusions. The second stage is labeled *transitional knowing*. In this stage, a person begins to question whether authority figures have all the answers, yet still wishes they did. *Independent knowing* is the third stage, and it refers to a change in focus from authority residing outside the self, to an internal authority. Adults in this stage are generally relativistic. They believe what they believe, but often cannot back it up with sound reasoning and are ready to accept someone else's differing reasoning based on a belief "it's OK for them." Mature cognitive development requires *contextual knowing*, which is the ability to sift through different types of evidence and conclusions, to listen to the thoughts of others, to integrate information in a given context, and to arrive at a reasoned conclusion. Most importantly, there is an understanding that at the end of the day some answers or conclusions will be better than others.

Therefore, it is prudent to listen for the stage of development of the individual when companioning him or her in reflection. Is she looking to you for all the answers? Perhaps you should share your uncertainty regarding a particular situation. Is he tentatively expressing his own thoughts, but still looking for reassurance that he is OK? Then by all means encourage the journey to independence by affirming his own expressions. Is she caught in the quagmire of relativism? Do not judge this harshly; she may be on her way to a more mature development. But ask some tough questions to get her thinking more deeply and seeing issues from multiple perspectives. While we may want to push someone into a more mature stage, to enhance his or her understanding, that simply is impossible. The most we can do is challenge a person's thinking to include more complex processes and thoughts, usually by asking good, but not-too-threatening "devil's advocate" questions.

Theological reflection with young adults can be fresh, energizing, rewarding work. Their insights and ideas continually enhance my own learning, as well as my faith life. What a privilege it is to accompany them on their journeys, to see God through their eyes and to be challenged over and over again to expand our own understandings of God and how the divine works in our lives. ■

Reference

Baxter Magolda, M. B. *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

The depth and breadth of theological reflection depends on the individual's level of spiritual development. Here is a straightforward look at the road to faith maturity.

Faith development takes time, and it can be assessed

BY FATHER KEVIN NADOLSKI, OSFS

I began violin lessons with a private instructor. Once a week, I was taught how to tuck the instrument under my chin, curling my thumb against the underside of the neck. Over and over, I raked the bow across the strings, trying to achieve a sound and not a screech. I learned the names of its various components.... And while I was proud to be able to name the parts of its anatomy, it was the smell of the wood, rosin, and velvet that I loved. The best part of every lesson was opening the violin case and lowering my face to inhale. Also, it seemed almost a miracle to me that this hollow figure eight, as light and elegant as a lady, as my Aunt Curtis, was made from wood, from a tree, like the trees out back behind our house in Shutesbury. I just could not see how this was even possible. And that wood—wood—could make a sound so ethereal you were tempted to look over your shoulder and see if somebody transparent were standing right behind you, watching and smiling. It gave me that looking-at-the-night-sky feeling. It made me think of the word God¹

THIS DESCRIPTION OF MEMOIRIST Augusten Burroughs' earliest image of God paints a sensual picture from when he was 6 years old. The imagery of wood, the infinite figure eight, the inhaling breath, and the all-approving invisible figure standing with him would be sufficient to claim this recollection as indeed religious. Yet, his punctuating the memory

with "God" marks it as a primary experience of the divine. This young man first met God in beauty, in the experience of music and the elements that helped him make it.

The countless ways in which people encounter God point to their relationship with God, their understanding of religion, their religious imagination and their spiritual maturity. This last category is essential—as the others are—in assessing a candidate's readiness for a formation program in a religious community or diocesan seminary. As vocation directors have the grave responsibility to determine applicants' emotional, sexual and psychological maturity, efforts to understand and accurately articulate their spiritual and religious maturity need acute attention.

This dimension, however, of the assessment task is challenging, for it almost always falls directly and exclusively to the responsibility of the vocation minister. Assessment of candidates' emotional, psychological, and sexual development can understandably be outsourced to mental health care professionals; in fact, it is probably best that it is. Similarly, vocation directors should possess a professional expertise in religious and spiritual matters that enables them to discuss at length related topics and then offer conclusions about candidates' maturity in these areas.

As the psychological profession has developed clear categories and fields from which they helpfully name areas of both mental health and pathology, religious professionals have not historically enjoyed similar descriptive resources for their pastoral ministry. As an effort to assist in this regard, this article will provide vocation ministers one model to classify candidates' religious development, discuss the model as it relates to candidate assessment and exhibit uses of the model for assessment.

Father Kevin Nadolski, OSFS is vocation minister for the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and a member of the Editorial Board for the National Religious Vocation Conference. He has also ministered as a high school principal and formation advisor.





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Westerhoff’s model of faith development

Most religious educators are familiar, though not conversant, with James W. Fowler’s stages of faith.² The work of this popular theologian and educator paralleled, in large measure, the developmental model of Erik Erikson in the field of psychology. While Fowler’s work eventually grew to be a seminal contribution to the area of theological formation and catechesis, its six stages with their complicated titles proved to be too cumbersome for most practitioners to use in pastoral settings. For example, with this model one could chart some growth, through use of a narrative, from the intuitive-projective faith stage to the subsequent mythic-literal faith stage, but it could understandably be a challenge for the minister to remember these stages, the other four that are similarly named, and what each actually means.

On the other hand, John Westerhoff, formerly of Duke University School of Divinity, addresses the same phenomenon of faith development in four discrete phases

or stages, called “styles,” that are easier to recall and more intuitive in their nomenclature. Clearly, their ability to describe the behavior, attitudes, and maturity depicted by each style or stage outshines Fowler’s hyphenated and polysyllabic terms.

Westerhoff’s model is more organic than it is hierarchical. Although his four styles are indeed discrete, there is a healthy hold-over of earlier styles even after one progresses to the next phase. Religious educators have commented that this model views faith as dynamic and evolving, where all experiences can emerge to a person’s present moment of faith experience. Like a tree trunk shows all the rings of its age, one’s faith development can always recall and will tend to build on various and prior religious experiences.³

Advancing from the earliest to the final style of faith development, Westerhoff’s four movements are named *experienced*, *affiliative*, *searching*, and *owned*. Experienced faith is the stage during early childhood. As with the aforementioned example from Augusten Burroughs, faith is based on actual experiences and interactions with people and materials rather than any sort of cognitive understanding. Sacramentals such as Advent wreaths, manger scenes, crucifixes, etc. may be more explicitly religious than Burrough’s violin case, but they are moments or experiences that bring a very young person to consider the divine on a very basic level.

Affiliative faith is the stage that occurs in childhood and the grade school years. This faith style brings (usually) pre-teens to a community moment where they see that religion and faith are larger than their personal experiences. Participation in the events of religious education, first communion, and maybe even confirmation pushes youngsters to a perspective that takes them beyond an exclusively individualistic approach to God and religion. In fact, it is the beginning of religious sensitivity in most cases, for they are exposed to the size of the tradition before them. Strong experiences during affiliative faith will tap into the historicity and magnitude of the Christian religion, for instance.

Often a place where many adults remain, searching faith occurs in adolescence and young adulthood. It is characterized by a deep questioning of many of the long-held traditions, beliefs, customs, and teachings that have been treasured by believers through the years. This style is marked, at times, by a rebellious posture that may even reject practices such as regular worship, prayer, and certain social behaviors that are grounded in a religion’s moral code. This searching phase is frequently felt, though not named, when parents will question their ministers about how to get their teenaged

children to church on Sunday. With an eye toward the whole of the developmental Westerhoff model, a pastoral minister could engage and console fretful parents about the health, not threat, of teens who are questioning their faith.

Westerhoff would argue that searching is a necessary passage, a threshold, through which people must pass in order to get to full spiritual maturity. It is common that a person withdraw from the religion in which they are searching in order to ask the important questions, to test its values and articulate and clarify their own, and to emerge with well-developed answers to the deeper questions that give authentic religion its efficacy. Some inherent wisdom in the names given to the two final phases is reflected in the task of this third one. If a person does not complete the necessary searching, can a religion ever become his or her own, as “owned faith” suggests in this model?

Finally, owned faith is the stage when religious belief grows as a central and vital part of one’s life. Here, it is through faith that one becomes fully alive and able to reach the potential that is grafted in the personality. Owned faith allows for an authentic appreciation and respect for all faiths because the person, having passed through the necessary searching stage, knows well what is at the center of his or her beliefs. Very simply, for people in this style of faith, their religion is theirs because they “own” it, possess it, and live through it. It is fully integrated into their lives and personalities.

Styles of faith and candidate assessment

Vocation ministers have the responsibility to provide candidates and the communities they represent a thorough assessment of candidates so as to ensure healthy ministers for the church. In recent years, religious communities and (arch)dioceses have spent a great deal of money employing the services of psychological professionals to help with mental and emotional health evaluations and predictions of candidates’ abilities to maintain appropriate boundaries. Few would doubt the benefit this has had for all involved.

The October 2008 statement from the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education could not be clearer in its endorsement of such resources. While it is written for candidates for the priesthood, the scope, spirit and breadth of the instruction apply to religious life as well. It states:

The timely discernment of possible problems that block the vocational journey can only be of great benefit

for the person, for the vocational institutions, and for the church. Such problems include excessive affective dependency; disproportionate aggression; insufficient capacity for being faithful to obligations taken on; insufficient capacity for establishing serene relations of openness, trust and fraternal collaboration, as well as collaboration with authority; a sexual identity that is confused or not yet well-defined.

In the phase of initial discernment, the help of experts in the psychological sciences can be necessary principally on the specifically diagnostic level, whenever there is a suspicion that psychic disturbances may be present. If it should be ascertained that the candidate needs therapy, this therapy should be carried out

While the trait of rigidity can surface in personality inventories and behavioral assessment interviews, it is necessary to locate evidence of it in the religious and spiritual lives of candidates, lest their initial formation be compromised at its conception.

before he is admitted to the seminary or house of formation.⁴

The Congregation’s listing of potential problems illustrates well the importance of sound assessments. Both the Congregation and the institutes that use psychological testing would readily admit to the reasonable expectation that these resources point to such difficulties in candidates, for significant and expert help is needed in identifying such troublesome issues. However, these problems, though very serious, neglect the essential area of spiritual and religious development. Recalling Pope John Paul’s description of the spiritual dimension as an “extremely important dimension of a priest’s education,” the Congregation reminds all who work in welcoming future ministers, including the non-ordained by natural extension, of the heightened attention that the spiritual assessment needs.⁵ Again, unlike the mental health areas, the resources are few, and they belong to the expertise of the vocation minister.

Thus, the facile use of Westerhoff’s model could assist vocation directors immeasurably in providing a resource around which to frame a spiritual assessment. An abundance of literature in the field of religious formation speaks to

the need to recognize the red flag of rigidity in a candidate, for example. While this trait can surface in personality inventories and behavioral assessment interviews, it is necessary to locate evidence of it in the religious and spiritual lives of candidates, lest their initial formation be compromised at its conception.

Additionally, much is made of the dynamic of religious ideology in candidates.

If a candidate presents as immature in the spiritual dimension, admission should be seriously questioned.

As the church enjoys a panoply of spiritualities and expressions of its one faith, it is called to remain open to the different ways that candidates live their relationship with God and the community who

gathers to worship. Efforts have been moderately successful in moving beyond the progressive-versus-conservative or cultic-versus-servant model of those presenting for admission. The question is not the candidate's ideology but his or her health, and the answer is not one matching the institute but being assessed well by its vocation director. If a candidate presents as immature in the spiritual dimension, admission should be seriously questioned. One very clear way to assess this is to determine, using the Westerhoff model, whether the candidate is living the faith at the owned level, having passed through the searching phase.

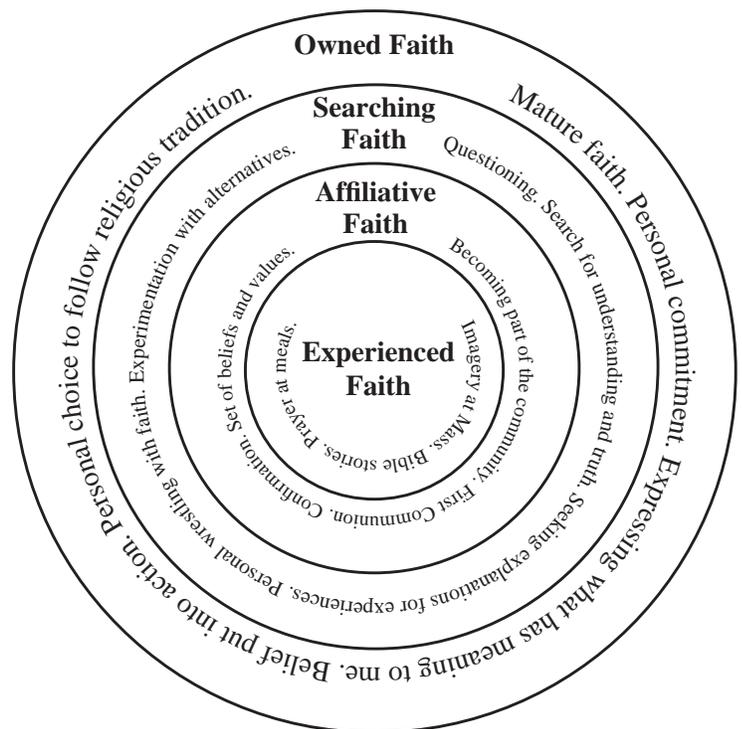
This is important, especially as a candidate's life in a community and ministry will be met with countless challenges and trials. While it is important for ministers to reflect the fullness of the church's teaching, it is possible—perhaps likely—that they will be challenged to articulate these at times when met by struggling people in various pastoral settings. If a man or woman has not appropriately “searched” or necessarily questioned so as to understand deeply the values of dogma and doctrine, he or she will be ill-equipped to present them and to minister compassionately and honestly. Very simply, a minister cannot—and should not—minister the faith until he or she has internalized its values. The faith cannot be given away, as the gift it is, until it is possessed fully as one's own.

As one of the strengths of Westerhoff's model is its four aptly named stages or styles⁶, the vocation director could easily recall them and use open-ended questions related to each during conversations around the candidate's spiritual life.⁷ It is not necessary for the director to make explicit for

the candidate the model or the categories. While it may not be necessary to list specific questions here, the use of broad questions that would elicit narrative answers is best. For example, for the experienced stage, the directors could inquire about powerful experiences or moments of faith, not just from childhood but throughout the candidate's life. Then, they will ascertain if these are based on deeper dimensions of faith or initial encounters of what has been believed to be sacred. While early experiences are important, they are not sufficient.

Growth in faith from adolescence onward

For the affiliative phase, candidates will need to discuss their understanding of community. Considerable research points to candidates in their 20s and 30s calling for community life; yet much of this research has not probed what these populations mean when they express this need or desire. Discussing a candidate's current level of investment in community, specifically a parish or prayer group, the vocation director will learn what is needed and sought after in the candidate's yearning for affiliation through religious life and ministry. Nonetheless, accessing early experiences of religious community, such as religious education or memories of the Catholic school can be particularly helpful, especially if there is an inordinate amount of energy given to these. It is



possible that a candidate's yearning for community, under the perception of a call to ministry or religious life, is a need to return to the safety or clarity of what is remembered or seen through the eyes of nostalgia.

If the Westerhoff model is to be used, the importance of attention to the searching phase cannot be overestimated. Searching as a stage of faith development is designed to be the cauldron of maturity where a person asks important questions, clarifies key values, and integrates essential external structures and ideals into the internal loci of decision-making and volition. A word of caution is helpful here. The searching style is not to be viewed or encouraged as a rite of passage wherein one leaves the church, dismisses its teachings, or is given tacit permission for dissent. Rather, it is to be understood as a development period where one's heart and conscience are stretched to embrace the deeper dimensions of the tradition. Realistically, one cannot go deeper in faith without asking its deeper questions and understanding its underpinnings. Healthy emergence from the searching phase does not require departure from the church, just a plunging into its depths.

Engagement of a candidate around this stage includes discussion of possible moments of doubt in and questioning of the church and some of its teachings. It may be helpful to ask the candidate to discuss a time when he or she was challenged to present a church position or a dimension of faith that was in question. Frequently, an experience of a relationship where a conflict over religious issues emerged could provide a window into how a candidate may have negotiated the rigors of searching. In light of the recent sexual abuse scandals, it may be helpful to discuss how the role of the leadership of the church and the behavior of offending ministers have impacted the candidate.

The conversation about owned faith will focus on how a candidate's relationship with God and understanding of the church facilitated experiences of healing, reconciliation, justice and prayer. While this list is not exhaustive, these themes point to concrete personal moments when a person's faith has brought transcendence, immanence, or both. While many experts may eschew specific questions for most assessment conversations, the vocation director would do well with a direct line of questioning here. Something like the following questions may be helpful: "How do you make this tradition that is older than 2,000 years your own faith?" "What personal experiences have you had that make you feel that your faith is central to your life?" "How do you understand your embrace of the faith at this time in our

society of tremendous plurality?"

Indeed, helping the church to grow is the work of the Spirit and the responsibility of those baptized and confirmed in this Spirit. The leaders—and future leaders—of the church have a unique role in this responsibility. Vocation directors' privileged place in this work may be obvious, but it is challenged by the pastoral ministry that frames the countless expressions and experiences of the Spirit in a candidate's life. The four-stage framework discussed here may serve well to assist the understanding and assessment of a candidate's faith life. A mature faith life is a key factor in admission to a religious institute or seminary, and only candidates who possess this maturity will be able to truly embrace a formation program. ■

Engaging a candidate in the search stage includes discussing possible moments of doubt in and questioning of the church and some of its teachings.

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 2. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).
 3. Carla E. Fritsch and William J. Raddell, Jr., *Faith: Developing an Adult Spirituality* (Villa Maria, PA: Center for Learning, 1994).
 4. Congregation for Catholic Education, "Guidelines for the Use of Psychological Testing in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood," June 29, 2008, no. 8.
 5. *Ibid.*, no. 2.
 6. The graphic on page 10 explains the model. It is taken from *Faith—Developing an Adult Spirituality* by Carla E. Fritsch, William J. Raddell, Jr. and Edward G. Scheid, p. 16, The Center for Learning, Villa Maria, PA 16155, 1-800-767-9090, www.centerforlearning.org. All rights reserved. Used with permission.
 7. A possible mnemonic device is a play on the word "easy." This model is not "eas-e" but "eas-o," as in the first letters of the stages: experienced, affiliative, searching, and owned.

Helping young adults to go deeper in their understanding of the faith requires entering into the young adult world, listening deeply and guiding from a solid foundation.

How Duchesne House leads students to reflection

BY SISTER MARY PATRICIA WHITE, RSCJ

I've come to realize that our service trip has been as much about helping to rebuild people's lives as it is rebuilding houses.

This was how a high school student articulated a valuable insight after completing a service and immersion experience in New Orleans. She and her 12 companions were staying with the Religious of the Sacred Heart at Duchesne House, a house for college and high school student volunteers who come to New Orleans to help with the rebuilding of the city.

Duchesne House is sponsored by the United States Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart. It was established in the fall of 2007 in response to the need for housing for the thousands of young people who hastened here to assist victims of hurricane Katrina. But the four religious of the Sacred Heart who live in and staff Duchesne House wanted to do more than simply provide a roof over the heads of these young people. We envisioned a four-point program that would offer to the students not only a meaningful service opportunity but also an immersion experience that would help them probe the relationship between their faith and the work they do.

Sister Mary Patricia White, RSCJ coordinates the Duchesne House Student Service and Immersion Program. Before that she served for 17 years in campus ministry at several state universities in California. Her early years in religious life were devoted to the administration of schools run by the Society of the Sacred Heart in Missouri and Texas. See <http://duchesnehouse.rscj.org> for more about Duchesne House.



Perhaps the story of how Duchesne House functions will offer insights to vocation ministers who want to encourage theological reflection among candidates. All of us are seeking to make the Scriptures come alive for those with whom we work, helping them to create links between their quiet times with God and living the call of Christ in the world.

The four-point program that we provide at Duchesne House includes a “reality/hope tour,” service projects, evening presentations and daily reflection.

1) Tour examines reality

This tour of New Orleans is meant to help students:

- First, see how Katrina was “an equal opportunity” disaster, flooding 80 percent of the city;
- Second, draw hope from realizing how much has been accomplished in bringing New Orleans back, particularly in more affluent and commercial areas.
- Third, see first-hand areas such as the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish which were hard hit by the surge that followed the hurricane and are nowhere near being rebuilt. These neighborhoods are where volunteers often focus their energies.
- Finally, help students become aware of the reality that for the working poor moving back into their homes is an agonizingly slow process.

We think of all of this as being a part of the social analysis aspect of our program. We want the students to see the bigger picture; to see clearly the discrepancies in the city

in terms of race, class and economy. At the same time we want to introduce them to the variety of cultures represented in the city by visiting the French Quarter, the Garden District and the Treme, an old African American neighborhood that has had a significant influence on the history, architecture and music of the area.

2) Service provides aid, experience

We make sure that the students have meaningful service opportunities under the auspices of local volunteer agencies: Catholic Charities, “Helping Hands,” and Habitat for Humanity, for example. It is this work in the homes of the working poor that becomes the focus for the reflection and sharing that takes place each evening. If they have had the joy of forming a relationship with their family, if the work was more or less challenging than they expected, if they grew somehow by working with others in their group, invariably, this is what the students draw on as they express their insights, questioning and soul-searching.

3) Evening presentations for education

Evening presentations include guest speakers and DVDs on various Katrina-related issues: racial, socio-economic, cultural and environmental. In this segment of the program the students are invited to look at causes, consequences, structures and assumptions that have influenced both pre-Katrina and post-Katrina realities. The evening presentations have included stories by Katrina survivors; a talk by a lawyer who spoke about the pro bono work being done, especially for the elderly poor who were taken advantage of by unethical

contractors; and a talk by a doctor accused of euthanasia while aiding the hospitalized elderly during the storm. The students have also

learned about the need

for healthy wetlands, which provide a sort of “hurricane speed bump.” Wetlands in healthy condition could have protected New Orleans from the 18-foot surge that flooded the city.

After each presentation, the students take part in a question/answer discussion period.

4) Daily reflection for spiritual growth

Essential to the strength of the experience are the evening reflections when the thoughts and experiences of the day are gathered and reflected on in light of the Gospel message.

The evening of their arrival, each group is welcomed during what we have come to refer to as a “Ceremony of Light.” Through music and the reading of Scripture students are invited to quietly gather their thoughts and reflect on the real purpose of their coming. Basic questions that help to guide this sharing are: What light do I want to bring to the family for whom we will work? The people we will meet? My peers while here at Duchesne House? What light do I want to take back home with me? And how will I shed that light upon the “Katrina” I will find in my own backyard?

The student, mentioned earlier, who came to realize the importance of building relationships as well as building houses, was a member of a high school group that was particularly well prepared for its stay in New Orleans. Group

Essential to the strength of the experience are the evening reflections when the thoughts and experiences of the day are gathered and reflected on in light of the Gospel message.



Hiba Ahmad of Creighton University wields a paint roller during a service trip to help New Orleans rebuild. Every evening Ahmad and other participants reflected on the day's events in light of Scripture.

members had read articles; discussed attitudes of humility, openness and acceptance of diversity; and prayed and reflected on the Scriptures before they arrived. Thus, their evening sharing was amazingly mature and characterized by some depth. Many were able to clearly articulate their values of living simply, building community, and being willing to be stretched beyond their comfort level.

They were working in a house where the family was already living. They were doing interior painting and small but necessary jobs. Sometimes, when youth come to work, they expect to take on a large project and, in a sense, have something to show for their time and labor at the end of the week. This group had to work through this and came to realize how important it was to talk to the family and build a relationship with them. What a great insight for one of the students to actually be able to articulate this by the last evening!

An important piece of this story is that the father of the family was deeply depressed. Not only had the family been reeling from the impact of Katrina and the stress of moving back into their house, by degrees, for 3 years, they also had lost their teenage son who died suddenly of an unknown heart condition. This outstanding young man had been at the dad's right hand in the rebuilding of the house. He was an athlete and the eldest son. The father could not be consoled.

Yet having all these young people in his house seemed to have lifted his spirits. He was touched by their generosity and their joyful, fun-filled presence. One day he gave them \$20 to have "the sisters" light a candle and pray for his intentions. The students took this very seriously and gathered together one morning before going to the work site to light the candle and to pray for the family and in particular for the father who was in such mental distress.

From the thoughtful and caring way the students dealt with this situation it makes me think that they truly arrived at a very important realization about the works of justice: that indeed their work was about helping to rebuild this man's life. I believe that they came to this understanding by drawing the connections between their service and the meaning it holds in their lives, seen in the light of the Gospel message.

Another evening a group was sharing under the guidance of their student leadership. They had brought along some prayers and readings and were asking excellent questions that helped the group to look at the day in a meaningful way. However what seemed lacking was a Scriptural foundation for their discussion. Because I felt that I had gotten to know the leaders well enough, I whispered: "Do you think you could read the parable of the Good Samaritan?" What flowed was an in-depth reflection that incorporated social analysis, Scripture and the events of their day in a unique and beautiful way. They were able to weave their knowledge of the Katrina reality with their own experiences and relate all this to the Gospel passage.

Following are some of their comments that I loved: "The neglected and ignored in this city, (the man set upon by robbers) were neglected before Katrina; Katrina showed this to all the world." Another stated: "Government—city, state and federal—were like the ones who passed by (the Levite and the priest) without helping, ignoring those in need." One student observed: "It is for us to be the Good Samaritans. Katrina, and other crises, bring out the best and the worst in us. Let us pray that we can learn to bring out the best in ourselves."

And one chaperone added: "There are in us both the

Ceremony of Light

This prayer service is held on the night that students arrive to set a prayerful tone and encourage students to begin practicing theological reflection (although we don't call it that).

OPENING SONG

"Sweets for my Sweet," C. J. Lewis

REFRAIN

"Hard to beat the system, standing at a distance...
but we keep waiting, waiting on the world to
change."

OPENING PRAYER

Oh God in Heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love, and our minds are searching for the Light of your Word. Increase our longing for the Christ our Savior, and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the Light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our brother and friend. Amen.

GOSPEL READING

The Visitation, Luke: 1:39 - 45

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

How does this Gospel passage relate to your life? Think of your time here as a Visitation. How can you be like Mary and bring great joy to those you meet in New Orleans? How can you be like Elizabeth and be receptive and so give a blessing? How will you bring light into the world this Advent? And specifically, how will you bring light into the lives of your peers? Your work site? What will be the hardest thing? What will bring you most joy—that will make something "leap inside you"? What will you do to bring light back home with you?

QUIET REFLECTION,

GROUP SHARING AND LIGHTING OF CANDLES

CLOSING: PRAYER TO ST. ROSE PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE

Good Samaritan and the priest and Levite. Through our life choices, we can bring the Good Samaritan forward."

What this might mean in vocation ministry

How do these reflections upon students' experiences at Duchesne House contribute to a concern that many vocation ministers voice: that there seems to be a disconnect between what candidates say they believe and their ability to articulate connections between faith and life? How can people considering religious life interpret their lives in light of the Scriptures? In light of our Catholic tradition?

In what way do the immersion and service experiences of youth at Duchesne House apply to vocation ministry in relation to this dilemma?

We who serve at Duchesne House have been keenly aware that students who are adept at making these life/Scripture connections are those who have been trained in this prior to their arrival. So, in this regard, I would suggest, that perhaps an important thrust for vocation ministers might be to provide frequent opportunities for service and reflection as a part of the vocation discernment process.

Some congregations are finding it helpful to offer days or weekends of service and contemplation in which candidates can share in a service program with others and then share their experiences in the context of a Scripture passage. Sometimes it is helpful to be taken out of one's normal routine and beyond one's level of comfort and be invited to stretch to a new level of thinking and doing. This is a role appropriate to a vocation minister: assisting candidates who have done service work to integrate this new learning in the light of faith. In the Society of the Sacred Heart we articulate this as being called to be "wholly contemplative and wholly apostolic." Perhaps we can think of this as a universal call. ■

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The rich and varied tradition of discernment of spirits is critical to the process of entering a religious community. Here is a close look at the underlying theology and at the process itself.

Discernment dissected

BY SISTER JANET K. RUFFING, RSM

THE PROCESS OF INCORPORATING a new member into a religious institute is a practical exercise in the discernment of spirits. Some understand discernment of spirits as simply a process or a skill, rather than a life-long relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is helpful for vocation ministers to be aware of the relationship between a theology of the Holy Spirit, religious life, and the practical exercise of discernment of spirits in regard to a vocation to a particular community.

In this article, I'll describe a brief foundational theology of the Holy Spirit in relationship to religious life itself. I'll examine how discernment in the incorporation process draws on themes in the discernment literature in the New Testament and beyond, showing that discernment is developmental in character and recognizes the ambiguity of spiritual experience and interior movements. I'll identify Christian writers on the discernment of spirits, noting the rich and varied focus of their teachings. Having established the spiritual foundations of discernment (the Spirit working within everyone), this article will then describe discernment in the incorporation process as parallel processes of discernment engaged in by the candidate, vocation ministers, and community leaders—all

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of whom are engaged in discernment at their unique level of spiritual and psychological maturity and in relationship to their particular responsibilities. Ultimately all discernment, regardless of its challenges, is grounded in and inspired by the Spirit at work in each of the participants' lives.

Theology of the Spirit and religious life

The discernment of spirits within the incorporation process in religious communities is rooted in an underlying theology of the Holy Spirit, who is currently understood as the “communion bringer” within the Trinity, the church and creation itself.¹ The charism of religious life is understood as a gift of the Spirit to the church. *Vita Consecrata* emphasized the charismatic impulse of institutes of consecrated life, the contemplative and prophetic nature of religious life, and the participation of religious orders in ecclesial communion—which is in turn a participation in Trinitarian communion.² We are witnessing in our own times a renewal and development of a theology of the Holy Spirit as Wisdom/Sophia who is always and everywhere at work in creation, in human persons, in the church and in the world and who is the “other hand of God,” together with Jesus, the Word of God.³ Thus, a “Spirit Christology is the foundation for a Spirit theology in the Church.”⁴

While religious life is one form of Christian discipleship, it is the Spirit who pours forth the love of God into our hearts, transforms us from within, and impels us toward love of God and love of neighbor. All communion, all community that arises within the church and the world is empowered by this “communion bringing” Spirit. In his mature theology, Yves Congar, one of the theological architects of Vatican II, describes these “two hands of God,”⁵ the Word and the

Spirit as doing God's work together. "The charisms of the Spirit are the basis for the whole life of the church,"⁶ and are central to its life. As Denis Edwards explains, "He [Congar] understands charisms as gifts of nature and grace given for the fulfillment of the mission of the church—such as those of preaching, teaching, healing, music, art, peacemaking, and prophetic words and deeds on behalf of human liberation."⁷ Congar's pneumatology is also simultaneously an ecclesiology. "The Spirit transforms individual persons, making them daughters and sons of God, but they are transformed precisely as persons-in-communion, as members of the church, the Body of Christ. The work of the Spirit is communion."⁸

Basil the Great in the late fourth century wrote that the Holy Spirit is the Breath of God and always accompanies the Word. Denis Edwards uses this insight of the Spirit as communion bringer and accompanier of the Word to assert that the Spirit accompanies the Word, giving life. This life-giving work refers both to creation, the bringing forth of life biologically, as well as bringing forth the resurrected life in Jesus and eschatological life for all of us. The Spirit as the Breath from God's mouth speaks with the Word of God. In Basil's own words:

Christ comes, and the Spirit prepares his way. He comes in the flesh, but the Spirit is never separated from him. Working of miracles and gifts of healing come from the Holy Spirit. Demons are driven out by the Spirit of God. The presence of the Spirit despoils the devil. Remission of sins is given through the gift of the Spirit.⁹

Just as the Spirit was at work from the beginning of creation and partners with the Word in incarnation and

redemption, so too, the Spirit sanctifies us through her indwelling communion in us. The Spirit illumines us and not only grounds our participation in God-life, but also gifts us with the discernment of Spirits which is correlative with the depth of our transformation in the God-life. Basil poetically describes this process:

When a sunbeam falls on a transparent substance, the substance itself becomes brilliant, and radiates life from itself. So too, Spirit-bearing souls, illumined by him, finally become spiritual themselves, and their grace is sent forth to others. From this comes knowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of hidden things, distribution of wonderful gifts, heavenly citizenship, a place in the choir of angels, endless joy in the presence of God, becoming like God, and the highest of all desires, becoming God.¹⁰

Members of religious communities are thus members of the one church and members of their religious institutes, living as persons-in-relation-to-others, participating in a mutuality of relationship brought about by the communion bringer and transformed over a lifetime into our full destiny as sharers in God's Trinitarian life.

Those who participate in a religious community's incorporation process as candidates, novices and temporary professed, are responding to the movements of the Spirit within them to test a call to the charism of religious life. They

The discernment of spirits within the incorporation process in religious communities is rooted in an underlying theology of the Holy Spirit, who is currently understood as the "communion bringer" within the Trinity, the church and creation itself.

also test a call to the charism of the institute they choose to join. There are many gifts of the Spirit, and religious life in a particular institute is one of them. Individual members of a religious institute bring their personal gifts to the community, even as they seek to discover the compatibility of these gifts with the institute's way of life. A participant in an incorporation process may discern at some stage that his or her particular gifts will best be expressed in a different context than religious life.

Rooted in the wisdom tradition

Discernment of spirits within the context of incorporation draws on the rich wisdom tradition of the lived experience of the church, of its mystics and its religious communities, which offer guidance based on theologies of the Holy Spirit.

In the early church particular local churches developed teachings on discernment and criteria for recognizing the presence of the Spirit in their midst.

The foundation of this tradition occurs throughout the New Testament witness since the earliest Christian communities experienced the action of the Spirit in the life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus first of all.

Subsequently, particular local churches developed teachings on discernment and criteria for recognizing the presence of the Spirit in their midst.

The earliest texts in the New Testament, especially Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Romans and Galatians present a rich teaching on discernment which include a developmental awareness of an individual's relationship to the Spirit, the interior transformative work of the Spirit, connatural knowledge of the things of God and discernment of Spirits as a charismatic gift for the good of the community.¹¹ In the early Christian communities, prophetic and charismatic gifts were experienced as ambiguous phenomena requiring further discrimination from whence they originated and whither they led. In order to discern counterfeit experiences from authentically Spirit motivated ones, Paul identified three potential relationships with the Holy Spirit that members of the community might enjoy. So too, there is an organic development from one level of spiritual development to

another brought about by the Spirit within a person. This developmental notion of the work of the Spirit is echoed again and again throughout the mystical tradition.

Pauline teaching on discernment

Within these early communities, Paul believed that some members manifested an absence of the Spirit in their lives. Others manifested the presence of the Spirit in their lives, while still others demonstrated that they were guided by the Spirit in a habitual way.

In all three cases, Paul described the observable fruits of these three relationships. They included both dispositions (affective states) and behaviors. For those Paul felt were not relating to the Spirit at all, he contrasted *sarx* (sinful flesh) to Spirit. Paul says in Galatians, "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and things like these" (5:19-20).

For those whose lives manifested the presence of the Spirit in their lives, Paul named many characteristics. The most important was the confession of Jesus as Lord, which is empowered by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3) So too, was the ability to address God as *Abba*, (Romans 8:12-17) and justification through the transforming Spirit, (Galatians 3:3).

For those who were most developed, the gift of the Spirit empowered their habitual ability to respond to direction by the Holy Spirit in a pervasive and on-going way in their interior life and ministry. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." (Romans 8:14). In Galatians, as well as in Corinthians, Paul offers a list of the fruits of the Spirit. "By contrast the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22,25).

This relationship with the Holy Spirit is marked by a parallel organic development of spiritual life itself. The Spirit brings about repentance and conversion from a sinful condition. Once established in a converted life growing in the Christ mystery, the work of the Spirit is present in on-going sanctification and transformation until one has become sensitive and docile to the Spirit's promptings so that one then lives by the Spirit's guidance. As a result of these distinct relationships with the Holy Spirit and differing stages of organic development in the life of the Spirit, individual



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persons' capacities for discernment in their own regard and in relationship to another range from nil to highly developed or even charismatically inspired.

As the lived tradition developed, teachings on discernment encompassed a variety of foci, all of which remain significant for discernment in the context of religious life. The fourth century desert immas and abbas, elders living the ascetic life both as solitaries and communities, guided neophytes in this way of life through the discernment they had developed. The medieval/scholastic theological tradition and mystics such as Catherine of Siena comprehensively described the growth of moral life and the development (or not) of the virtues which coalesce in persons as character. Thomas Aquinas elaborated this foundation, relating the gifts and fruits of the Spirit to this foundation in virtue. Ignatius of Loyola, in his rules of discernment of spirits in the Spiritual Exercises, describes interior movements within persons as they engage in the structured process of the Exercises, seeking to discover God's will for them in a vocational or ministerial decision.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, among others, focus more on mystical development and discernment related to contemplative prayer and contemplative life. Liberationist and feminist reflection on discernment take into account social conditioning and social location that will either impede freedom or support clarity of reflection when members of an oppressed or privileged group attempt to discern. Finally, psychological understandings of human persons contribute to the role of the unconscious, negative or positive images of self or of God, and the influence of personality structures on a person's process of discernment.

Discerning a calling to religious life

Discernment of vocation to a religious community understandably incorporates and builds on this general teaching on discernment. The person seeking admission to a religious institute has a relationship to the Holy Spirit who is nudging him or her to explore this way of life. The individual will arrive with his or her own level of spiritual development

and his or her own ability, or lack thereof, to discern interior movements. Likewise, the vocation minister, novice ministers and incorporation ministers will have their particular levels of spiritual development and a developed or undeveloped ability to discern the spirits within themselves, as well as in relationship to another. All those involved in discerning a vocation will have their areas of blindness, as well as their areas of deep insight. All involved in such discernment need to grow in the ability to work with the Spirit, to make themselves available for the Spirit's communications, and

All those involved in discerning a vocation will have their areas of blindness, as well as their areas of deep insight. All involved in such discernment need to grow in the ability to work with the Spirit.

to pray for clarity and guidance from the Spirit.

From the perspective of the religious institute, the process of vocational discernment to the institute begins with an inquirer's first contact and continues through final vows. It may be helpful to vocation ministers, incorporation ministers and leadership to

recognize that they are engaged in parallel processes of evaluation and discernment from the perspective of the institute and for the sake of the common good. Evaluation focuses on whether or not a person seeking admission to the institute has the basic qualifications as defined in an incorporation plan, usually based on externally documented factors, i.e. age, recommendations, degrees, work history, results of psychological testing, etc. Once admitted, however, incorporation ministers are also responsible for evaluating and recommending to leadership the person's suitability for progressing to the next stage of religious life at this time in her life in this particular institute. Evaluation in this case focuses on whether or not the candidate has fulfilled the requirements for each stage of incorporation related to community living, ministry placements, education, living of the vows, etc.

Discernment focuses on how this particular person might contribute to the community in relationship to his or her personal gifts and appropriation of the community's charism. Discernment of the individual person should focus primarily on the candidate's spiritual maturity and aptitude for religious life within a particular community. Is the candidate flourishing humanly and spiritually within the incorporation

process? Is she able to integrate her new experience with her past history and sense of herself? Is he rising to the challenges presented by living in community and engaging in ministry? Are her struggles typical transition dynamics for anyone in a major life transition, or do they indicate deeper problems? Vocation and formation personnel and leadership are responsible for discernment regarding the person's call to religious life and his or her "fit" with the community. Decisions related to progression through the incorporation process thus entail both evaluation and discernment on the part of the community.

Parallel processes of discernment for candidate and community

Decisions about admission and progression to full membership must take into account the common good of the community, as well as the good of the person seeking membership. Simultaneously, vocation ministers assist the person in his own personal discernment: helping him gather information, developing a relationship with him, reflecting with him, and observing the congruence or lack thereof between espoused values and actual behavior. Vocation ministers contribute to the person's discernment through formation conversations—sharing observations, raising questions for consideration, etc. They also discern with the person his or her ability to live religious life and to embody the charism of the congregation. But they are always both discerning and evaluating.

The person in the incorporation process is simultaneously discerning for him or herself based on growing self-knowledge, reflection, interior movements, religious experience, desires, experiences with the community and peers, gifts and freedom. He or she benefits from study, interactions with incorporation ministers, experiences of the life and the assistance of a spiritual director (who should have no responsibility for evaluation but only for facilitating the person's vocational discernment and growth in the spiritual life). Thus parallel discernments are going on: the person discerning for him or herself about religious life in this particular community, and representatives of the community discerning for the greater good of the community.

The novitiate period is of critical importance because of the experiential component of living religious life with professed members and peers. A successful novitiate results not just in a deepened identity but a new identity as a Sister of Mercy or a Franciscan Friar, etc. This new identity is

integrated into the novice's life story cognitively, affectively, spiritually and behaviorally. Depending on a person's previous experience of communal living (for instance, in a volunteer experience after college or in a local community of the institute), learning to live interdependently may be a major challenge for adults accustomed to independence.

Only in the live-in situation with novice directors who receive the novices' self-disclosure and who observe their behavior do some major psychological or behavioral issues become apparent in vocational discernment. Capacities for both peer relationships and relationships with authority become clear. If psychological testing raised questions but was inconclusive, the extended live-in experience verifies or contradicts the initial findings. Members of religious communities, as a base-line, need to be able to relate in a healthy way to authority and to peers, both within the community and in ministry settings. Follow up recommendations for further growth at each stage of incorporation need to be taken seriously and acted on before decisions for final vows. It is important to test out a person's potential for growth, as well as a candidate's manifestation of a personality disorder. A personality disorder is unlikely to change or may even be part of the person's basic personality, which is pretty much established by age 35, according to Sister Donna Markham, OP.¹²

In addition, cultural factors can affect discernment at all stages of the incorporation process. Candidates may lack community living skills that once were developed in families. Novices in some novitiates may be challenged by an immersion into a different ethnic culture on top of immersion into religious life culture. Generational and ethnic diversity within the novitiate group brings the challenge of a wider range of cultural norms, often taken for granted and usually unconscious.

Incorporation personnel at all stages need to take into account cultural differences and immerse themselves in the person's ethnic culture enough to distinguish between normative cultural patterns unfamiliar to the formators and psychological tendencies. Incorporation personnel may also need to seek psychological evaluation or supervision from a person of the same or similar ethnicity as the person in incorporation in order to correct for cultural bias, as well as to disallow the use of culture as an excuse to get special treatment. Likewise, attention to culture is important during candidacy and temporary profession if the person's local community does not understand or appreciate her culture and welcome the diversity she brings to the community.



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Mutuality in vocational discernment

Mutuality in the discernment process is highly desirable. The hoped for outcome is that the person and the vocation minister both arrive at the same decision through a process of careful discernment—whether or not the decision is to continue with the entry process.

Mutuality in discernment may break down if the person does not have the psychological and spiritual maturity or ability to process and assimilate both negative and positive feedback. This implies not only freedom from major psychological disorders but also a developmental capacity to reflect on experience. Truly mutual discernment also depends on the candidate having a prayer life developed enough to be able to prayerfully bring this interior and exterior experience to God and freely seek God's response. This on-going dynamic is the domain of vocation discernment in spiritual direction (without threat of evaluation). The formation interviews during the incorporation process would also examine the capacity for mature self-reflection and prayer.

Mutuality may break down if either the incorporation

minister or the person is unable to be both loving and honest, grounded in the virtues required for discernment, and skilled in dialogue. Mutuality may also break down if the person or the incorporation minister develops negative transference¹³ reactions to one another that are not resolved through the minister's supervision. [For more on the importance of and process for supervision, see "Supervision and consultation: the vocation minister meets the mirror," by Sister Cindy Kaye, RSM in the Spring 2009 edition of *HORIZON*.]

While such unconscious projections are always going on in all relationships, if a woman in the incorporation process begins to "act as if" her formation director is someone from her past life with whom she had difficulty, this may make it very hard for her to trust her formator. Likewise, the incorporation minister might also begin unconsciously to "act as if" the woman actually is someone from her own past toward whom she had negative reactions. As a result, she may not be able to be realistic in her responses. Most of the time, competent supervision of the formator can help her become conscious of what is being stimulated in her and help her modify her responses. Mutuality may also break

down if the woman's responses are rooted in a personality disorder or disturbance. The initial psychological testing may have noted problems or missed them. Since these test results are confidential and often restricted to the major superior, re-testing may be desirable to discover whether there is psychological incapacity for mutuality.

Leadership's role in vocation discernment

In religious institutes, decisions to progress through the stages of the incorporation process are usually made by the major superior with the consent of the leadership team or council. In relatively small communities, the president and members of the leadership team may have gotten to know candidates quite well. In larger communities, the leader responsible for these decisions may have relatively little sustained contact with persons in the incorporation process. The more distanced leadership is, the more difficult it is to get to know candidates at the level of discernment (e.g. internal dispositions and external behaviors). In such cases, perhaps leaders are making prudential judgments based on receiving the parallel discernments and recommendations of the candidate and the incorporation ministers. Leadership does have the opportunity to explore questions or concerns with both the person requesting vows and with incorporation ministers. In smaller communities, leaders may have had enough conversation and contact to use both their own first-hand experience and the parallel discernments and evaluations of the incorporation ministers and the candidate.

While leaders frequently make every effort to get to know people in the incorporation process, nevertheless, their relationship with them is not entirely problem-free. Everyone has attitudes, both conscious and unconscious, toward authority figures. Leaders, vocation and formation ministers are all susceptible to receiving the authority projections of people in incorporation. This can be either positive or negative. The person in authority benefits when candidates have had positive prior experiences with authority figures; they also suffer from projections based on prior experiences of untrustworthy, abusive or arbitrary exercise of authority. Leaders must also be aware that candidates with some personality disorders (borderline and narcissistic) characteristically try to develop a special relationship with those perceived to be the most important in the group or important to their future. Likewise borderline or narcissistic personalities dismiss peers as less influential and unworthy of their attention.

Thus, as leaders participate in discernment and evaluation, they always need to take into account that their experience is conditioned by authority projections, and by the fact that candidates may relate differently with peers than with them. As a result of either typical or unhealthy authority projections, a president may experience an extremely positive relationship with a person in the incorporation process, while many others experience her differently, as perhaps unable to relate to peers, or to maintain a connection with another, or to relate to persons with less authority. Consequently, leadership needs to be very careful to relate equally to all people in the incorporation process, without singling out a few for special attention or for a special relationship not available to others.

Despite some inevitable failures in mutuality within the discernment and evaluation processes, mutuality remains an ideal. This means that people in incorporation enjoy an adult relationship with their vocation and formation ministers and with leaders. It means that evaluation is transparent—ministers share their assessments with the women, discuss them, and try to agree on the content whenever possible. When women in the incorporation process trust their vocation ministers and formators, they are generous in their self-disclosure and feel free to discuss achievements, areas for growth, struggles, doubts, graces, their love for God, their significant interior movements and desires. Likewise, their incorporation ministers join them in their joy, share their suffering and challenges and offer both challenge and support as transparently as they can. When discernment and evaluation is rooted in such mutuality, decisions to proceed or to leave are shared. If discernment is truly serving both the community and the candidate, what matters most is that a candidate is led by the Spirit of God and is freely discovering how and where God wants him or her to live Christian

Mutuality remains an ideal. This means that people in incorporation enjoy an adult relationship with their vocation and formation ministers and with leaders. It means that evaluation is transparent—ministers share their assessments with the women, discuss them, and try to agree on the content.

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— Vita Consecrata, 1996

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discipleship—as a religious or in some other way of life.

Discernment of Spirits within the incorporation process, therefore, is grounded in a theology of the vivifying and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, who inspires religious life itself and bestows the charism of discernment on individuals and communities. The charism of discernment rests on the basis of human and spiritual development and responsiveness to the Spirit's guidance. Vocation and formation ministers, leaders and candidates are engaged in mutually-related yet distinct processes of vocational discernment. These processes ripen over time and deepen as each person involved becomes more available to the indwelling Spirit and grows in his or her own spiritual life. ■

1. Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 26-30.

2. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II, *Consecrated Life (Vita Consecrata)* (Boston:

Pauline Books, 1996).

3. Edwards, 93.

4. Edwards, 92.

5. An image of Irenaeus of Lyons.

6. Edwards, 93.

7. Edwards, 93-94.

8. Edwards, 95.

9. Cited by Edwards, 27, *On the Holy Spirit*, 19.49.

10. Edwards, 28, *On the Holy Spirit*, 9.23.

11. For an overview of discernment of spirits both in the New Testament and in the western spiritual tradition, see Michael J. Buckley, "Discernment of Spirits" in *The New Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville: Glazer, 1993).

12. Notes from a formation workshop given at Aquinas Institute in 1999.

13. See Sister Janet K. Ruffing, RSM, "The 'As if' Relationship: Transference and Countertransference in Spiritual Direction," in *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 155-180.

A discernment house provides a positive environment for prospective members and an ideal setting for vocation-ministry events.

How a discernment house can enhance vocation ministry

BY SISTER CHARLENE DIORKA, SSJ

HAVE YOU EVER HAD the experience where something crosses your path more than once and then, finally, after a third occurrence, you consider its relevance? These circumstances provided the context in which Elizabeth House, the SSJ House of Discernment, in Philadelphia, PA originated.

Two of our sisters on separate occasions sent me an article that featured the Jesuit experience entitled, Six-Weeks-a-Jesuit, a program in which participants live in Jesuit communities and work on ministry projects sponsored by the Society to get a taste of what Jesuit life entails. The sisters liked the concept and were taking time to recommend it to me, the congregational vocation director. I had already acknowledged this as a great idea and wondered how and where I might duplicate something like this program. Off-handedly I thought, "If this idea crosses my path once more, I will be convinced that God is up to something!"

Indeed, God was at work! Within a few days, our congregational president called to say that a community benefactor had offered a donation particularly for the

promotion of vocations. She encouraged me to think about possible uses for this donation. Both amazed and excited, I told her that I already had an idea, and I explained my recent experience and the significance of the timing regarding a possible house of discernment. She liked the idea and agreed that a congregational house of discernment would be ideal. What I did not know at the time was that a congregational property would soon be available for such use. As often happens in religious life, when one thing's time has ended another soon takes its place. In a short time, renovations were made on a wonderful house that had been in the congregation for some 80 years, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph were founding a house of discernment.

We named it Elizabeth House in reference to the visitation in Scripture where we are introduced to the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. My hope was that the professed sisters who would live in the house of discernment would create an environment that encouraged what transpired between Mary and Elizabeth to take place between discerners and us sisters.

A place for discernment

In my mind, a space like this could provide a more personal and intimate experience of the Sisters of Saint Joseph for an inquirer or discerner before exposing her to an institutional experience at the motherhouse. A discernment house could provide opportunity for Come and See weekends, occasions for prayer and dinner, week-long experiences, or more

Sister Charlene Diorka, SSJ is associate director of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) and a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph. She was a vocation minister for her community for six years and a sister-resident in Elizabeth House for several years prior to joining the NRVC staff.



long-term stays for a month or so at a time. An experience at Elizabeth House would introduce guests to the Sisters of Saint Joseph, provide time away from their everyday pace to reflect and to listen, and help discerners to experience the rhythm of apostolic life. Sandra Schneiders, IHM, notes, “People thinking about religious life will get a much clearer and more authentic picture of the life if they can visit with,

Elizabeth House gave us an automatic place where people who are searching can come and go without much ado! I didn’t need to wait for the next house meeting to have the community members’ consensus for an agreeable time for a visitor.

or even spend some months with, a vibrant community while they are discerning their own call.”

Another consideration about creating a space like Elizabeth House is that it gave us an automatic place where people who are searching can come and go without much ado! In other words, as the vocation director and a community member, I didn’t need to wait for the next house meeting

to have the community members’ consensus for an agreeable time for a visitor. While everyone knows life in community involves accountability, communication, and regular planning, at Elizabeth House it was presumed that at anytime someone might stop by for a visit or inquire about a more long-term stay. The nature of this place of welcome is that there is always an open door and a space for someone to “come and see.”

If location is everything, as they say in real estate, it is especially so with a house of discernment. Because the Sisters of Saint Joseph already had an available property to use for a house of discernment, there was not much discussion about location. However, there are several things about the location of the house that are natural attractions.

The first asset is access. Elizabeth House in Philadelphia is an easy walk to a local train station that provides convenient transportation. In addition, the house is only three miles from Mount Saint Joseph Convent, our motherhouse of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, where other connections can be made and opportunities abound. This proximity is another asset of the house. It provides access to many of the ministries of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and makes it convenient to take part in volunteer and service opportunities. A final

asset regarding location is that the house is in the heart of a neighborhood that is very active, urban, and diverse. While the neighborhood itself offers lots of places to walk, it is also near a local walking trail that is part of Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park. This environment has often assisted discerners who lived in the house with ample space to nurture the desire of their heart.

Visitors and residents get to know us

The mission is another essential element of a house of discernment. The purpose of our Congregational House of Hospitality and Discernment is to provide an opportunity for young women to experience the mission of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, to live and work so that all people may be united with God and with one another. Elizabeth House offers an opportunity for women to experience this mission first-hand. Guests, inquirers and discerners live with a core group of sisters in community and share prayer. The house provides a unique atmosphere to nurture life for the congregation, the church, and the world. Visitors join the community for dinner, stay for a weekend, or even become residents. We welcome those women who desire to grow in relationship with God, with themselves, and with others.

In a house of discernment, some guidelines regarding responsibilities and expectations can be very helpful. We tell visitors and residents that the core community has the following expectations.

In our local communities we establish those structures which unite us in spirit and mission. We engage in the process of shared decision-making to facilitate our living together. We seek opportunities to be together, to be with one another, for we value the support and strength of community living, both in the joys and in the sufferings which unite us (Constitutions, 52).

- To participate in various facets of community life
- To share in household tasks (i.e. shopping, cooking, cleaning, etc.) as well as to keep your own living space neat and orderly
- To make your community life in Elizabeth House a priority

Community living requires a spirit of faith. To nurture this spirit we accept, reverence, and love ourselves and one another in our weaknesses and our strengths. Thus we

endeavor to be realistic in our expectations as pilgrims on the way (Constitutions, 54).

- To participate in reflection time and regular processing of your lived experience with the community
- To contribute to the spiritual aspects of daily communal living
- To have a mutual respect of privacy
- To be open to the experience of those with whom you live

In our relationships and in our work both in community and among others, we follow the example of Jesus, as far as we are able, in reflecting the justice of the Gospel. We honor Joseph, the just man, by our manner of service in a spirit of reverence for all persons and for all creation (Constitutions, 27).

- To engage fully your present experience of ministry/work
- To bring a spirit of unity and reconciliation to your daily interactions
- To serve the dear neighbor with cordial charity and loving service

Practically speaking, Elizabeth House has ample space for daily living and can accommodate eight residents. Ideally, we planned for three professed sisters to live with the women who would come. Some months only the professed sisters were in the house! And other times occupancy ranged from six to eight full-time residents. At any given time, the guest book we kept recorded the various women who came and spent some time, no matter how long or short it was.

I formally welcomed the first discerner to live at Elizabeth House just four months after it opened. This young woman was already in the preliminary stages of applying to our community and asked if she could live in the house of discernment to give her some transitional time before she moved into one of our local convents as an established candidate. For her it proved to be a valuable six months in nurturing her call to the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Two other women, who have since entered the congregation, also spent some time living at Elizabeth House for the same purpose. One came for seven months and the other for four months. Each found the time spent living at Elizabeth House to be beneficial in her transition to religious life.



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While these three women came for an extended stay, many others stayed for various lengths of time and were often repeat visitors. Their time at Elizabeth House enabled them to grow in self-awareness, insight, and clarity. Sometimes that knowledge called them to pursue other paths in life, while others continued to visit until they officially began the process of formation with our congregation. Each woman who came to the house of discernment was either recommended by a sister in the congregation or was someone with whom I had met as the vocation director. Over time I had enough information to support an overnight invitation. It is prudent to screen anyone who comes to the house of discernment and especially important to assess and get references or letters of referral for anyone who will spend extended time with you. Remember that the house of discernment is also your home!

One unique use of the house of discernment came by way of collaboration with the campus minister at Chestnut Hill College, a sponsored work of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.



Vocation minister Sister Kathleen Clafin, SSJ is glad that Elizabeth House provides space for discerners to listen to God.

Together we worked on a monthly program for the college students and offered it at Elizabeth House. The opportunity had a two-fold purpose. First, it was an attractive offer for the students to get off campus and renew themselves. They had the chance to eat, pray, and socialize with one another. Secondly, the time exposed students to the house of discernment as well as the Sisters of Saint Joseph and their mission. Students enjoyed programs like “Coffee and Contemplation,” “Mystic Pizza,” and “A Wing and a Prayer.” Their bodies and spirits were nurtured as they sipped coffee and learned about contemplatives such as Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales, ate pizza and discovered Julian of Norwich, and munched on hot wings after experiencing a guided meditation. It is significant that several newer members in our congregation graduated from our congregationally sponsored college. Connections between Elizabeth House and Chestnut Hill College make sense.

Making the most of a discernment house

No project is without its challenges. Three areas of concern in establishing a house of discernment include the actual construction, renovation, or search for a rental or purchase; professed members to create a local community in the house of discernment; and upholding the mission of the house. When it comes to actual timelines, they often need to be extended. Plan generously for the time needed before any real use of the house of discernment takes place. When discerners come to the house, it is important to remember that they are in discernment, not formation. It's good practice if all involved in the living situation are familiar with young adults and their culture, as well as able to meet them as they come. It is likewise helpful if the professed religious who

choose to live with discerners are flexible, comfortable with ambiguity, and have a good sense of humor. Their interaction with the discerners can have a very influential and formative effect. Invite and encourage healthy community members. A final consideration concerns the mission of the house of discernment. In religious life these days housing is a critical issue. It would compromise the mission of any house of discernment if congregations merely filled empty rooms with members ill-suited or un-inclined to live in community with discerners or inquirers with the congregation.

As I recall the founding of Elizabeth House, I am convinced that having a house of discernment is both a gift and a luxury. It certainly is not a requirement to do vocation ministry, but there is an advantage to creating a comfortable, welcoming space specifically for discerners. I believe my own experience of opening this house of discernment symbolizes what vocation ministry really entails. Truly, it is God's work; yet we as vocation directors must be attentive and attuned to cooperate with God's grace. In this case, a wonderful house became available as a result of that cooperation, and many discerners have been and are still being served.

It seems fitting that the final words in this article be those of a young member of the community who was once a discerner at Elizabeth House, Sister Michelle Leshner, SSJ.

Blest is She who believed...

Come and sit comfortably here
that which is coming to life in you
will grow
in the love present here.

As with Mary and Elizabeth,
these visitation moments
will cause new life
to stir and leap for joy
in the stillness of your heart.

Be at peace
and believe in the knowledge
that I built this house
for you to come and see.

Know that the love
I have for you is far greater
than you could ever imagine.

Blest is she who believed
that what I promised
would be fulfilled. ■

Letter of Agreement

Sisters of Saint Joseph live and work so that all people may be united with God and with one another. Elizabeth House offers an opportunity for women to experience this mission. The guests, inquirers, and discerners will pray and share life in community with a core group of sisters. Residents of Elizabeth House strive to grow in relationship with God, with themselves, and with others.

The Sisters of Saint Joseph agree to the residence of _____ at Elizabeth House from _____ to _____ in the amount of _____ per _____ for room and board. The length of stay is renewable with mutual agreement of resident and Director of Vocations based on discussion and evaluation. The Director may at any time, with or without cause, terminate the resident's stay.

Elizabeth House Resident

Date

Director of Vocations

Date

Member of General Council

Date

Release and Waiver of Liability

Please read carefully; this is a Legal Document that affects your legal rights.

This Release and Waiver of Liability ("the Release") executed on this ____ day of

_____, _____ (year), by _____ (the "Resident"),

in favor of the Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Chestnut Hill, their officers, employees, and agents (The Congregation).

The Resident desires that the Resident live as a member of Elizabeth House related to Chestnut Hill and engage in activities related to being a resident (the "Activities"). The Resident hereby freely, voluntarily, and without duress executes this Release under the following terms:

1. Release and Waiver

Resident does hereby release and forever discharge and hold harmless Chestnut Hill and its successors and assigns from any and all liability, claims, and demands of whatever kind or nature, either in law or in equity, which arise or may hereafter arise from Resident's Activities with Chestnut Hill. Resident understands that this Release discharges Chestnut Hill from any liability or claim that the Resident may have against Chestnut Hill with respect to any bodily injury, personal injury, illness, death, or property damage that may result from Resident's Activities with Chestnut Hill, whether caused by negligence of Chestnut Hill or its officers, employees, or agents or otherwise. Resident also understands that Chestnut Hill does not assume any responsibility for or obligation to provide financial assistance or other assistance, including but not limited to medical, health, or disability insurance in the event of injury or illness.

This weekend justice retreat served multiple purposes. It spurred theological reflection, exposed contacts to the Marianist charism and encouraged relationships between discerners and the community.

Justice retreat provides discernment perspective

BY BROTHER BRIAN C. HALDERMAN, SM

FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS our national vocation team has gathered young men whom we call “serious contacts” for a retreat experience in early December to help them discern the next step of becoming an aspirant, a ten-month live-in experience prior to novitiate. We have attempted several formats and themes for these retreats, with varying degrees of success. This past year we decided to highlight the social justice ministries of our brothers. While it is difficult to do this in a weekend retreat, we felt it was worth an attempt to try something new.

Recognizing that young people are engaged more than ever in works of charity (i.e. volunteerism), we felt it important to expose our contacts to the Marianist method of engagement in works of charity and justice. We saw this weekend not only as an opportunity for the young men to see and learn about our works, but for them to do some personal reflection and social analysis. We hoped they would be challenged by what they would see and learn. Perhaps this challenge would call them forth to respond in an act of love by serving the church as a vowed religious.

About eight months prior to the event we decided to hold the retreat at our community in Rockaway Park, New York in the borough of Queens. Here our brothers support the operation of St. John’s Home, a facility for at-risk teens,

Brother Brian C. Halderman, SM, is a member of the Marianist community. He lives and works at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, TX as the university minister for social justice, responsible for the advancement of Catholic social teaching and justice education on campus. Brother Brian is also a member of his community’s vocation team.



many under state supervision. A former orphanage, St. John’s now provides a place where these young men can feel safe and experience a supervised environment of care and concern for their well-being.

Here the contacts would experience a community in action, engaged not only in the work of St. John’s Home, but with brothers also working at Marianists International, our non-governmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations, and others volunteering time with organizations that provide hot meals, clothing and shelter to those in need.

Shortly after selecting the site we formed a team to plan and execute the weekend. The team included Brother Steve O’Neil, SM, the director of the community at Rockaway and director of Marianists International. Brother Bob Donovan, SM a medical doctor who provides healthcare to the homeless in Cincinnati, was on board, and I served as the coordinator and logistics person on behalf of our vocation team. Additionally we invited a second year novice and a current aspirant to be part of the planning team, so as to ensure a closer connection to the young men that would attend.

Six months prior to the weekend we held our first conference call to brainstorm activities, opportunities for input and to formulate a schedule. We quickly discovered that we could overwhelm the young men with too many activities and input sessions, and we wanted to ensure plenty of time for informal interactions and social experiences. We agreed at the conclusion of the call that we would communicate via e-mail to continue our planning and would hold one more conference call prior to the retreat.

Four months before the event we held another conference call to refine the schedule, define responsibilities and to discuss various logistics. Invitations were extended to the young men during this period, and they were asked to book travel and make provisions with employers or school

schedules in order to attend. We asked that they travel on Thursday, so we could have both Friday and Saturday as full days for our retreat experience.

The weekend

The team traveled into New York a day early and did some final preparations the night before the retreatants arrived. The young men began arriving early on Thursday morning, and we continued with airport pick-ups well into the day. On Thursday evening we began our retreat by sharing a simple meal and introductions. The opening prayer included a beautiful ritual of cleansing and anointing our heads, eyes, ears, hands and feet to symbolize that Christ has no body but ours. Following the prayer Brother Bob facilitated the first input session. He shared his experiences as a medical doctor working among the homeless in Cincinnati.

Friday morning we began by celebrating Eucharist with our local community and departed shortly after for a subway trip into Manhattan. As we made our way toward the United Nations, the young men and religious had time to interact informally, and a number of beneficial conversations were held. Arriving at the United Nations, we participated in an official tour, which highlighted the 40th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights.

Following the tour, Brother Steve, director of our U.N. NGO facilitated a panel discussion about the work of Catholic NGOs at the United Nations, with a specific emphasis on the work of religious orders. The young men seemed very interested in this presentation and asked lots of questions. This was a new concept for many, that Catholic religious orders have a place at the U.N. and in the international community.

Friday afternoon included a visit to a homeless project



Novice Rayler Dominguez, nSM and Brother Brian Halderman, SM await the train in New York City on the way to a homeless ministry during the Marianists' justice retreat.

in New York City that involved the homeless running a co-op of sorts that collects the bottles and cans that the men and women pick up off the street. They cash in their collections with manufacturers or recycling companies. It was an impressive operation, run completely by the homeless and some volunteers. The young men met a young sister who is from a religious community in Spain and who came to the U.S. to work at the United Nations and later felt called to live on the street with the homeless. She now is homeless and ironically struggles with convincing her religious community that this indeed is a ministry.

Friday evening we returned to the community where we shared a meal with our brothers, followed by prayer and personal reflection about what we experienced during the day.

Helping at a soup kitchen

Assisting in a Long Island soup kitchen was our Saturday morning destination. A member of our community is on the soup kitchen's board and arranged for the young men to help with cooking and serving. This eye-opening experience for the young men drew their attention to the realities of homelessness, migrant workers from Latin America, and families in poverty. This experience proved to be a valuable part of the weekend, for it provided an activity for

the participants, brothers and other volunteers to interact informally in a structured situation in which we were all offering charity to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Saturday afternoon we returned to the community for an Emmaus walk (vocation discerners partnering with a brother to discuss their vocation and possible next steps) and some well-needed rest. After cooking dinner together and celebrating the Sunday vigil Mass, we had a presentation about the specific Marianist perspective on social justice. During this session the brothers fielded a variety of questions, from our involvement in social justice ministry to the length of the formation process.

Our evenings included plenty of time to socialize informally. I have found that informal times of socialization on vocation discernment weekends are extremely important for the young men to see that there are others who are thinking about this same step. It also allows members of the religious community to observe how the young men interact socially with others.

We concluded the weekend with a morning prayer experience and breakfast together before beginning our journeys home.

Conclusion

We received very good evaluations from the retreat participants, stating that it was helpful to see the types of ministries the Marianists are involved in and how they conduct themselves in those ministries. The brothers who were part of the team also gave the weekend high marks, stating that they were able to really get a good sense of the young men in discernment and how they might contribute to our efforts of advancing justice. The team suggested to the national vocation director that he consider holding similar weekends around other aspects of our community ministries—for example, a weekend on ministry in our secondary schools or retreat houses. While this weekend format had elements of prayer and personal reflection, it was more focused on the practicalities of the day-to-day life of an apostolic religious community.

We often take for granted that young people see how we work and live, but we discovered that offering a specific weekend focused on one aspect of our ministry provided a deeper perspective into our life of ministry and some of our core values for advancing justice in our world. As Father William Freere, SM has written: social justice is social; it is done in the context of a community. What better way to experience this than to share Marianist life with young men

by doing works of social justice with a community of fellow discerners. ■

Retreat Schedule

THURSDAY

- 4 p.m. Retreatants arrive at Rockaway
- 6 - 7 p.m. Dinner - pizza
- 7:30 p.m. Opening prayer, social justice talk

FRIDAY

- 6 - 6:30 a.m. Rise and pick-up breakfast
- 6:45 a.m. Eucharist with the community
- 7:30 a.m. Depart for United Nations
- 9 a.m. Arrive at United Nations for tour and presentation on the work of Marianists International with panel of Catholic NGOs
- Noon Lunch
- 1 - 3 p.m. Visit homeless recycling project
- 3:30 p.m. Depart Manhattan for Rockaway
- 5:15 p.m. Dinner with Rockaway community
- 7 p.m. Prayer and discussion

SATURDAY

- 6 - 6:30 a.m. Rise and pick-up breakfast
- 7 a.m. Depart for soup kitchen
- 8 a.m. Direct service at soup kitchen
- Noon Lunch (at soup kitchen)
- 1 - 4 p.m. Free time and Emmaus walks
- 5 p.m. Sunday Eucharist
- 6:15 p.m. Prepare and eat dinner together
- 7:30 p.m. Discussion, Q & A on advancing justice and the Marianist charism
- 9 p.m. Social

SUNDAY

- 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. Rise
- 8 a.m. Brief morning prayer, breakfast together, departures to airport

FILM NOTES

Documentary is rich in teachings

BY SISTER CAROL MUCHA, RSM

IN HIS DOCUMENTARY *The Calling*, (www.thecallingdocumentary.com) independent filmmaker David Ranghelli has carefully, thoroughly, and with great authenticity portrayed the call to religious life to a particular community. Capturing the human emotions that interplay in the decision each individual makes, Mr. Ranghelli follows two entrants and their consequent struggles. This film focuses on a newer community that includes both men and women. It is an entrée to rich reflection and discussion about the very essence of religious life and God's call in any person's life. Vocation ministers and young adults alike will find much to explore and learn, even if they might find fault with aspects of this very human community.

The film introduces viewers to Mother Mary Elizabeth, the superior of the community, previously married and the mother of two adult daughters, who are now married with children. Then there is Orlando, only son of a doctor and his wife, Cecilia. Orlando is 21 years old and feeling called to follow Jesus with great sincerity of purpose. He is enamored of the founder, Father Philip, and wants to be mentored by him in his spiritual life.

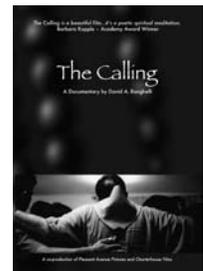
The community—The Family of Jesus the Healer—begins in Tampa, but because of a call from God, Father Philip is moved to “return to his native country,” Peru, to work with the poor. Thus begins the fledgling

community's struggles and questions. Through Mother Mary Elizabeth we hear the “double jeopardy” of having just come to some resolution of the abandonment felt by her daughters upon her entrance to religious life, and now she senses a new abandonment through the greater distance that seems to further the alienation.

With Orlando we hear the tension of trying desperately to do “God's will” and the anxiety of separation from those he loves and who love him. We see how his parents, both of Nicaraguan heritage, are involved in his life decision, and we see their desire to support him in what appears to be, at least for the present, a place of joy and contentment. Nevertheless, we hear Orlando articulate the questions that arise in him. Why can he not keep in touch with his family through e-mail or phone contact while Father Philip is able to do so? What is he to do with his money? His struggles are clearly stated about letting go of all that he had, of trusting God and needing to “test out” the life to which he feels called.

Scene after scene we can empathize with the heart-wrenching that each of Orlando's and Mother Mary Elizabeth's family members feel. We also see the tears of Orlando and Mother Mary Elizabeth coupled with the potent words that come from their own hearts, genuinely seeking clarity from God. Father Philip responds time after time with words, which although sincere, seem to stem from his own spirituality based on a desire to sacrifice and live with the poor, and a conviction that God desires us to struggle in life.

True to its title, *The Calling* indeed allows viewers to plumb the depths of the experience of call. ■



Sister Carol Mucha, RSM belongs to the West Midwest Community of the Sisters of Mercy. She has been in new membership ministry for 14 years. Currently Sister Carol is a co-minister in the Institute New Membership Office, founded in 2005, in St. Louis, MO.



The Calling is a beautiful film...it's a poetic spiritual meditation.
Barbara Kopple – Academy Award Winner

The Calling

A Documentary by David A. Raghelli

Transporting viewers to distant lands and into deep regions of the human soul, *The Calling* presents candid portraits of three people drawn to Catholic religious life. We witness how they and their families embrace the challenges and blessings this vocation entails. It's a film about hard choices and having the faith to make them, providing a glimpse into the nature of belief, the bonds of family, and our eternal quest to discover:
Who am I?

To learn more about *The Calling*, or to purchase the DVD visit our website:

www.thecallingdocumentary.com

Whether married, single or religious we are all beneficiaries of this film's artistry, and the personal reflections it evokes.

Dr. David Foster, Director - Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership
at Seton Hall University



A co-production of Pleasant Avenue Pictures and Charterhouse Films

BOOK NOTES

Religious life book shows today's tensions are not new

BY SISTER MARY CHARLOTTE CHANDLER, RSCJ

WHAT IS VERY CLEAR from the highly footnoted pages of *Religious Life and Priesthood* (2008, Paulist Press) by Sister Maryanne Confoy, RSC, is that the tensions experienced in the church today were present throughout the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II was not simply an event in church history but a microcosm of the church universal grappling with the essentials of its life, not in concerted harmony but in ongoing debate. Each document went through multiple drafts, and the final texts reflect difficult compromises.

Sister Maryanne Confoy, RSC is a Sister of Charity of Australia and a professor of pastoral theology at the Jesuit Theological College and the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, Australia. She is director of the Kilbride Spirituality Centre.

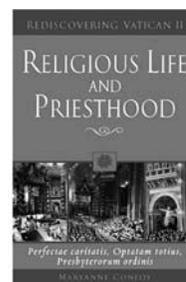
Her book is a study of three documents from the Second Vatican Council on priesthood and religious

Sister Mary Charlotte Chandler, RSCJ is the former director of the Center for the Study of Religious Life (CSRL). In August 2009 she begins a three-year term on the U.S. provincial team of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Prior to her work at CSRL, she was a research associate at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.



life—*Perfectae Caritatis* (*On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life*), *Optatum Totius* (*On the Ministry and Life of Priests*) and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (*On the Training of Priests*). The book:

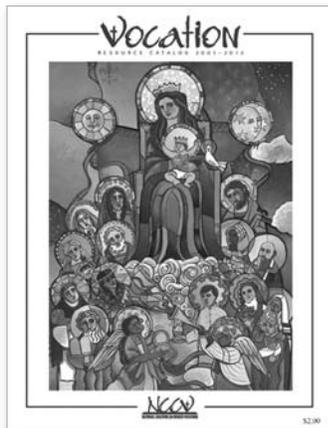
- walks the reader through each document's development at the Council, draft by draft,
- highlights the main points,
- chronicles its implementation in the life of the church from the close of the Council until the current day, including additional documents promulgated by the church on the topic, and
- explores "the state of the question" today, that is, the directions the church appears to be heading, or should be heading in Confoy's opinion.



The actual documents are not included in the book. The reader is referred to copies of them on the Vatican Web site.

When this series is completed, there will be eight volumes covering the documents of Vatican II. Confoy's book is a resource for those who have heard about the Council but actually have little knowledge of it, as well

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Pray for Vocations!

as for those wish to understand the present conversations on priesthood and religious life in the context of the last 50 years. Those serving in vocation ministry may be in one or both categories.

The church controversies that vocation ministers encounter today were fully present during the Council. Some of that story is communicated in the title changes that occurred in new drafts of the documents. The schema on priesthood was successively titled *On Clerics (clericis)*, *On Priests (sacerdos)*, *On the Life and Ministry of Priests (sacerdotium)* and finally *On the Ministry and Life of Priests (presbyterorum)*.

How the section on celibacy in this same document was shaped and formed is an example of the diversity of perspectives present at the Council. A section on celibacy had been omitted in an early schema partially in sensitivity to the fact that the document was for both the Eastern and Western churches, but it was added in additional drafts. There were those bishops who wanted a reaffirmation of celibacy's primary importance to

priesthood and another group of bishops who wanted clarification that there was no incompatibility between priesthood and marriage. A number of Latin American bishops supported a married clergy. At one point rumors circulated about the possible relaxation of the law of celibacy. These were picked up by the media. The debate was brought to a halt when Pope Paul VI wrote a letter to the Council requiring that any further discussion on the topic be halted. The final document affirms that celibacy is a gift received by the church and a requirement of candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin Rite.

The history of *Perfectae Caritatis* begins before the Council. During Pius XII's papacy there were numerous recommendations to religious for updating—including the necessity of adapting to the present times—secular institutes were formally recognized, and the World Congresses for the Lay Apostolate were convened in Rome in 1951 and 1957. The first draft of the Vatican II schema on religious life, according to Confoy, is a compendium of the state of the questions about religious life in the pre-conciliar period.

Part of the complexity in the development of this schema, which went through many and massive revisions, was that at the Council religious life was the responsibility of two commissions, the commission for religious and the doctrinal commission, and they differed in their understanding of religious life. There was great tension in the discussions on the chapter on religious life in *Lumen Gentium*, which influenced the discussion of this document.

The schema on the training of priests went through six drafts. Some of the issues debated concerned the proportion of pastoral work and studies during seminary years, the importance of St. Thomas, and formation based on a diocesan (not monastic) spirituality.

This book is not a casual read. Great attentiveness is required to keep up with the various bishops being quoted, the multiple changes being made to each draft of the document, and the spectrum of perspectives being presented on topics central to each document. But one does come away with an appreciation of the variety of perspectives present at the Council and to what degree each document is a compromise. It is also clear that many of the debates that took place during commission meetings, sessions of the Council or private gatherings continue today but perhaps without the forum for various sides to be heard. ■



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