



Moving forward in hope

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Editor's Note

Walking forward in every type of weather

I'M A DIEHARD WALKER. I'll go out daily in almost any kind of weather. I like to start the day with a short walk, and my favorite way to take a break is to go outside and move around. The air, the light, other people going about their day, the architecture, the natural world—I enjoy taking it all in. Of course it's always a bonus when the weather is sunny and mild, as in the tree-lined path on our cover this edition.

“Moving forward”—whether in a casual walk, in someone's personal life, or in a religious community desiring new membership—is always easier when the conditions are right. When you think about your own community, what conditions come to mind when you think of its progress in vocations? Rain? Sun? Sleet? Drought?

This edition of HORIZON is about “moving forward” no matter the conditions. Maybe you don't have a sunny, level path as you seek to build a future for your institute. But one sure bet is that you do not walk alone: God is with you; other vocation directors are there to support you; laity who are connected to your institute want you to succeed; all of us with HORIZON and the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) are in your corner.

To encourage religious communities to “move forward in hope,” HORIZON is publishing the presentations from our well-received “Men Religious Moving Forward in Hope” events that took place this past winter. All our main features this edition, pages 5-36, are drawn from presentations at these events. While this material was originally developed for men, we think most of it is relevant for women as well. (Because of her book contract, the keynote speaker, Sister Mary Johnson, S.N.D. de N., at our parallel “Women Religious Moving Forward in Hope” events in 2013 could not allow us to publish her talk. Much of her material can now be found in the book *New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity*, by Sister Mary Johnson, S.N.D. de N.; Sister Patricia Wittberg, S.C., and Mary Gautier, published by Oxford University Press.)

I hope that your community is experiencing fair weather on its path forward. But regardless of conditions, our writers in this edition offer you wisdom, data, information, and insight that will guide your journey. ■



Carol Schuck
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When you think about your own community, what conditions come to mind when you think of its progress in vocations? Rain? Sun? Sleet? Drought?



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Hilton grants \$2 million to NRVC

In June 2014 the National Religious Vocation Conference received a three-year, \$2 million grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to build the organization's capacity and sustainability. The grant will be used to help add personnel, build a fund-raising program, create resources for the Year of Consecrated Life, and add other vocation promotion programs. The objectives of the grant include:

- 1) **Restructure and expand administration.** Jobs will be redefined to better match NRVC's needs, and additional staff will be hired, including a director of finance and operations, an IT manager, an executive assistant, and a director of development and fund raising.
- 2) **Develop a broad-based campaign to elicit financial and moral support** for NRVC and its affiliated National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations (which will assist communities with education debt of new members).
- 3) **Promote and provide resources for the Year of Consecrated Life**, including a commemorative hymn, a media e-kit, a parish resource packet, and an expanded edition of VISION Vocation Guide.
- 4) **Sponsor an English-language vocation program at World Youth Day** in Krakow, Poland in July 2016 in partnership with other organizations.
- 5) **Sponsor an international gathering of national vocation organizations** from English-speaking countries in Rome in February 2015 to enhance collaboration.
- 6) **Convene experts to develop an NRVC communications plan** that will focus on what unites the many forms of religious life.
- 7) **Redesign the VISION vocation network website.**
- 8) **Launch a "vocation ambassadors" program** that



The Hilton grant will help NRVC in developing an English-language vocation program for the 2016 World Youth Day in Krakow. Pictured above, center, is Patrice Tuohy, executive editor of NRVC's VISION Vocation Network, at the 2013 World Youth Day in Brazil with pilgrims on the Vocation Veranda NRVC helped sponsor.

will recruit and prepare young people to promote religious life in their schools, parishes, etc.

HORIZON, VISION win 14 awards

HORIZON won six editorial awards and VISION Vocation Guide won eight in the 2014 Catholic Press Association awards competition, the results of which were released June 21. HORIZON was honored for best essay, first place (Sister Susan Francois, C.S.J.P.); best review, second place (Father Radmar Jao, S.J.); best feature article, second place (Father Donald Senior, C.P.); general excellence, third place; best regular column, honorable mention ("Feed Your Spirit"); and best redesign, honorable mention.

VISION took home first place honors for best photo story originating with a magazine or newsletter, best feature, and best essay. It also won best essay, second place; best online content, second place; best electronic newsletter, third place; best coverage of vocations, third place, and best essay, honorable mention.





WAKE UP THE WORLD!

— 2015 Year of Consecrated Life —

The Year of Consecrated Life logo, commissioned by NRVC, and other free resources will be available in print and online through NRVC and the VISION Vocation Network.

Resources for Year of Consecrated Life

To help religious communities and the wider church commemorate the Year of Consecrated Life, NRVC and its VISION Vocation Guide have begun to release free resources, three of which are now available.

A SPECIAL EDITION OF VISION can be ordered online at www.vocationnetwork.org/orders or by calling (800) 942-2811. VISION 2015 includes a multilingual poster of the cover, a poster of a time line of consecrated life through the ages, the results of a survey on consecrated life, and a specially commissioned hymn for the Year for Consecrated Life.

THE HYMN, “WAKE THE WORLD WITH DAWNING JOY,” written by composer Steve Warner, founder and director of the University of Notre Dame Folk Choir, in addition to appearing in VISION, will be available for download as sheet music and a recording.

A LOGO FOR THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE is available for free download at www.vocation-network.org/articles/show/432. NRVC encourages use of the logo in 2015 materials and events connected to religious life.

Year of Consecrated Life plans underway

The Vatican has begun to announce plans for celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life, which begins in November 2014. The year will focus on:

- **renewal** for men and women in consecrated life,
- **thanksgiving** among the faithful for the service of sisters, brothers, priests, and nuns,
- **invitation** to young Catholics to consider a religious vocation.

The Vatican has announced tentative dates for several events that will be part of Year of Consecrated Life:

NOV. 29, 2014: Opening Prayer Vigil

NOV. 30, 2014: Opening Mass with Pope Francis

JAN. 22-24, 2015: Meeting of Catholic consecrated men and women and consecrated religious from other Christian traditions (to be held during the week of Christian unity)

SECOND WEEK OF APRIL, 2015: Conference on religious formation around the world

SEPT. 23-26, 2015: Event for young men and women in discernment and in the process of joining religious orders

DEC. 18-21, 2015: Separate meetings for members of monastic orders and of secular institutes.

JAN. 28 - FEB. 1, 2016: Theological symposium on religious life

FEB. 2, 2016: Closing Mass with Pope Francis on World Day of Consecrated Life

Meetings focus on brothers' vocation

The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) has established a special “Brothers’ Task Force” which has met twice during 2014 with the purpose of calling attention to the vocation of religious brothers. Representatives from four collaborating organizations are taking part (CMSM, NRVC, Religious Formation Conference, and Religious Brothers Conference). Discussions have focused on the formation of religious brothers and ways to commemorate the Vatican’s anticipated letter on the vocation of the religious brother, which is expected to be released in the upcoming Year of Consecrated Life.



The vocation of religious brothers is the focus of a special task force of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. Pictured here is Viatorian Brother John Eustice, C.S.V. with parishioners in Corazal, Belize.



Communities can forge a future if they can let go of the past, explore new options, and embrace fresh ways of attracting the young.

Direct contact with young people is important for any religious community that wants to build a future. Pictured here is Brother Richard Buccina, F.S.C., far left, leading a discernment retreat.

Vocation promotion in contemporary culture

NELSON MANDELA'S DEATH in December 2013 gave rise to a number of moving commentaries about the man's life and mission. He had a common touch, adapted skillfully to changed circumstances, and knew full well that bitterness and resentment were worth only a fool's time and energy. Mandela was a reconciler, well able to entertain criticism, willing to pay the price that lasting change never fails to exact.

Why cite this statesman and champion of freedom here at the outset of an article about contemporary culture, the world of the young, and vocation promotion? After all, our focus is neither Nelson Mandela nor his legacy but rather finding more effective ways to attract young Catholics to our congregations and their mission.

I mention Mandela primarily because of his ability to let go of the past, accept critique, and change when necessary. For we will need these very same talents if we are ever to put aside some of the policies and practices that have guided vocation promotion and initial formation in many of our congregations during the years since Vatican II and arrive at a new set of best practices.

By BROTHER SEÁN SAMMON, F.M.S.



Brother Seán Sammon, F.M.S. is a Marist Brother. He is currently a scholar in residence at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. From 2001 to 2009 he served as

Superior General for the Marist Brothers. Brother Seán has spoken and written widely on religious life.

We cannot help but admit that much of what we have been doing to promote vocations for almost a half century now has not been as effective as we had hoped. We need, first of all, to understand some of the factors that have contributed to this disappointing outcome and, second, to imagine new lines of action that might lead to more promising results.

To do so we will need to examine the shift in attitude and self-understanding that has taken place between those immigrant Catholics who were part of the 19th and early 20th century U.S. church and four distinct groups who today self-identify as Catholic. Next, we will have to take a closer look at the attitudes and outlooks of contemporary young Catholics and understand more fully their experience of faith and church and, more to the point, knowledge of our way of life.

Finally, we must explore the implications that all of these factors have for the work of vocation promotion, asking ourselves all the while if we are willing to surrender some long-held, cherished beliefs in order to explore new directions and experiment with fresh approaches. With these thoughts in mind, let's begin by looking at some shifts that have taken place over time in U.S. culture and their implications for the work of vocation promotion today.

Cultural changes

In the midst of World War II's economic prosperity the U.S. media created and conveyed an image of religious harmony and inclusion. To illustrate the point stories were used, such as the gripping tale of four military chaplains—two Protestant ministers, a rabbi, and a Catholic priest—who gave up their life jackets and went to their deaths together in February 1943 on the U.S.S. *Dorchester* after it had been torpedoed by a German submarine. Missing from these reports was any mention of the nation's ingrained anti-Catholicism.

From the time of its foundation the United States has had no officially established church. By the mid-19th century, however, Protestant historian Robert Baird had affirmed America's identity as Protestant Christian. He wrote in the midst of a national debate about slavery. Around the same time, however, many of the country's citizens were also expressing anxiety about the large numbers of Catholic immigrants arriving from Germany

and Ireland. Due to their ever-growing presence diocese after diocese was established across the frontier during the 1830s and 40s, leading to the fear that Catholics were taking over the American West.

As the 20th century got underway Catholics once again found themselves at odds with aspects of U.S. national and foreign policy. The country's anti-Catholicism was evident in several developments—the imposition of Prohibition (the movement's supporters were not surprised to learn that Catholics opposed it), immigration restrictions in 1924, the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, and what can only be described as the humiliation of Al Smith, Jr. in his 1928 presidential bid.

And while Catholics served in great numbers and with distinction in the armed services, their commitment and sacrifice were often understood differently than that of a number of their fellow citizens. Sad to say, in the midst of World War II when the patriotism of U.S. Catholics could not have been

more evident, a number of them still worried that many of their fellow citizens might doubt their loyalty. (These historical references are developed in Robert Orsi's essay in *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History* edited by Scott Appleby Scott and Kathleen Sprows Cummings.)

Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century these and other factors caused most U.S. Catholics to live in a world different from the one inhabited by those who were part of the dominant Protestant culture. Catholic life centered on the local parish, and young Catholics were insulated from the larger culture through a vast network of Catholic schools and other institutions. Religious practices such as weekly confession and Benediction were common. Catholics set up their own social networks, married among themselves, and generously supplied the church with priests, nuns, and brothers.

Catholics also continued to nurture what sociologist Father Andrew Greeley has called a "sacramental or Catholic imagination." They blessed their homes and their bodies with holy water, addressed their needs to statues and images, and joined their physical pain with the redemptive suffering of Jesus on the cross and those who suffered martyrdom.

The post-World War II atmosphere of national harmony, along with the changing social and economic fortunes of U.S. Catholics, however, eventually caused

Well into the 20th century, U.S. Catholic life centered on the local parish, and young Catholics were insulated from the larger culture through a vast network of Catholic schools and institutions.

many to forget the historical and foundational connection between U.S. nationalism and anti-Catholicism. By the 1960s and 70s—in standard of living, educational achievement and professional accomplishment, in where they lived, whom they married, and the manner in which they worshipped—U.S. Catholics were looking like other Americans far more than their parents or grandparents ever had. There had even been a

Catholic president. This was the age, many believe, when the U.S. church was finally “de-Romanized” with Catholics themselves moving from authoritarianism to freedom, from corporate to personal responsibility, from the values of another world to those of this one.

For many U.S. Catholics Vatican II also represented a break with the past. The religious world of their childhood with its devotional culture was put aside. Old statues that once filled their churches were discarded along with many vestments and other religious garb. Novenas, rosaries, relics, holy cards, and the practice of offering up suffering for the souls in purgatory were now seen as something that belonged to another time in history.

While the Catholic world may have been on the verge of changing during the early part of the second half of the last century, during subsequent years it was transformed to a point where Catholics became almost indistinguishable in attitude and practice from many of their Protestant counterparts. This shift was to have profound implications for the generations of young Catholics who would follow.

Today's young adult Catholics

When discussing intergenerational differences in the Catholic Church today, many researchers refer to four distinct groups: pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, post Vatican II, and Millennial Catholics. The last one includes the majority of those young people who form the pool of potential candidates for religious life today. Let's take a closer look at them.

Young adult Catholics between ages 20 and 39 constitute approximately 40 percent of the total U.S. Catholic population. Research results demonstrate that they are

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NAZARETH ARCHIVAL CENTER



The strong Catholic culture of the past, when most Catholic children knew sisters, brothers, and priests from their school or parish, no longer exists. Pictured here are pupils mingling with Sisters of Charity of Nazareth at St. Vincent De Paul School in Mount Vernon, OH in 1960.

much more loosely tied to the institutional church than previous generations. Though they appear to be “at home” with the church's basic doctrines, sacramental tradition, and concern for the poor, these young Catholics view their faith as being a coincidence of birth or a personal preference; they fail to see the pope as necessary or the Catholic Church as unique and judge other churches to be equally legitimate. They believe that they can be good Catholics without going to Mass. (These and other aspects of Catholic identity are examined in the 2006 book *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice* by Thomas Rausch.)

Two other issues also emerge consistently: 1) a significant number of young people have only a very thin sense of their Catholic identity; 2) a small but substantial number of them appear to be obsessed with their Catholic identity but define it in ways that alienate many pastoral ministers as well as a number of vocation promoters.

Many young Catholics also have a rather selective approach to authority. They are not convinced that the church's rules are God's rules, or that its structures are divinely ordained or even necessary. The church also has little credibility for them in the area of sexuality; they find particularly problematic the official teachings about contraception, sexual orientation, limits on the role of women, and rules against women or married people being ordained priests.

Without doubt the ignorance of young Catholics about their tradition has played an important role in diminishing their commitment to the church. The rapid decline of the Catholic school system in the U.S., seen by many as the most effective means of evangelizing the young, has contributed to this state of affairs. While the hearts of many young Catholics may be Catholic, their intellects surely are not.



Sharing meals and talking with young people helps religious communities form bonds with prospective members. Pictured here are young women sharing a meal with Sisters Angela Gertsema, A.S.C. (third from right) and Colleen Therese Smith, A.S.C.

Catholic imagination and identity

Older Catholics grew up in what Andrew Greeley has described as an enchanted world of stained glass windows and holy water, statues and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy cards. These were seen as a hint of a much deeper religious sensitivity to the divine presence found in nature, stories, human love, and religious symbols. The Catholic imagination of members of this generation organized what they took in from the world and at the same time influenced profoundly the manner in which they experienced that world. They uncovered the Ultimate hidden in the events of everyday life.

By way of contrast many of today's young Catholics have little memory and limited understanding of the pre-Conciliar church. A number also are ignorant of their Catholic tradition, are theologically illiterate, and received a catechesis that may have stirred their emotions but failed to test their intellects.

If we are passionate about evangelizing the emerging generation, we must come once again to appreciate the symbolic and metaphorical factors that influence the way we Catholics come to experience and know God. Catholic imagination contains the tools that we need for developing a new catechesis, one that will speak to both the hearts and the minds of this new generation.

Young Catholics in 2014, then, are quite different than those of us who came of age during the years following the Council. Let's stop wishing that they were just like us and instead try to understand more fully the reality that so many of them face today, appreciate more

deeply the lack of evangelization that exists in the lives of more than a few of them, and accept the fact that a number of the religious artifacts and practices that may make sense to you and me have little, if any, meaning for most of them.

As mentioned earlier, among these young people there is a noticeable minority who are zealous about their faith and enthusiastic about their identity as Catholics. Unfortunately, many of us who are members of the Vatican II generation too quickly label all young people as neoconservative or insist that they are intent on restoring the past. We need to realize, instead,

that the defining moments in their young lives are simply different than those of a generation or two ahead of them. While many of us grew up in a world where all the answers about faith were provided, these young Catholics have come to maturity in a world where there have only been questions. More than a few of them are looking for some answers.

Today, however, there are also many more young men and women whose Catholic identity is in jeopardy. Unfamiliar with their religious tradition, they know little about the history of doctrine, find the Scriptures a mystery, and the lives of the saints foreign to their experience. When talking to them about church and religious life, we quickly discover that they lack a frame of reference that would allow them to understand what we are trying to communicate. Quite simply they do not know what we are talking about.

Way forward: openness to renewal

What sense can we make of the shifts that have taken place in U.S. culture over the last century? What sense can we make of the experience of a number of young Catholics today when considering a way forward in vocation promotion? At the outset, we need to admit that the world and church of today are not the world and church that existed during the 1960s and 70s, nor are they the world and church that existed even 25 years ago.

Many of us who were young Catholics about the time of the Second Vatican Council felt a connection with church; we also knew personally at least one priest, sister, or brother. For a number of today's young Catholics neither is the case. While still generous in character and curious about spirituality, most have only a superficial knowledge of their faith and are largely ignorant

about religious life. Their parents, too, more often than not, have little, if any, understanding of the changes that have taken place in this way of life since Vatican II. Or parents judge it to be a lonely way in which to live out one's days.

In searching for helpful ways to respond to this state of affairs, we must first accept the fact that there are no quick fixes. Cosmetic program changes or new initiatives that fail to address some foundational issues will lead only to greater frustration. A creative response to the challenge of vocation promotion today requires of each of us a fundamental re-thinking of the entire topic and a willingness to change personally.

1. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY LIFE—To begin with, the renewal of our way of life needs to be at the heart of any effort to transform the way in which we promote vocations. As congregations we have spent the last half century falling apart; the time has come to begin building a religious life suitable for the 21st century. And that means insuring that within each of our provinces we have a number of healthy and vibrant communities with a clearly articulated spirituality and evident religious practice. The results of the 2009 NRVC-CARA study of newer members indicated that young U.S. Catholics who might be considering religious life have little interest in groups where most members live alone or those made up of communities whose lifestyle can best be described as “living alone together.” They are not looking for perfect communities but rather for places where life together is interactive and faith is shared. Unfortunately these two elements are not present in many of our groups in the strength and frequency that they should be.

Community life is a great challenge for a number of congregations today. They continue to devote little time to the topic during the years of religious formation and rely on the model of a family when discussing the issue. But religious communities are not families. Rather they are groups of imperfect people of good will with genuine respect and affection for one another and the firm resolve to make the Gospel message the central concern of their life together.

It stands to reason, then, that the skills needed for community life differ from those necessary in a family. If we want to insure the presence of healthy “good enough” communities in our provinces today, we must work at finding ways to make honesty non-threatening, stop normalizing pathology, and cease tolerating ways of acting that are not only destructive of life together but also frankly unchristian.

2. INVIGORATE OUR PRAYER LIFE We need to be renewing our life of prayer and of mission. Our founders were men and women in love with Jesus Christ. Can we say the same about ourselves? We need to demonstrate to young people in obvious ways how important faith is to our way of life. We also must develop a vocabulary that allows us to share with them our experience of God, struggles with faith, hope for the church.

3. ADDRESS SEXUALITY ISSUES—If many young people today question the church's current sexual ethic, they have an equal number of questions about celibate chastity. This vow is a distinctive sign of religious life, quite unlike the promise of celibacy required of diocesan priests prior to ordination. Unfortunately, however, when asked why we live out our sexuality in a celibate chaste manner, a number of us who are religious priests, sisters, and brothers will respond, “For the sake of the Kingdom, in order to love everyone rather than just one person, and to be more available.” Then, we take a deep breath and hope that no one else asks any more questions.

The renewal of our way of life needs to be at the heart of any effort to transform the way in which we promote vocations.

Celibate chastity is not asexuality, rather it is a particular way to live out one's sexuality. Here again we need to develop a vocabulary that allows us to share with young people this important aspect of our lives.

We also need to be honest about issues such as sexual orientation. For there have been, are now, and always will be both heterosexually and homosexually oriented men and women in religious life who are living lives of celibate chastity. To think otherwise is rather naïve. Although how one has lived out his or her sexual orientation may be a criteria for admission to religious life; a willingness to strive to live a life of celibate chastity is a healthier measure of suitability.

4. SEEK DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE YOUNG—Many young people don't know us; they have had little, if any, contact with men and women religious during the course of their short lives. Therefore we need to be working with young people at a much earlier age than many of our congregations do currently and to create experiences where they can come into closer contact with our way of life and mission. This would include providing during the college years live-in experiences that span a significant length of time.

On university campuses corporations such as Apple and Google, as well as service groups like Teach for America and the Peace Corps, are present in the lives of students beginning in freshman year. They take every opportunity to explain their company or group's mission and policies. During a student's sophomore and junior year many of these groups offer opportunities to participate in internship experiences or to meet other students who have similar interests. Many young people are signed up for a job or offered a place in the group's program prior to the early part of their senior year.

On a smaller scale communities can invite young people over for dinner and continue the conversation after the meal has ended. We must ask ourselves personally: are you and I willing to alter our schedules and plans so as to come to know better members of the emerging generation? If our answer is affirmative, then we need to get busy and act on our resolve.

For fear of pressuring young people, we are sometimes too tentative about presenting our way of life and asking young men and women if they have ever considered religious life as a possibility for themselves. By so doing we miss an opportunity to be included among their life choices. We also run the risk of communicating that we neither need nor want them to join us.

From an early age we need to be in direct contact with young people, through parishes, youth groups, schools, and colleges. We need contact on social media, during retreat experiences—in all those places where young people gather. We need to talk with them about who we are, what we mean to the church, and what service we render in the name of the Gospel.

5. INVIGORATE EVANGELIZATION—As a church we have failed to evangelize well one, if not two, generations of young Catholics. We cannot risk having this number increase. With the Catholic school system in this country being steadily dismantled or transformed into a group of private schools with programs available to those who can pay the fees, the sense of community and experience of Catholic culture that these institutions afforded to past generations is not available to an increasing number of young Catholics. We need to re-evaluate corporately the work of evangelization and to develop a new way of speaking to young people about Jesus and his Gospel.

To do so we will have to develop a curriculum that includes a renewed pedagogy of the basics about our faith and to make it available to young people wherever we can. Using the technology at our disposal we must ask ourselves how we can, in the best sense of the word,

“market” our faith and way of life to a new generation. In helping young people to fall in love with Jesus Christ, we will also contribute to the development of their Catholic imagination, that unique way of looking at the world and of interpreting experience.

6. FORM ALLIANCES WITH PARENTS—Parents were once one of our greatest allies in the work of vocation promotion; today, however, a number are wary about encouraging their children to consider this way of life. We have done relatively little since Vatican II to form alliances with this important group. The time has come to correct that omission. Offering a short course on religious life as part of a parish adult education program, giving a presentation during Mass on the day each year devoted to consecrated life, or leaving in the vestibule of the church short, informative materials on religious life can go a long way in terms of filling the information gap.

7. GIVE MEMBERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY—Finally, a number of congregations need to effect a reversal of roles so that the vocation promoter is seen as a resource person within the province and each member comes to see him or herself as a vocation promoter. We might challenge each member of a province to dedicate 20 percent of his or her best time to vocation work, to find creative ways to be present among Catholic children, teenagers, and young adults. It is only in this way that young people may come to know us as persons and begin to understand our way of life and mission. To do so we will have to change our ways of living and acting, open our communities and our hearts, learn new skills and ways of relating. But isn't that exactly what many of those who preceded us in religious life had to do?

Nelson Mandela transformed the history of a nation. He did so because he refused to be encumbered by the past, was able to change when necessary, and had a hopeful vision about the future. Mandela turned passion into fire, the flame of which spread from one person to another until its intensity was such that the forces resisting change could not overcome the inevitable march of history. Those of us in religious life today would do well to rediscover fire, the fire that was there at the time of the foundation of our respective congregations. For fire has always attracted the young. When we find it for ourselves, young people will come once again to our way of life. They have in the past; they will in the future. Have no doubt. ■



Canon law provides a foundation to vocation ministry— spelling out norms and expectations for both prospective members and communities.

Canon law spells out that a close connection to Christ is the foundation of religious life. Sister Anji Fan, S.P. prays with her community, the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary of the Woods, during a send off liturgy to minister in China.

Canon law on entering a religious community

I HOPE TO ADDRESS HERE a number of issues related to the acceptance of new candidates in religious institutes. As a professor of canon law, I base my remarks on the *Code of Canon Law* and other church documents. This article is divided into two principal parts: what new candidates would have a right to expect from a religious institute, and what an institute would need to find in a prospective candidate—in other words, the canonical requirements for admission to the institute.

WHAT CANDIDATES HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPECT FROM A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

Recent studies seem to indicate that candidates for religious life are looking for five perspectives when considering joining a religious institute. There is no particular order to the way I've listed these points.

BY FATHER FRANK MORRISEY, O.M.I.



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1. Close connection to person of Jesus

Canon 577: In the Church there are very many institutes of consecrated life, with gifts that differ according to the grace which has been given them: they more closely follow Christ praying, or Christ proclaiming the Kingdom of God, or Christ doing good for people, or Christ in dialogue with the people of this world, but always Christ doing the will of the Father.

Jesus called those whom he wished to have follow him (see Mark 3:13). Much of the task of vocation directors, then, consists in verifying whether the candidate has, indeed, received such a call from the Lord. It is not a matter of self-determination. God chose us to go out into the world and to bear fruit (see John 15:16).

Although God calls, he does not program us in advance. We are continually invited to find new ways to respond to this call. Although God accompanies us, he does not do everything on his own. Our free and informed consent and response must accompany this call. Our union with God is in the order of love, not of fusion!

Church teaching shows us that the three evangelical counsels, which are fundamental to any type of consecrated life, are founded on the teachings and example of Jesus (see *Vita Consecrata*, The Consecrated Life, No. 1a). Therefore in any form of consecrated life there will be a desire to have a special relationship with Jesus, an authentic experience of God in one's life (*Vita Consecrata*, 14a). But, we should keep in mind that Jesus did not establish, as such, any specific form of consecrated life. These forms grew up through the course of history, and we still find new expressions today.

Today we use the Latin expression, *Sequela Christi* to indicate the special relationship with Christ. Each form of following will vary according to the charism and nature of the community a person wishes to join. Not surprisingly, then, canon 577 spells out the important and even essential dimension to be found in any institute: the following of Christ.

This following of Christ can take on various forms:

- Christ praying (contemplative life)
- Christ doing good to people (health care, social services)
- Christ proclaiming the Kingdom of God

(teaching, missionary, and apostolic institutes)

- Christ in dialogue with people of the world (secular institutes)

But always it involves following Christ doing the will of the Father.

Although each institute has a contemplative and an apostolic dimension, the difference lies in the specific manner of adopting one or another aspect of consecrated life. This leads us to the next characteristic that candidates can expect from a religious institute.

2. A particular charism truly lived in the community

Canon 574, §1. The state of those who profess the evangelical counsels in institutes of this kind pertains to the life and sanctity of the Church and for this reason is to be fostered and promoted by all in the

Church. §2. Certain Christian faithful are specially called to this state by God so that they may enjoy a special gift in the life of the Church and contribute to its salvific mission according to the purpose and spirit of the institute.

Canon 574 tells us that this state of life pertains to the life and holiness of the church. For this reason it is to be fostered and promoted by everyone in the church.

This state of life leads to a special mission but in accordance with the purpose and spirit of each institute.

Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit to build up the church. To be recognized they must, in some way, be confirmed by the authority of the church. Initially most religious charisms had some relationship to the particular church. Indeed they could not be understood without this relationship.

Canon 574 sets the basis for the identification of various institutes. Although there are similarities, there are also significant differences in the way in which the mission is carried out. It is important, therefore, for each institute to be able to identify itself clearly, and to be able to show what it has to offer to the church and to those who wish to join it. Other canons (especially canons 578 and 587), based on Vatican II teachings, mention seven elements of the identification of each institute (its charism). I note the following about the seven elements.

1. THE INTENTION OF THE FOUNDER(S)—Keep in mind that it is often rather difficult to determine clearly who was the founder or foundress, given the fact that

In any form of consecrated there will be a desire to have a special relationship with Jesus, an authentic experience of God in one's life.

many institutes were either divisions of existing ones or were the result of unions along the way.

2. **THE DISPOSITIONS OF THE FOUNDER**—At times, founders and foundresses had very particular views—sometimes characterized by a vow—that marked the way the institute was to carry out its mission. These intentions should be clearly specified.

3. **THE NATURE OF THE INSTITUTE**—as approved by church authority. Some institutes are contemplative, others apostolic. Some are mixed (priests and brothers); some are clerical, others lay, etc. Likewise a community cannot change at will from being a religious institute to become a secular institute and vice versa.

4. **THE PURPOSE OF THE INSTITUTE**—Purposes can change as new needs present themselves. Nevertheless there is often a general thrust (for instance, teaching the faith) consistent throughout a community's history.

5. **THE SPIRIT (SPIRITUALITY) OF THE INSTITUTE**—Some institutes are penitential; other are focussed on particular Marian devotions (such as the rosary); others have a spirit centered fully in diocesan service, no matter what type of need arises. For most institutes this spirit is also expressed in their form of prayer, whether in common or in private. Prospective members are looking for various forms of community commitment to prayer.

6. **THE CHARACTER OF THE INSTITUTE** (conventual or integrally apostolic)—This has very significant consequences for the description of the common life, prayer obligations, the manner of living the vows, and so forth. Many constitutions were written for a “conventual” community, although the members are living an “integrally apostolic” lifestyle, and this leads to numerous internal tensions. The form of community life expresses the institute's character. New members today seem to want and need the support of community life, not being seen as “lone rangers.”

7. **THE SOUND TRADITIONS OF THE INSTITUTE** (such as certain traditions of the Franciscans, Dominicans, etc.)—Not every “tradition” is sound; some customs were not good for the health of the members. When a person wishes to join a religious institute, the formation programs must correspond to the style of life to be lived in the community. We cannot form new members in one form of spirituality and community life, and then, after profession or ordination, have them live a completely different lifestyle.

3. A specified apostolic mission

In addition to a close connection to Jesus and an identity

PHOTO: FATHER LAWRENCE LEW, OP



One element of a religious institute's identity is its spirituality, such as a devotion to Mary, expressed in the rosary.

with a particular charism, prospective members also have a right to expect a specific mission. Two canons in particular have bearing on the mission of an institute.

Canon 673: The apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to foster through prayer and penance.

Canon 673 could be considered a “mirror” canon (that is, one in which we are supposed to see ourselves reflected). It sums up, in a few short words, a basic principle: actions speak louder than words.

The primary apostolate of all religious, therefore, is the witness they give to their consecration. They are bound to foster this witness through prayer and penance. The forms of prayer and penance will vary from institute to institute, depending on its character. The principle given in canon 673 is doctrinal in nature. In one sense, we could say that it is not a “legal” canon, because we cannot legislate for the “witness” we give. Much depends on the receiver.

Since witness is the primary apostolate for many institutes today, it might be worthwhile to see what some of the popes have been saying about this. Particularly relevant is the exhortation by Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio*, June 29, 1971, paragraph 53:

Today more than ever, the world needs to see in you persons who have believed in the Word of the Lord, in His resurrection and in eternal life, even to the point of dedicating their lives to witnessing to the reality of that love, which is offered to all. In the course of its history, the Church has ever been quickened and gladdened by many holy religious who, in the diversity of their vocations, have been living witnesses to love without limit and to the Lord Jesus. Is not this grace, for the person of today, a refreshing breeze coming from infinity itself, and foreshadowing our liberation in eternal and absolute joy? Open to this divine joy, live generously the demands of your vocation, renewing the affirmation of the realities of faith and in its light interpreting in a Christian way the needs of the world. The moment has come, in all seriousness, to bring about a rectification, if need be, of your consciences, and also a transformation of your whole lives, in order to attain greater fidelity.

On the topic of being living witnesses to love, I cannot help but note some excerpts of Pope Francis' address to contemplative nuns in Assisi, Oct. 4, 2013. While his words were addressed specifically to contemplatives, hopefully, they resonate with all of us who live religious life.

When a cloistered nun consecrates her entire life to the Lord, a transformation happens beyond our understanding. It would be natural to think that this nun becomes isolated, alone with the Absolute, alone with God: it is an ascetic and penitent life. But this is not the path neither of a Catholic nor a Christian cloistered nun. The path always leads to Jesus Christ, always! Jesus Christ is at the center of your life, your penitence, your community life, your prayer and also of the universality of prayer. And on this path the opposite of what one might think happens to an ascetic cloistered nun. When she takes this path of contemplating Jesus Christ, of prayer and penitence with Jesus Christ, she becomes extremely human....

[You] are called to have a great humanity, a humanity like that of the Mother Church; human, to understand everything about life, to be people who know how to understand human problems, how to forgive, how to supplicate the Lord on behalf of others. Your humanity. Your humanity takes this road, the Incarnation of the Word, the path of Jesus Christ. And what is the mark of such a human nun? Joy, joy, when there is joy! I am sad when I find nuns who are not joyful. Perhaps they smile, but with the smile of a flight attendant, and not with a smile of joy, like

the one that comes from within. Always with Jesus Christ....

And the second thing I wanted to tell you quickly is about community life. Forgive and sustain each other because community life is not easy. The devil takes advantage of everything in order to divide us! He says: "I do not want to speak ill but..." and then the division begins. No, this is not good because it does not do anything but bring division. Build friendship between yourselves, family life, love among you. May the monastery not be a purgatory but a family. There are and there will be problems, but like in a family, with love, search for a solution with love; do not destroy this to resolve that; do not enter competitions. Build community life, because in the life of a community it is this way, like a family, and it is the very Holy Spirit who is in the middle of the community.

Public witness involves separation from the world proper to the character and purpose of each institute. The cloister for contemplative communities is one example of separation. Canon 573 tells us also that religious are to be a sign in the church of the world beyond. We should, however, keep in mind that what could be a positive sign in one part of the world, might be a counter-indication in another. All in all it seems clear today that prospective candidates are seeking some form of public witness and external identity.

In addition to public witness, service is key to the apostolic mission of many institutes, as noted in canon 676:

Canon 676: Lay institutes of men and women participate in the pastoral mission of the Church through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, performing very many different services for people. They are therefore to remain faithful to the grace of their vocation.

The canon states that institutes that are not clerical participate in the pastoral mission of the church through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and by being identified with service. The canon also includes a call to remain faithful to the grace of the vocation of the institute. The corporal works of mercy have traditionally been identified as taken from Matthew 25:34-40 and Isaiah 58:6-10. They are, and I note some examples:

- feeding the hungry (improving social and economic structures),
- giving drink to the thirsty (providing unpol-

luted water where lacking),

- clothing the naked (those stripped of human dignity and power),
- harboring strangers and sheltering the homeless,
- visiting the sick (companionship for the elderly),
- ministering to prisoners (to victims of racism, class distinctions),
- burying the dead (providing companionship, helping survivors).

The emphasis is on attitudes, rather than specific actions. There is a close relationship between social justice and the works of mercy; mercy is loving gratuity. The church's health care and social service ministries are the best illustration of its concern for these works of mercy.

In the same perspective, the spiritual works of mercy have been identified as:

- admonishing the sinner (even by example),
- instructing the ignorant (removing misunderstandings based on prejudice),
- counseling the doubtful (spiritual advice, patient presence),
- comforting the sorrowful (attentiveness to the emotional needs of others),
- bearing wrongs patiently (humility and a sense of reality),
- forgiving injuries,
- praying for the living and the dead (an expression of the communion of the church).

(See P.M. Vinje, "Mercy, corporal works of," and "Mercy, spiritual works of," in R.P. McBrien, ed., *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, San Francisco, Harper, 1995, pp. 854-855.)

4. Identification with the mission of the greater church

I turn now to one more characteristic that those considering religious life can rightfully expect. One thing seems certain today: new candidates do not want to enter communities where they are then told to find something to do and the superiors will bless it. In tandem with their search for a sense of identity, they seem to wish to be involved in corporate ministries, rather than in individual ones of their choice, because they can choose individual ones without entering a community.

Canon 576: It is the prerogative of the competent

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

authority in the Church to interpret the evangelical counsels, to legislate for their practice and, by canonical approval, to constitute the stable forms of living which arise from them ...

The authority to which canon 576 refers will be either the Holy See, or, in some cases, the diocesan bishop. In other words a group of the faithful cannot on their own constitute a new institute of consecrated life; the intervention of the hierarchy is required in each case. And, once constituted, an institute's apostolic mission is to be carried out in communion with the diocesan bishop. Canon 394 tells us that it is the diocesan bishop who is to coordinate all apostolic works under his direction, but with due regard for the character of each apostolate.

5. Profession of the evangelical counsels

Naturally those seeking out religious life also expect to follow the evangelical counsels. Since the vows are constitutive of religious life, it is important to spend more time on them and on certain contemporary issues relating to the way they are lived.

CONSECRATED CHASTITY

Canon 599: The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy.

Canon 599 could be read in parallel to canon 277 on clerical celibacy. Both canons speak of a twofold obligation: abstention from marriage and abstention from any external or internal act which violates chastity. The vow, by those who take it, adds a new moral bond, that of the virtue of religion, so that in their case, an act against chastity is not only a sin against the virtue of chastity, but also a sin against the virtue of religion. I will return to this subject in the next section of this article.

CONSECRATED POVERTY

To understand the implications of the canonical legislation on poverty and personal patrimony (canon 668), we must first take a quick look at canon 600 which spells out the underlying principles relating to the vow. We will then be in a better position to understand the norms of canon 668 on patrimony.

We could limit ourselves to a "legalistic" approach to the issue, but this would be deadening. Instead, we are dealing here much more with an attitude than with a legal system. This is why a counterpart spiritual component is so important, and to overlook it would risk falsifying the entire understanding of the church's laws on the matter.

Canon 600: The evangelical counsel of poverty in imitation of Christ, who for our sake was made poor when he was rich, entails a life which is poor in reality and in spirit, sober and industrious, and a stranger to earthly riches. It also involves dependence and limitation in the use and the disposition of goods, in accordance with each institute's proper law.

Canon 600, which is based on the Vatican II document *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 13, spells out five general constituent elements of consecrated poverty:

- a life which is poor in reality and in spirit,
- a life lived in moderation and a stranger to earthly riches,
- a life of labor (earning one's daily bread),
- dependence on superiors in the use of temporal goods,
- limitation in the use of and disposition of goods.

CONSECRATED POVERTY: ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

PERSONAL GOODS

Another area of the vow of poverty that deserves close attention is personal patrimony and cession of administration. Let's begin with what canon law says.

Canon 668 §1 Before their first profession, members are to cede the administration of their goods to whomsoever they wish and, unless the constitutions provide otherwise, they are freely to make dispositions concerning the use and enjoyment of their goods. At least before perpetual profession they are to make a will which is valid also in civil law.

Although canon 668 does not use the expression "personal patrimony," this term is generally used by institutes to refer to personal goods or property. A member's goods (depending on the proper law) can include:

- all that a member owned upon making profession (movable and immovable goods, copyrights, etc.),
- all that to which a member had a title upon making profession, even though not yet acquired (for instance, accumulated years of pension for teaching; paid-up annuities purchased in early childhood),
- goods received by a personal title of inheritance, either by will, or in lieu of a will, as when parents who are still alive divide their goods among their children so as to avoid disputes later on,
- substantial gifts destined to be added to the patrimony (an institute will usually determine a minimum amount before a gift is considered to be patrimonial),
- interest and revenues accruing to the above.

In institutes with a stricter form of poverty, the members are not allowed to "capitalize," or add their interest to the capital. Some do not recognize the possibility of receiving patrimonial gifts. So the proper law must be consulted to see what is considered as patrimony in a given institute.

It should be noted that according to civil law in a number of countries, revenues added to the patrimony are taxable since they are not given to the institute. For instance in Canada a religious' patrimony must be taken into account when determining eligibility for the old-age pension supplement. In other countries the applicable civil law would have to be consulted and followed.

DOCUMENTS TO BE SIGNED

When making profession, religious usually sign three

documents relating to temporal matters:

- 1) the agreement not to demand compensation for services rendered, or for future considerations,
- 2) the cession of administration of goods presently owned or to be acquired in the future, and
- 3) the last will and testament determining how any personal goods are to be disposed of after death.

Today there is usually a fourth document, often called "durable power of attorney" for health care, but this is not directly related to the vow of poverty.

Each document is separate and has a distinct purpose. The document on cession of administration applies while the religious is alive; the agreement applies when a member leaves the institute; the last will and testament applies after death.

PARTICULAR SITUATIONS FOR VOCATION DIRECTORS

It often happens today that people enter an institute late in life, sometimes after having been married for a number of years and with children of their own. It is not rare for religious entering today to have \$500,000 in patrimony, either in funds, real estate, or similar holdings. In such instances, particular care must be given to family feelings.

On the other hand, a person who enters at a later age will not have as many productive years in the institute and will not be contributing as much to the common fund as others did. These persons who have resources sometimes want to pay room and board. However it is preferable that they not be asked to do so immediately, especially if there are no charges for the other candidates entering the community. However many times the administrator will put aside a sum each month in a special account in compensation. If the religious makes perpetual profession, this sum is given to the institute at that moment. If the person leaves before final profession, the money is returned to him or her.

If a member enters with goods that are used by the community, such as an automobile, a stereo and CDs, books, a computer, etc., it is important to have some type of agreement in case the member leaves before first or final profession. For instance a monthly sum is credited to his or her account in return for the use of the goods. If the religious wishes to have them used freely, then there should be a written agreement to this effect.

Any patrimony belonging to a person in formation should not be in a bank account in the name of the religious. Sometimes a personal bank account is necessary for other reasons, but the money in this account is congregational money, not personal.



Canon law protects the interests of both candidate and community during the long process that leads to final vows. Pictured here is Sister Kim Mandelkow, O.S.B. (center) at her final vows ceremony with the Benedictine Sisters of Ferdinand, Indiana.

It is the last two of these five elements which will call for particular canonical explanations—dependence and limitation. Canon 668 will spell out what is meant by these terms in the context of a religious institute. One purpose of the rules on dependence and limitation is to make certain that religious who come from families that have greater wealth will not be leading a lifestyle different from those whose families have little or nothing.

We note that canon 600 speaks of the “proper law” of the institute. If there is one area of canon law that relies on the spirit of each particular institute, it is this one. In other words, the general principles must be complemented by the norms of each institute’s own constitutions and rule.

We cannot overlook the fact that today, although the canon speaks of dependence and limitation, the emphasis seems to be placed much more on sharing with the poor and needy (see canon 640), and on responsible, creative stewardship of goods. This can lead to internal tensions because of differing understandings of the implications of the vow.

Furthermore, in North America and in Europe, as institutes are declining, it is becoming more and more important to make long range plans in regard to the support of the members themselves, which is a primary obligation on the part of institutes (see canon 670). Meanwhile, in poorer countries, there is great pressure on religious to provide for their families who are in need. Indeed a number of religious consider their family their

first obligation, not their institute. However this is not what canon law teaches. Institutes are now making provision to assist parents who are truly in need. It must be remembered, though, that institutes do not make a vow of poverty, only the individual members do so.

CONSECRATED OBEDIENCE

It is usually understood that while members of male institutes seem to have more difficulties with the vow of chastity, in women’s institutes, it is the vow of obedience that frequently becomes a blocking factor. Let’s examine this vow closely, starting with canon 590.

Canon 590: §1. In as much as institutes of consecrated life are dedicated in a special way to the service of God and of the whole Church, they are subject to the supreme authority of the Church in a special way.

§2. Individual members are also bound to obey the supreme pontiff as their highest superior by reason of the sacred bond of obedience.

The supreme authority in the church is the Holy Father, or the Ecumenical Council, with the Holy Father (see canons 331 and 336). All institutes, even of diocesan right, are subject in a special way to the supreme authority, not only as are the faithful but, more particularly, precisely because they are institutes of consecrated life.

Individual members are obliged to obey the supreme pontiff (not the “Holy See”, unless specifically delegated) in virtue of their vow of obedience. However, the pope

may demand obedience only in accordance with the proper law of the institute. Thus, for instance, he could not order a member of an apostolic institute to become exclusively contemplative, but he could order a religious to observe the norms on prayer in the proper law of his or her institute. See *Vita Consecrata*, No. 46, on this point.

Canon 601 also has bearing on this vow.

Canon 601: The evangelical counsel of obedience, undertaken in a spirit of faith and love in the following of Christ obedient unto death, requires the submission of the will to legitimate superiors, who stand in the place of God, when they command according to the proper constitutions.

Seeking the will of God must be the preoccupation of both superiors and subjects. Members must obey the Roman Pontiff as their first superior (c. 590, §2); the other superiors are those determined in the constitutions.

Not every wish or desire of the superior comes under the vow. It should be clear from the constitutions whether the specific obligation of the vow is entailed in every clearly manifested order of a superior, or whether certain formalities have to be fulfilled in order to command under the vow (for instance, in writing, before witnesses, using appropriate words, which superiors may invoke the vow, etc.). The matter to be commanded has to do directly or indirectly with the life of the institute, that is to say, the observance of the constitutions and other norms of the institute.

A formal order given under obedience should also include the words: "Failure to observe this order would constitute cause for dismissal from the congregation" (or something similar).

A superior cannot command what is against the law of God or against the constitutions (see decision of the Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, October 10, 1986). Some religious try to use "conscience" to refuse to accept legitimate orders of superiors. If the matter is not immoral, etc., and not against the constitutions, the obligation can hold. However, in certain delicate situations, some arrangements could possibly be made. For instance, in the case where a religious refuses an obedience to a certain place because a former sexual partner lives in that town or city, but the religious does not wish to share that information with the superior, a member of the council agreeable to both parties could hear the sister's reasons and make a recommendation to the superior, without going into details.

Having reviewed the five expectations a candidate

can rightly expect from a religious institute, let us turn to the institute's side of the equation.

WHAT THE INSTITUTE NEEDS FROM THE CANDIDATE

The canonical requirements for admission to a religious institute are addressed in several different canons, beginning with the general conditions for entry to the novitiate listed in canon 642. They are:

- having the required age,
- having the required health,
- having a suitable disposition,
- having sufficient maturity.

Affective maturity and sexual integration

Given today's cultural context, I thought it would be helpful to address some contemporary issues related to the selection of candidates and their capacity to live the obligations of celibacy and chastity. Much of what follows is based on the Oblate norms of formation.

Given the importance of a healthy and integrated sexuality in the life of a religious, it is important to know a candidate's psycho-sexual history as well as his or her ability and desire to embrace the celibate life. A period of celibate living, usually several years, must precede entrance into the initial stage of formation.

Related to this are issues of disclosure of sexual history and orientation. While disclosure to one's spiritual director or formator is important to ensure that healthy integration is taking place in that area of the candidate's life, disclosure to the community requires discernment.

The candidate must also come to a clear understanding of the issues of appropriate boundaries in ministry and of the issues of sexual misconduct and abuse of power in relationships. These issues have grave consequences both in canon and civil law. I suggest in the case of any candidate who is discovered to have been sexually involved, as an adult, with a person under age 18, that there be a policy that he or she not be advanced to vows.

The call to chastity is the same for all, regardless of sexual orientation. Candidates who commit themselves to a life of consecrated celibacy, as well as those who guide them in this direction, must have the moral certitude that, with the help of God's grace and the prudence proper in this domain, they can be faithful and can grow and mature in peace.

To live the vow of chastity in a healthy way requires affective maturity. To assess this maturity in a candidate, the following should be considered:

- family history and related issues;
- relationships with persons in authority, with peers, with persons of both sexes;
- the naturalness and ease of these relationships;
- ongoing development, both in relationships with others and in personal self-acceptance, attention to what is blocking or stunting growth, attention to feelings of bitterness or frustration;
- capacity for generosity, openness, and faithfulness in daily behavior.

A candidate who is expected to undergo an HIV test prior to admission should be aware of what is involved and declare in writing his or her willingness to undergo this medical examination. A lawyer should be consulted about the advisability and legality of signing such a waiver. Candidates who prefer not to undergo an HIV test requested by an institute are thereby withdrawing from the program and cannot apply for admission.

The candidate must be counseled before the examination, be the first to receive the results, and be counseled after the test. The results would also be given to the vocation director who can counsel the candidate in view of the medical results and help to discern the future (cf. canons 220 and 642).

Free of impediments

A number of canonical impediments or restrictions can prevent a person from entering an institute. These include the following:

AGE—Not having completed the 17th year of age.

A SPOUSE—while the marriage lasts. If a candidate had been married, and the spouse has died, or if the marriage was declared null, then there is no impediment. If he or she is divorced, but the former spouse is still alive, and no declaration of nullity has been received, then an indult is required from the Holy See. This is a *most* difficult indult to obtain; it is granted only on certain very specific conditions: a) the divorce is final and absolute; b) there are no

If a candidate has received a declaration of nullity for a former marriage, then it is important to examine the court's decision to determine whether or not there was a restrictive clause imposed.

alimony or child support payments to make; c) there are no minor children under 18; d) the candidate was not the guilty cause of the break up of the marriage; e) there would be no scandal; f) the former spouse is aware of the project and has no objection.

If, on the other hand, a candidate has received a declaration of nullity for a former marriage, then it is important to examine the court's decision to determine whether or not there was a restrictive clause imposed. If the candidate requires psychological counseling before entering into marriage, this requirement is even more important if he or she wishes to enter religious life or the clerical state. A restrictive clause (*vetitum* or *monitum*) should be taken *most* seriously before accepting a candidate.

In assessing a previously married candidate's suitability for entering a formation program, the vocation director should be especially attentive to the following:

- motivation,
- relationship to the former marriage partner and the latter's attitude to the potential candidate's request to enter religious life,
- possible obligations to dependents (educational, social, financial, and legal),
- psychological balance and maturity,
- ability to live the religious vows,
- ability to live an authentic community life,
- freedom in regard to previous obligations (especially in regard to debts that the candidate cannot extinguish; cf. canon 644).
- Christian faith and life during the marriage experience and following the separation and annulment.

MEMBERSHIP ELSEWHERE—A person who is already a member of another institute is ineligible for entry into the novitiate. Of course for perpetually professed members the transfer process between institutes, as spelled out in canon 684, can be applied, but such persons are not required to do a novitiate. A person who concealed the fact that he or she was previously in an institute cannot enter; any admission or profession would be invalid (cf. canon 643 §1 and §5 and canon 656 §2). Today we usually add that one who had previously been in a major seminary or



Vocation ministers need to assess candidates for emotional and spiritual maturity and to be sure they are free of impediments. Pictured here is Father Guerric DeBona, O.S.B., former vocation minister at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

formation program needs to disclose this. In cases where a candidate has a history with a seminary or religious institute, references must be sought from the seminary director or the person in charge at the time of the candidate's departure or dismissal. The reference should include:

- how long the person was in the program,
- reasons he or she left or was dismissed,
- recommendation concerning entry into the formation program,
- other relevant information, oral or written.

The above information should also be sought from the candidate personally.

FORCE, FEAR, DECEIT—There is an impediment if a person enters the institute through force, grave fear, or deceit. However, it must be noted that if the community does not ask certain questions of the candidate, then it cannot blame him or her for hiding information. For instance, the institute will want to gather details about things like family background (mental illness, criminal activities, etc.) and health (AIDS/HIV, other physical or psychological illnesses).

SEXUALITY CONCERNS—The Holy See has deter-

mined that candidates who have “deep-seated” homosexual tendencies are not to be admitted. This decision does not apply to those with the “transitory” problems of adolescence. Of course, each situation has to be evaluated personally. The Congregation for Catholic Education deals with this topic in an official instruction (cf. “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies,” 2005) This instruction applies also to all candidates to religious life.

Free of impediments for clerics

A number of permanent impediments, known as irregularities, affect the admissibility of candidates for holy orders. While these may, in certain circumstances, be dispensed, in general church authorities are rather reluctant to dispense from them. It follows that candidates who are subject to one or more of these permanent impediments should not be accepted as candidates for orders without first making certain that a dispensation will eventually be available.

If any of these situations arises, it is essential to consult a canonist or specialist before proceeding further, in order to determine whether or not a dispensation is possible, and, if so, by whom it must be granted.

1. **SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESS**—While insanity obviously would prevent a person from being accepted, other forms of psychological illness could render a person incapable of properly fulfilling the ministry. For instance, intense scrupulosity would be an impediment.

2. **APOSTASY, HERESY, SCHISM**—A person who once was Catholic and left the church to join another church or ecclesial community, and then returns to the Catholic Church, cannot generally be admitted to holy orders except after a prolonged period of probation.

3. **FORMS OF ATTEMPTED MARRIAGE**—Someone who commits bigamy (in the canonical sense: while a former spouse is still alive and the first marriage has not been dissolved or declared null),

or who marries while under vows, or who marries a person who is under vows, cannot be accepted for holy orders.

4. **WILLFUL HOMICIDE, ABORTION, AND POSITIVE COOPERATORS**—This impediment is unfortunately rather common, especially in regard to abortion. Encouraging and supporting someone to have an abortion makes that person a “positive cooperator” and is an impediment to holy orders. Given the church’s public stand on abortion, a dispensation is *most* difficult to obtain, and it is usually refused once or twice before it is eventually granted, if ever.

5. **SERIOUS MUTILATION, ATTEMPTED SUICIDE**—It is often held today by some canonists that a person who underwent a voluntary vasectomy is subject to the impediment (but the bishop may dispense more readily from it). The question of attempted suicide relates to psychological illness as mentioned above.

6. **ABUSE OF HOLY ORDERS**—A person who carries out an act of holy orders reserved to others (i.e., attempting to celebrate Mass publicly or hear confessions, while pretending to be a priest), is also subject to an impediment.

A final word about candidate protocols

A fairly recent case in the African nation of Lesotho illustrates the importance of my final recommendation (“High Court of Lesotho”, L. Chaka-Makhooana, J., file no. CIV/APN/05/2013, Jan. 23, 2013). A seminarian was refused admission to perpetual vows, and thus to orders. He sued his community in civil court, and the tribunal ordered that he be admitted to vows and orders; otherwise, his human rights would be endangered.

In appeal (Court of Appeal (CIV), 2/2013, April 19, 2013), the Court unanimously upheld the High Court’s judgment. The two decisions were based on faulty reasoning, but it is reasoning that is out there: seminarians are to be treated as employees, and, therefore, under human rights legislation, are entitled to written warnings, to notices, and to all the other protections in place to protect workers.

Because of its potential importance, this matter has since been brought to the attention of the Holy See. Since Lesotho is a Common Law country, we should not be surprised one day to see other countries following a similar approach. Therefore, my strong recommendation would be to make sure that when dealing with seminarians and other candidates, we follow carefully the procedures used for termination of employees, even though the situation is quite different.

I hope the issues I’ve raised here will assist vocation directors in their difficult task of selecting candidates for religious life and for holy orders. Since each case is different, it would be essential to keep the canonical provisions in mind when accompanying potential candidates. The canons are based on experience, and there is strong wisdom in following their norms to avoid potential problems and to build healthy religious communities. Ultimately our goal is to help our communities, as canon 574 puts it: “enjoy a special gift in the life of the Church and contribute to its salvific mission.” ■

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The canons are based on experience, and there is strong wisdom in following their norms to avoid potential problems and to build healthy religious communities.

The cultural, geographic, and ethnic realities of today's church set the context for vocation ministry.



PHOTO: © BILL WECHTER, UT SAN DIEGO, ZUMAPRESS.COM

The U.S. Catholic Church today is much more Hispanic than in past generations. Pictured here is Father Jorge Vasquez, pastor of Church of the Resurrection in Escondido, CA blessing Jasmin Gomez.

Today's church and its vocation environment

WHEN WE THINK OF RELIGIOUS LIFE in the United States, one of the first challenges we face can be our memories, images, and experiences of religious life and the Catholic community, many of which no longer correspond to the realities and context of 2014. The geographic, cultural, and ethnic realities of both the Catholic community and members of religious institutes have dramatically changed over the past few decades, but our thinking about vocation promotion may not have caught up with these changes.

Changes in where Catholics live

Catholics in the U.S. have undergone tremendous geographic shifts. Some 60 years ago almost half of the Catholic population in the United States resided in the Northeast and another 30 percent in the Midwest. The South and West regions of the country each had about one-eighth of the Catholic population. The educational, pastoral, and health care institutions of religious institutes were similarly situated in the Northeast and Midwest along with their membership.

The movement of Catholics out of the Northeast and Midwest urban

BY FATHER THOMAS GAUNT, S.J.

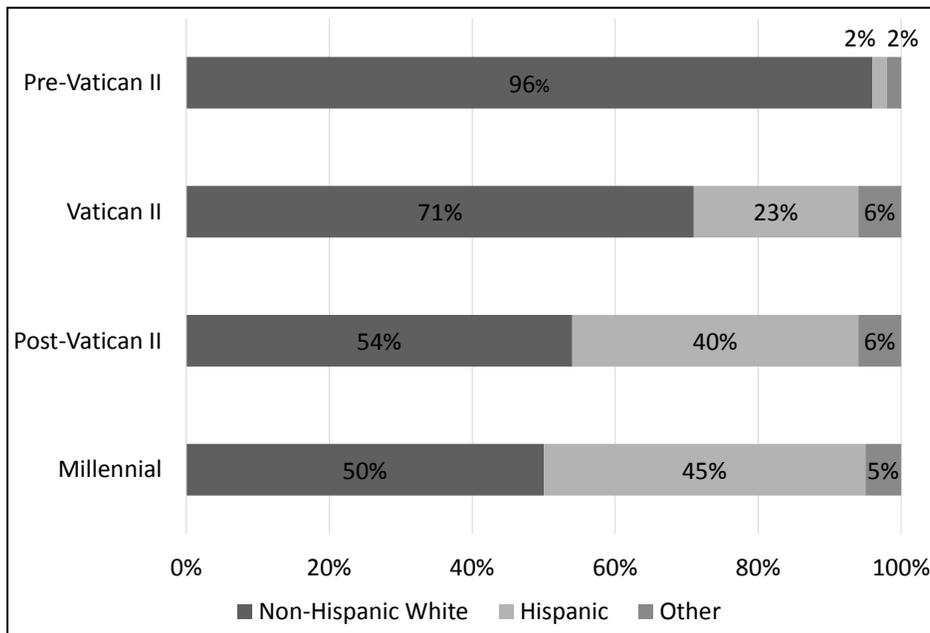


Father Thomas Gaunt, S.J. is executive director of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), based at Georgetown

University in Washington, DC. He was director of formation and studies for the Maryland and New York Jesuit Provinces from 1994 to 2001 and executive secretary of the Jesuit Conference-USA from 2001 to 2010. He has a Ph.D. in city planning from U.N.C.-Chapel Hill and served as a pastor in the Diocese of Charlotte during the 1980s.

This article is based on contemporary research done by CARA about U.S. Catholics, young adults, and religious institutes.

U.S. CATHOLICS BECOMING MORE HISPANIC



olics has also changed over the past several decades. Today the ethnic and cultural diversity of Catholics in the United States is most clearly seen in the different generations of Catholics. In the above chart, “U.S. Catholics Becoming More Hispanic,” we see that pre-Vatican II Catholics, those born before 1942 (71 and older), are overwhelmingly non-Hispanic white (96 percent), reflecting the flow of Catholic immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Germany, etc. of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Very few Catholics of that generation are African American, Hispanic, or Asian American.

centers to the suburbs and into the economically expanding cities of the South and West has dramatically realigned the Catholic population distribution (see the pie chart below, “Changes in Where Catholics Live”). Today, each region of the country is home to about one quarter of the Catholic population. This means the South has nearly as many Catholics as the Northeast, and the West has as many as the Midwest.

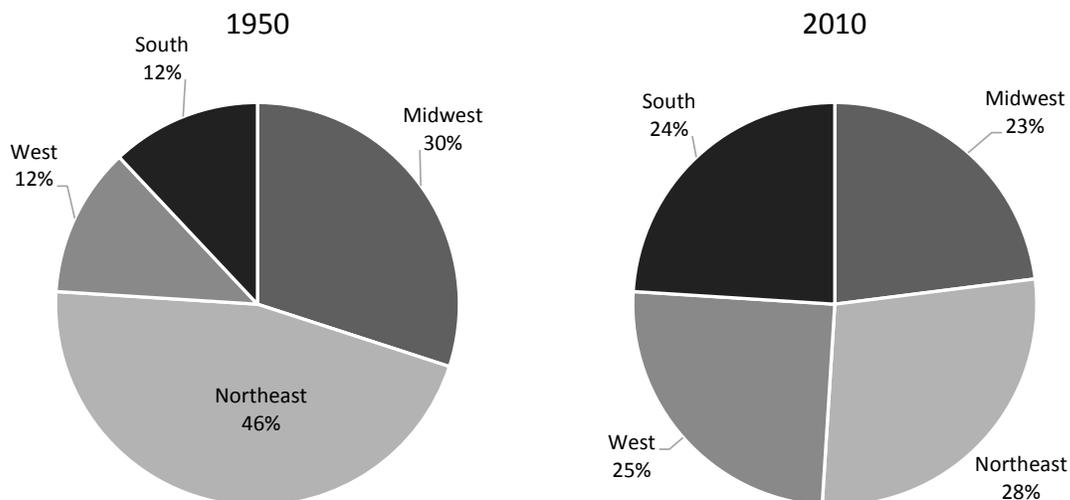
Vatican II Catholics, those born between 1943 and 1960 (53-70 years old) are a little more diverse. More than 70 percent of this generation are non-Hispanic white and almost one quarter are Hispanic. Post-Vatican II (32-52 years old) and Millennial Catholics (31 and younger) are almost equally distributed between non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics.

Changing ethnicity and culture

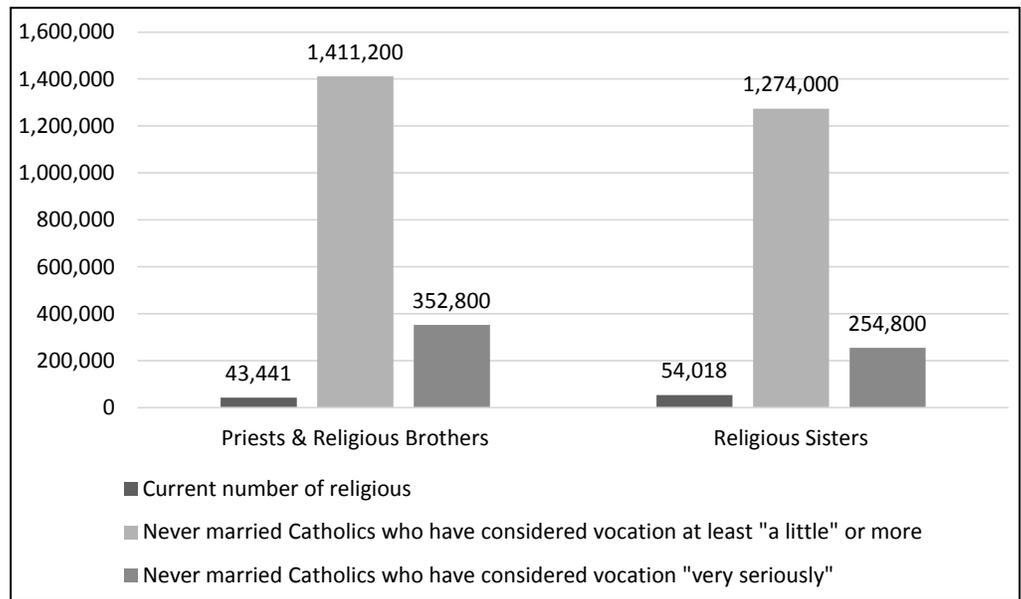
The cultural and ethnic diversity among American Cath-

In brief, younger Catholics today are not where we used to find them, nor are they typically of the same cultural or ethnic identity of the vast majority of members in U.S. religious institutes. Yet has our attention and focus on vocations shifted with the changing geography

CHANGES IN WHERE CATHOLICS LIVE



MANY CONSIDER A CHURCH VOCATION



and different cultural and ethnic realities among young adult Catholics?

Who considers a vocation?

At times it can seem that vocations to religious life or priesthood are as hard to find as the proverbial needle in a haystack. In 2012 the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) conducted a national poll of never married Catholics and found that 13 percent of the men and 10 percent of the women said they had considered a vocation to religious life or priesthood. When that percentage is converted to the raw number of Catholics, we see that over 1,400,000 men and 1,270,000 women have considered a vocation. Among them some 350,000 men and 250,000 women have considered it “very seriously.”

The graph “Many Consider a Religious Vocation” shows these numbers in comparison to the current number of priests, brothers, and sisters. Some 20 to 30 times as many individuals have considered a vocation as there are priests, brothers, and sisters. It is also important to note that out of the 350,000 men that say they have given “very serious” consideration to a vocation about 1,000 currently enter a seminary or novitiate each year. Among the 250,000 women who give “very serious” consideration about 200 currently enter the novitiate each year.

Only a fraction of one percent of those giving “very serious” consideration actually enter a seminary or novitiate each year. Nonetheless even a minimal positive impact on this “very serious” population of Catholics would have profound consequences on the number of men and women entering seminaries and novitiates. The question is: What can vocation directors do to better engage with, encourage, and support this group?

In the same 2012 national poll, CARA asked those who said they had considered priesthood or religious life when they had first considered this. Nearly three-quarters had first considered a vocation during their high school and college years, and 60 percent reported that three or more people had encouraged them in their con-

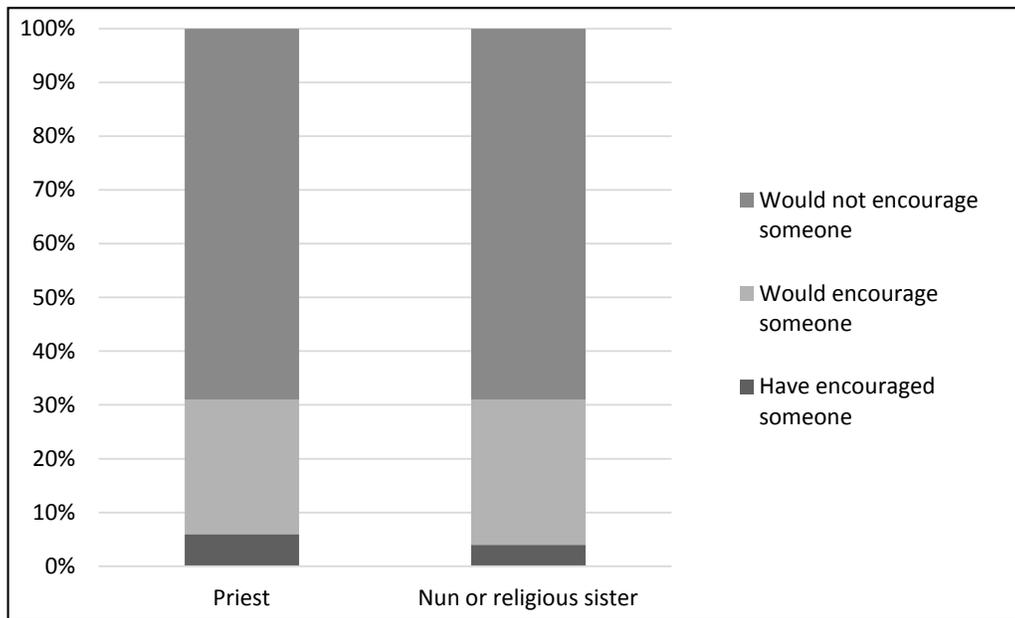
sideration. This reinforces what so many have intuitively known: vocational information is important for high school and college students, and encouragement is key in any vocational consideration.

What encourages a vocation?

In 2013 CARA surveyed all men in formation in seminaries and religious institutes and those recently ordained to ask about the influence of their college experience on their vocational choice. Attending a Catholic college or university was important, and having a priest, brother, or sister as a professor had a great influence on their discernment. When asked about the influence of classmates, professors, or close friends during college, the survey results suggest that a Catholic college offers the space for a conversation about vocations to occur and to be encouraged. In terms of our Catholic colleges we might ask ourselves how well we do in providing the context and space for such conversations and discernment to occur.

Yet encouraging a vocation to religious life or priesthood is not something that comes easily to Catholics in the United States. In a different national poll in 2008 CARA asked Catholics about their willingness to encourage vocations. (See the bar graph on the next page, “Catholic Encouragement of Vocations”). Seventy percent of Catholics reported that they would *not* encourage someone to become a priest, brother, or sister. One-quarter said they *would* encourage a vocation but never had. Only 5 percent said they actually have encouraged

CATHOLIC ENCOURAGEMENT OF VOCATIONS



likelihood of more people entering novitiates and seminaries would be great. This highlights the importance of encouraging vocation promotion by colleagues in ministry and by the families in the schools and parishes we serve.

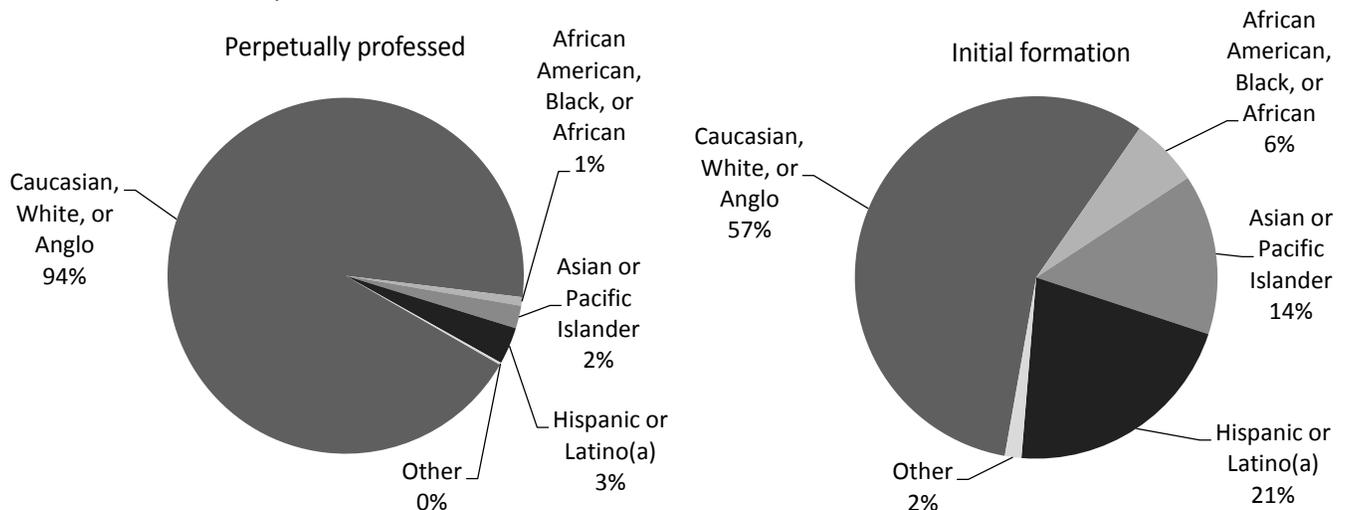
Looking at a more positive trend, a year of volunteer service with groups like the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Lasallian Volunteers, or Maryknoll Lay Missioners is closely correlated with the decision to enter a seminary

someone to consider being a priest, sister, or brother. When asked why they would not encourage a vocation, most said it was a personal choice of others, or that they were not religious enough, or it was not their responsibility. The challenge here is that the majority of Catholics do not see that they have a responsibility for encouraging vocations. The idea of calling forth vocations from among the community is absent from the mindset of many.

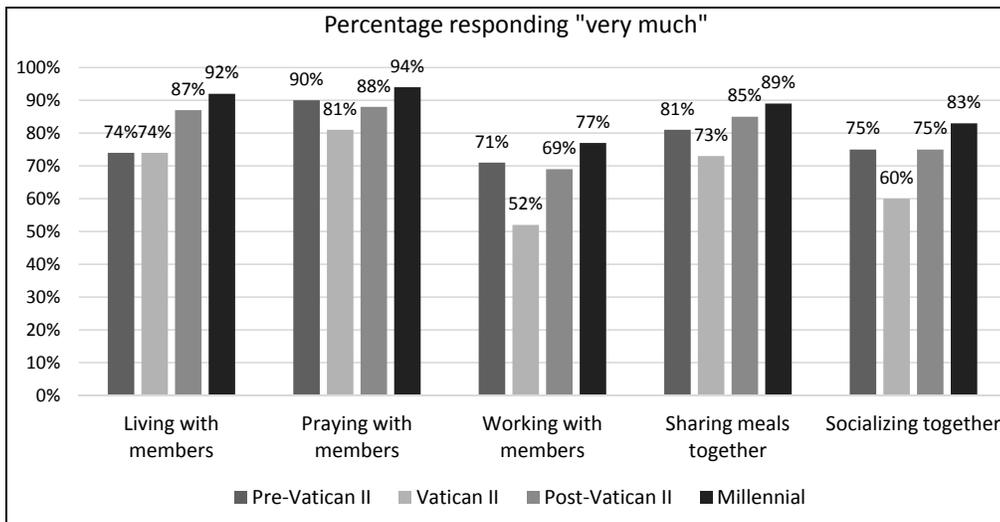
As shown in the above graph, "Catholic Encouragement of Vocations," currently 5 percent of Catholics are encouraging vocations to religious life and priesthood. If that proportion increased even a small amount, the

or novitiate. In a 2013 survey of alumni of 60 volunteer service organizations participating in the Catholic Volunteer Network, CARA found that 6 percent of former volunteers later went on to be a priest, sister, deacon, brother or seminarian. It should not surprise us that the young women and men who generously give a year or more to voluntary service are also likely to seriously consider, and act on, a calling to religious life or priesthood. With so many open to a religious vocation, we must ask ourselves how we engage with and support these thousands of young women and men during their time of volunteer service. Could we increase our contact with them?

ETHNIC AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES



PREFERENCES REGARDING COMMUNAL LIFE



important different aspects of religious life were to them. The responses were sorted by generational group (the Pre-Vatican II generation were 71 and older at the time; the Vatican II generation were 53 to 70 years old; the Post-Vatican II generation were 32 to 52 years old; and the Millennial generation were 31 years and younger). In the graph "Preferences Regarding Communal Life" we see

Religious institutes are changing

The sharp decline in the number of new members entering religious institutes since the mid-1960s has created an obvious demographic bulge where the largest number of members are in the oldest generation rather than in the youngest generation. The cultural and ethnic differences between generations within religious institutes are clearly seen when we compare those members in perpetual or final vows with those in initial formation, as seen in the pie charts on page 26. The older members in perpetual vows are almost entirely non-Hispanic white, with very few Hispanic, African American, or Asian American members. The younger members still in formation are from dramatically different cultural and ethnic backgrounds: more than one fifth are Hispanic, one in eight are Asian Americans, and one in 15 are African or African American.

Thus the challenge in recent decades is that newer and younger members are not only a small portion within an aging community, but they are also coming from different geographic regions and different cultural and ethnic groups. Clearly one can expect different preferences and practices in many aspects of religious life.

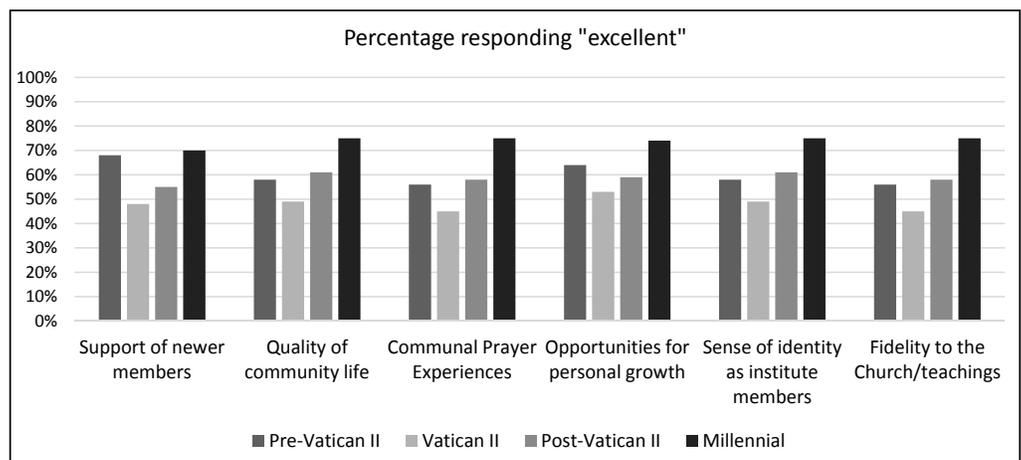
In a 2009 CARA survey of men and women religious, individuals were asked how

that the older generations placed less importance than the younger generations do on living with, socializing and sharing meals together, praying and working with other members. The differences are not huge but are clearly there. Keep in mind that this oldest generation is often two or three times as large as the two younger generations combined.

The survey also asked individuals to rate different aspects of their own religious institute. The older generations (especially the Vatican II generation in their 50s and 60s) rate their institute as doing "excellent" less than the youngest generation on almost every item, whether it be the support of new members, opportunities for personal growth, the sense of identity, or the communal prayer experience. (See the bar graph below.)

With a little reflection one can begin to offer a variety of explanations for these generational differences, but

YOUNGEST MEMBERS THE MOST POSITIVE ABOUT COMMUNITY LIFE





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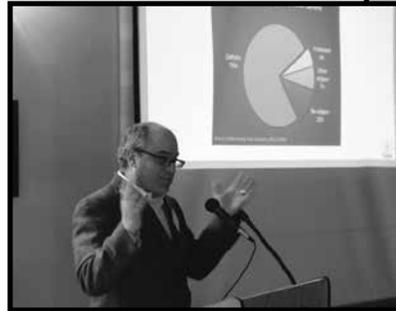
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I believe it is important for this data to be considered within the context of the younger members' experience in the community. Do those belonging to this small group of younger members consistently find their enthusiasm, zeal, excitement, and hope overwhelmed by the far more numerous older members' judgment, prudence, tested experience, and realism? Are we unintentionally deflating and discouraging the interest of potential members and undermining the perseverance of those in initial formation?

The generational experiences and expectations among members of religious institutes in the United States are very different. The temptation is to place those differences into pre-set categories (e.g., liberal/conservative, progressive/traditional) rather than to simply acknowledge that things are different. The challenge—with all of these generational, cultural and ethnic differences—is recognizing and accepting the changed reality and context of vocational discernment and choice in 2014. ■

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The internal “vocations culture” of a community has huge significance. Learn how to assess and build a culture that attracts and retains new members.

Those drawn to religious life are seeking—among other things—a strong communal life. Pictured here is Brother Jason Ford, C.F.C. (center left) breaking bread with community members Brothers Greg McNally, C.F.C. (far left), Alberto Llanos, C.F.C. (center right), and John Sullo, C.F.C. (right).

Defining an internal culture of vocations

CERTAINLY IN THE UNITED STATES much time, attention, and money have been spent on efforts to increase the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and there has been much talk about promoting a “culture of vocations” in the larger culture of the U.S. Catholic Church. These efforts typically focus on increasing the visibility of religious men and women and finding ways to help parents encourage vocations among their children. National organizations such as the National Religious Vocation Conference, discernment magazines such as *VISION* and *Oye*, special websites like “Busted Halo” and “Imagine Sisters,” and even radio programs such as “Vocation Boom” are all examples of these efforts to promote and raise awareness of vocations in our church. As important as these programs and resources are, they fall short of addressing the equally, if not more important variable of the quality of the culture of vocations *within* our religious communities and monasteries—what I refer to as an “internal culture of vocations.” This article aims to draw from the available research on religious vocations in the church as well as theological,

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psychological, and sociological perspectives to arrive at how best to assess and build a culture within religious communities that both attracts and supports new members.

In considering an internal culture of vocations, it is greatly important to focus not only on aspects of the community culture that will attract new members, but also aspects of the culture of the religious community that will *retain* those who have already been attracted. In some communities the number of people who leave from temporary or even perpetual vows equals or exceeds the number of new members coming in. Consequently it must be emphasized that if our communities are to stay alive, we must be concerned not only with attracting new members, but also retaining the members we already have. Interestingly there is a small body of research on what causes men to leave priesthood and religious life. (I'm not aware of similar research on women religious.) The research results on men who leave are not surprising in light of what we also know about what is drawing people to religious life. Let us begin there.

Research tells us what attracts people

In 2009 the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) collaborated with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to publish a comprehensive study identifying, among other things, what is currently attracting young men and women to religious life. (Find this 2009 vocations study at nrvc.net under the "Publications and Studies" tab.) The study found that a few primary factors attract young people. These include: the desire for communal living, the spiritual and prayer life of the community, and a clear Catholic identity.

DESIRE FOR COMMUNAL LIVING—The NRVC-CARA study discovered that in the United States, most young men and women who had joined religious life in the previous 15 years were motivated by a strong desire to be part of a community. The executive summary of the study points out, "When asked about their decision to enter their particular religious institute, most new members cite the community life in the institute as the most influential factor in their decision (followed closely by the prayer life or prayer styles in the community)." Newer members

stated that they wished to live together, pray together and work together with other members of their community, and preferred large communities (more than eight members) over medium-sized and small communities. Communities in which members are living on their own were generally not attractive to young people looking at religious life. In fact there was an inverse correlation between the number of members living on their own, outside the community, and the likelihood of that community having new members.

SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER LIFE—The NRVC-CARA study also reports that:

Newer members are drawn to religious life primarily by a sense of call and a desire for prayer and spiritual growth. To only a slightly lesser degree, most new members also say they were attracted to religious life by a desire to be of service and a desire to be part of a community.... They were attracted to their particular religious institute by its spirituality, community life, and prayer life. Although the ministries of the institute are also important to most new members, they are less important than spirituality, prayer, community, and lifestyle.

When young religious were asked what they found most rewarding about their religious life, they again mention the communal dimension (i.e., living, praying, working together), then the spiritual dimension of their religious life (i.e., daily Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, devotional practices) as the most satisfying and rewarding factors.

CLEAR CATHOLIC IDENTITY—Finally, a clear and specifically Catholic identity was another variable that came across as important to younger individuals choosing religious life. For example, nearly two-thirds of new religious who took part in the survey are in orders in which a habit is worn. Most prefer to work in ministries sponsored by the church and, ideally, ministries sponsored by their own community. Many see "giving witness" with their lives as an important part of their role as religious, and communities that made explicit their fidelity to the Catholic Church and the magisterium were more likely to receive new members.

These findings lead to a few observations. First,

When asked about their decision to enter their particular religious institute, most new members cite the community life in the institute as the most influential factor in their decision.

they make clear that men and women are joining religious communities primarily to pursue a spiritual life and are drawn by a community's prayer life and community life—not primarily by the community's apostolates or works. That is not to say that they are not interested in working or in the community's apostolates. However they are not looking to join a monastery or community in order to do a certain type of work. In most cases, given the expanding role of the laity in the church, young people do not have to join a religious community in order to do most types of ministry, including religious education, chaplaincy work in hospitals, retreat work, and certain types of parish ministry. Rather, young men and women appear to choose religious life because it affords them an opportunity to live in community, to belong to something larger than themselves, and to pursue more intentionally a spiritual life and prayer life.

If these factors are what motivates young men and women to religious life, then it is not surprising to learn that three of the primary factors that lead young religious to leave their commitments are: 1) overwork; 2) difficulty balancing spiritual and prayer life with their work obligations; and 3) loneliness and lack of support in their community.

Second, I would like to respond to some of the reactions to this research which perceive these findings as indicative of a growing trend toward conservatism among young people in the church. While there likely is some trend in this direction, we must be careful not to dismiss their interest in the habit, larger institutional living, clear Catholic identity, and explicitly Catholic and community-sponsored ministries as solely a desire to return to some former, pre-Vatican II version of the church. Theories of psychological development suggest that young men and women (regardless of the generation they grow up in) have as the developmental tasks of late adolescence and early young adulthood achieving a sense of identity, investing in relationships with like-minded others, dedicating their lives to a common (often idealistic) goal, and making concrete and public affiliations. These would have been important to previous generations, too, in their 20s and 30s; however previous generations did not have to seek out clear rules, obvious signs of Catholic identity (such as a habit), or the common life. These were part of everyone's experience of religious life. And while some of these dimensions of religious life may not be sufficient to impart all of the values of religious life (the habit does not make the monk, after all!), these concrete expressions of faith and affiliation are necessary at particular stages, especially



Those entering religious life today are seeking a balanced approach to ministry that avoids overwork. Pictured here is a sister with the Daughters of Charity providing health care in Haiti.

for those whose catechesis and experience of church may have been very diffuse, incomplete, or altogether absent, as recent sociological studies suggest.

Before using these NRVC-CARA findings to more clearly articulate what a “culture of vocations” within a religious community might look like, we will briefly review another body of research with significant implications for how to build a culture that both attracts and sustains new membership.

Why men leave religious life and priesthood

A small but important body of research investigates the variables that predict men leaving religious life and priesthood in the first years following ordination or final vows. William P. Daly wrote the 2001 report “Early career resignations from the priesthood” for the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators. He



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found that approximately 9 percent of U.S. priests leave the priesthood within five years of ordination—a figure that has been on the rise in the last few decades and is expected to be higher among men ordained in the mid to later 2000's. Dean Hoge, author of the 2002 book *The First Five Years of Priesthood* (Liturgical Press), discovered in his study of newly ordained priests that two primary factors, working together, predict the likelihood of a man leaving the priesthood in his first five years. They are: 1) feeling lonely and unappreciated; and 2) experiencing a “crisis of commitment,” such as falling in love, discovering his sexuality, or experiencing conflict with authority.

Of particular importance was the discovery that both of these factors had to be present at the same time to elevate a man's likelihood of leaving. In other words, the first factor—feeling lonely and unappreciated—appears to act as predisposing condition upon which a later crisis of sexuality or conflict acts, leading the individual to resign from his priestly vocation.

In 2008 Sister Jane Becker, OSB and I surveyed monastic religious superiors and monks who had made solemn profession within the last 10 years in order to identify whether similar factors motivated men to leave

monastic life within the first years of their final vows. (Our results appear in “The first ten years of solemn vows: Benedictine monks on leaving and remaining in monastic life,” published in *American Benedictine Review*, 2008, No. 2.) We discovered that among the communities surveyed, 13 percent of the monks who had made solemn vows in the last 10 years had already left. The top reasons for leaving, according to their priors were:

- 1) sexuality-related issues, including falling in love, discovering their sexuality, a desire to live a homosexual lifestyle, and sexual confusion;
- 2) difficulty with keeping commitments;
- 3) psychological concerns, such as difficulties with authority, addictions, or an antisocial personality.

Perhaps more helpful in understanding why monks leave monastic life within the first 10 years of solemn profession were responses given to the following question: “What do you see as the particular challenges to monks in the first five years after making solemn vows?” This question was asked of both priors and of recently professed. The most commonly named challenges were:

- the amount of work and difficulty maintaining a healthy balance between work and the spiritual demands of the monastic life;
- change in the amount or type of support received after solemn profession (e.g. loss of relationships with peer group, few structures for spiritual formation, and lack of formal supervision);
- concerns about how to use new levels of freedom;
- generational concerns within the community and with leadership.

In large part Sister Becker and I concluded that the reasons that young men leave monastic life within a few years of making solemn vows are very similar to reasons for leaving the priesthood. First, those who leave feel overworked, under-appreciated, and under-supported; then a crisis occurs, such as falling in love, coming to terms with sexuality, having conflicts with leadership or experiencing intergenerational stressors. Again, it appeared likely that neither the predisposition (feeling overworked and under-supported) nor the stressor (falling in love, conflict) alone are enough to account for men leaving; however, when both are present at the same

time, the chances of a professed religious leaving are much higher.

What helps men avoid a departure

In our study Becker and I also asked recently professed monks who had not left if they had ever given serious consideration to leaving monastic life, and if so how they coped with those desires. We discovered that over a third to almost a half (36 percent to 47 percent) of them had entertained serious thoughts about leaving shortly after profession. When all were asked how they would cope with such a desire to leave if it ever arose, their top answers were:

- 1) talk to someone: abbot, a spiritual director, or confrere (mentioned by 80 percent),
- 2) give it time (mentioned by 26.7 percent),
- 3) prayer (mentioned by 20 percent).

What was most interesting and problematic was that monks imagine that they would rely on their monastic relationships and their prayer life to deal with thoughts of leaving. However it is precisely the absence of these resources (i.e., satisfying monastic relationships and a balanced prayer-work relationship) that are in large part motivating them to leave in the first place. To close the circle, let's remind ourselves that the NRVC-CARA study has pointed out that these same variables—community relationships (“talking to someone”) and spiritual life (prayer) are what attracted the individual to religious life in the first place.

To summarize, two primary factors working together appear to be the best predictors of men leaving religious life within the first years of final profession. The first, feeling overworked, under-supported, and losing touch with their spiritual lives, acts as a predisposition upon which a crisis of sexuality, falling in love or community conflicts then acts. Unfortunately current trends in religious life with respect to aging and decreasing size of communities increase the likelihood of newly professed religious being asked to take on multiple jobs, leading to feelings of overwork, detachment from relationships, and loss of focus on the spiritual and prayer life they likely joined their communities to pursue. For every 10 men in the diocesan priesthood who leave or die, only three are being ordained, and we suspect that the reality is similar or worse for many religious communities. One implication is that religious communities will need to be proactive in evaluating their apostolates

and even the style of their observance in order to avoid overburdening young members with unrealistic work demands that ultimately undermine the spiritual and communal aspect of their religious vocation.

In our study of monks, Becker and I concluded that feelings of loneliness, experiences of falling in love, and the ever unfolding challenges of being a sexual person are inevitable dimensions of religious life and frequent stressors that contribute to men (and presumably women) leaving their vows. Unfortunately, many communities report having little or no formal formation programs in the areas of celibacy, sexuality and emotionality as part of their initial and ongoing formation.

Using the research to define an internal culture of vocations

We've looked at the research about both what attracts people to our communities and what causes them to leave. Now let's look at how these research findings might help us to develop an internal culture in our communities that will attract and support vocations. Broadly speaking a “culture” is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that identify a group of people and serve to support the goals and work of that group. By extension, a “culture of vocations” within a particular community would be the set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that support the cultivation and retention of vocations in that community. When it comes to evaluating a community's culture of vocations, a simple but critical question arises: How does the way we live our religious life—our values, attitudes, and, in particular our behaviors (i.e., our “culture”)—encourage or discourage both the attraction and retention of religious vocations?

The body of research reviewed above suggests that the following six dimensions are key to defining an internal culture of vocations, that is, a culture within a religious community that attracts and retains members.

1. **A CLEAR, DISTINCTIVE, AND LIVED CHARISM**—Religious communities must begin by having a clearly articulated and shared sense of their charism. There must be a shared conviction among members that their community's charism remains relevant to the current times and valuable to the ongoing building-up of the church. In order to attract new members, a community's charism must be distinctive—that is, it must offer a particular gift to the church and to the world—and provide an opportunity to live and serve that young people cannot

find elsewhere in the church. The charism must be visible, recognizable, and distinguishable from other forms of religious life and other vocations within the church. Along these lines a strong internal culture of vocations presumes an effective education and indoctrination of new members into the charism, and its value should be apparent to the members by the community's frequent referral to that charism when discerning and evaluating its works, lifestyle, and spiritual or religious life.

MEASURE YOUR VOCATION CULTURE

How is your community doing in terms of an internal culture that supports vocations? Find out by using "The Vocation Culture Assessment Tool," by Brother John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B., published by National Religious Vocation Conference. Order from "the store" at nrvc.net. \$4 each for NRVC members; \$6 non-members. (Note: this tool was developed for men's communities. NRVC hopes to publish a similar instrument for use with women's communities.)

- appropriate allotment of community resources to the liturgical life of the community,
- witness of prayer and devotion by older members of the community,
- emphasis on the importance and use of spiritual direction,
- incorporation of sacraments including Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick into the common life of the community, and
- a cultivated atmosphere of recollection within the community.

2. A STRONG FOCUS ON COMMUNAL LIVING—The research clearly points out that young men and women pursuing religious vocations in the church are attracted by and feel supported by the experience of living a shared, common life. A number of aspects of common living appear to be important to new members, including living together in larger communities (eight or more), common prayer, shared meals, opportunities to work with other members of the community (preferably in community-sponsored apostolates), and opportunities for support and accountability within the religious life.

3. A STRONG EMPHASIS ON THE SPIRITUAL AND PRAYER LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS AND THE COMMUNITY—The available research suggests that an internal culture of vocations is characterized by a strong and observable emphasis on the spiritual and prayer life of the community. This emphasis might be evident in a number of concrete expressions including:

- set times for prayer in common (Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist),
- prioritization of prayer in the community's lifestyle (i.e., work is scheduled around prayer),
- clearly stated and enforced expectations regarding attendance at prayer,
- allowing for and respecting times for private prayer and devotions (e.g., *lectio divina*, meditation, rosary, Eucharistic adoration),

4. FIDELITY TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH—Religious communities that demonstrate a support for and alignment with the magisterium and official teachings of the church are more attractive to new members. This does not mean that an internal culture of vocations is identified with any particular ideology (i.e., liberal versus conservative); however the community's manner of living, teaching, and praying must be in line with the tradition and official teachings of the Catholic Church in order for young people to feel supported and confident in their hopes of growing in holiness and in their Catholic faith and identity.

5. AN APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT OF WORK IN THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY—Given the significant role that overwork and an imbalance of work and prayer play in the resignation of men from religious life, communities must be careful to maintain a healthy relationship with work if they hope to build a culture that retains new members. Along these lines, a strong internal culture of vocations is characterized by, first, a set of apostolates that are appropriate for the size, age, and resources of the community. Second, apostolates would contribute to the mission of the church but serve within the demands of a particular charism. Third, works would complement, but not compete with the spiritual and common life to the point that members are prevented from being present for liturgy and community exercises.

6. A STRONG FORMATION IN CELIBACY, INCLUDING HUMAN SEXUALITY AND

EMOTIONAL MATURITY—Finally a strong and effective preparation for celibacy is essential in preparing men and women to face the inevitable challenges of loneliness, falling in love, and evolving as a sexual person over the years and decades of celibate commitment. Again available research indicates that these are among the primary stressors that cause individuals to leave religious life and priesthood. Consequently a strong culture of vocations must include an intentional and effective program of formation for celibate chastity.

These six dimensions of an internal culture of vocations have been organized into an instrument that religious communities can use to evaluate and strengthen this culture within their community. (See the box on page 34.)

Be worthy of the gift of someone's life

An increase of vocations in our religious communities will come about in two ways: first by attracting new people to our communities; and then by retaining the men and women who have already joined us. Men and women with religious vocations will come and remain if they find in our communities a life that is distinctive and which offers a gift to the church that no other life can offer. If a young man who visits a monastery experiences a life there which is indistinguishable from that of an apostolic community, a diocesan priest, or a layperson living on his own, then it should not surprise us if he looks elsewhere to join a monastery. If a young sister in temporary vows discovers that her life is resembling more and more that of her age peers who are living on their own as single people in the church, then we should not be surprised if one day she leaves with someone with whom she has fallen in love.

The research reviewed here underscores what the theology of religious life has always suggested: that, like the fig tree in the gospels, its survival depends on its ability and its willingness to provide its particular fruit, a meaningful witness to our current times, a distinctive, prophetic and irreplaceable gift to the church.

Several years ago when I was discerning my own vocation, I ran across an advertisement for one of the teaching orders. The ad featured a photograph of a man (presumably a community member) wearing a white lab coat, holding a test tube, and standing in a chemistry lab. The text said: "Be a religious brother, and be what-

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ever you want to be." I remember thinking to myself: "I don't need to be a religious brother to be whatever I want to be. I can do that right now." Religious communities must offer young adults something they cannot get elsewhere in the church and give a witness no one else can give.

Young men and women who are discerning a vocation in the church are looking for a life which will impose on them a clear, new, and challenging identity. I believe young people want something demanded of them. And I am certain that they don't want to spend their lives on something mediocre. Young men and women of discernment age have the precious gift of their whole life in their hands ready to invest. They are going to want to invest it in something that is alive, that has zeal, and that is counter to the individualistic, materialistic, highly secular, and overworked culture from which they are coming. Give them a culture of zeal, a culture of prayer and spiritual depth. Offer them a culture of stable relationships, and give them a culture that is clear, confident, and true to what it says it is. This is a culture of vocations. Offer them this, and they will come, and they will stay. ■

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The Lord and I had a sort of chess match wherein I tried to beat him by proving how awful the situation was.

Even when we confront our biggest fears, Christ takes our hand and walks us through it.

My worst nightmare

AFTER NINE WONDERFUL YEARS of high school teaching, I was asked by my provincial to move into formation work. It was difficult to leave high school ministry, because those years were, up to that point, the happiest of my life.

Not long into my new job as novice director, our novitiate became a bi-province novitiate, and I found myself working for a provincial and a province that hardly even knew my name. At one point in those early years I made a decision that was controversial and had repercussions that were difficult for some to accept. A few of the rank-and-file members of the province began to complain to the provincial. The provincial handled the whole situation beautifully and was very supportive. But even so, I found myself frightened that I might well be asked to step down from this assignment. On my annual retreat that year, the Lord confronted me about my fear and anxiety. We had a sort of chess match wherein I tried to beat him

BY FATHER MARK E.
THIBODEAUX, S.J.



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Also a speaker and writer, he is the author of *Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer*; *God I have Issues: 50 ways to pray no matter how you feel*, and *God's Voice Within: the Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will*.

by proving how awful the situation was, and he tried to win over me by proving otherwise. The dialogue went something like this:

Mark, what are you really afraid of? What is your worst nightmare? I'm afraid I'll lose my job. Well, Mark, let's stare right in the face of that nightmare. What if that happens? What if the provincial asks you to leave this work? What would happen next? Would he kick you out of the Society? Of course not! Would he force you into retirement, not allowing you to do any public ministry? Of course not! Would your brother Jesuits who love and care

Each time a particularly frightening scene arose, I heard the Lord whisper into my ear, "I would be with you, Mark, even then."

for you now love you any less if you had to leave this position? Of course not!

Already, I was beginning to feel consolation welling up from deep below. Christ was showing me that nothing terrible would befall me if I were to leave this particular work. Most

importantly, Christ let me know that I would still be loved and valued and that he would be with me through it all. Isn't that all anyone really desires or needs?

The chess match continued:

So what exactly would occur if you had to leave this position, Mark? I suppose I would be put out to pasture. What does that mean, "put out to pasture?" I would be given some job wherein I couldn't do any damage to young Jesuits. What sort of job might you be given, Mark? Where might you be sent? Well, they always need high school teachers, and I was good at that. I suppose I would be sent to teach freshmen somewhere. Right, Mark, and this is your worst nightmare, correct? This is the worst case scenario? So, Mark, how did you like teaching freshmen the last time you did that? Are you kidding? I loved it! Those were the most joyful and fulfilling years of my life! I would be thrilled to teach freshmen again!

And this is your worst case scenario, Mark? Yes, I suppose so. So, let me get this straight, Mark. One of two scenarios will occur: either you will be allowed to continue in this current job, which you find to be challenging but adventuresome and enriching, or you will be sent back to do the work which gave you the best years of your life. Have I got that straight, Mark?

Checkmate. In a few quick and easy moves, Christ had won me over. It was blindingly clear how unfounded was my anxiety—how there were no bad scenarios here.

As the retreat progressed, I played one chess game after another with the Lord by conjuring one nightmare scenario after another. I went far beyond the present situation: What if I get cancer, Lord? What if I screw up so badly that I'll have to leave the Jesuits? As I watched each scenario play itself out, I sensed the Lord watching with me, sitting close and holding my hand. And each time a particularly frightening scene arose, I heard the Lord whisper into my ear, "I would be with you, Mark, even then."

Although for each scenario there were many reasons to have hope and peace, this gentle, caring, abiding presence of Christ revealed itself as the one consolation present in all scenarios—and the only consolation that I really needed. By the end I found myself saying to the Lord, "If you'll be with me, Lord, I'll be just fine, no matter what."

And I really meant it.

Vocation work can be discouraging and even frightening. What if I can't find enough viable candidates? What if I discourage a good candidate or encourage someone who turns out to be the wrong fit? What drastic steps might the community have to take if we don't get enough recruits? At times our worst nightmares can give us a fright. At those times we must do as we ourselves were taught when we were young recruits: take our fears and anxieties to the Lord. We ask him to sit beside us, hold our hand and watch with us these frightening scenarios as they play themselves out in our minds. And we allow Christ to point out the one surety that is common to all possible futures: his own loving presence. And then we begin again to serve him another day, with trust, hope and peace in our hearts. ■

GOD ALONE SUFFICES

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

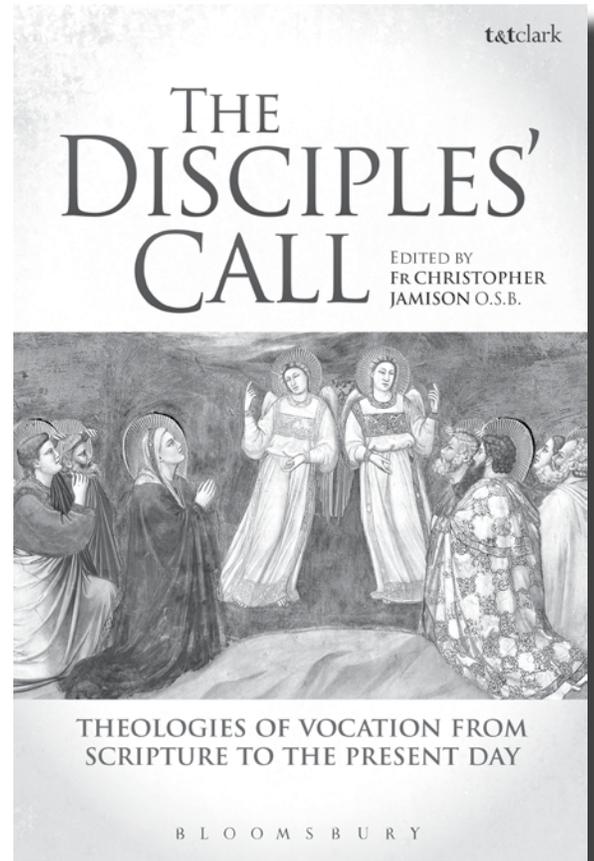
—St. Teresa of Avila

Sorting out the complexity of vocation

BY ITS TITLE, *The Disciples' Call: Theologies of Vocation from Scripture to the Present Day* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), would appear to be a systematic review of theologies of vocation. The introduction, by editor Father Christopher Jamison, O.S.B., describes the purpose of the essays: “to clarify the theology and practice of vocation discernment ... and [to offer] a contribution to what the authors hope will be an ever widening circle of reflection on the nature of vocation and discernment.” In the end, *The Disciples' Call* presents what might best be titled “a collection of understandings” about the concept of vocation and “suggestions” for its discernment. Nonetheless the best of the essays offer vocation ministers rich reflection.

The book presents material from a seminar convened by the National Office for Vocation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in collaboration with Boston College and the International Theological Institute (Austria). As the printed version of oral presentations, some of the essays lose their poignancy in translation and offer little contribution. The essays are grouped in three categories: foundations of theology, tradition and vocation, and discernment—though none fall neatly into just one category.

In Part One, the three essays purport to offer the foundations of a theology of vocation. The first essay, “What theologies are to be found in the Bible?” is a wide-ranging, selective view of persons (mostly male) who experience some type of call. The second essay looks at the early monastic tradition and asks, “Did the early monastic tradition have a concept of vocation?” The author, Father Richard Price, examines classical monastic texts only to conclude that early monks would not recognize the question of a call to a particular vocation (i.e., to religious life or priesthood). For them, “vocation” meant the call to all humanity to repent and to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ. Entering monastic life was “simply to respond to the universal call more fully and more effectively than is possible in the world.”



BY SISTER JUDITH K. SCHAEFER, O.P.



Sister Judith K. Schaefer, O.P. is a professor of theology at St. Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona. She previously served

her Sinsinawa Dominican congregation in formation ministry. An award-winning writer, she is author of *The Evolution of a Vow: Obedience as Decision Making in Communion* (LitVerlag, 2009).

The final essay in Part One, “The Church as Mission,” is solidly written and grounds all vocation in the mission of the church itself. The author, Father Richard Lennan of Boston College, presents a clear, articulate understanding of a contemporary ecclesiology of mission that is the foundation of all vocation discernment. Lennan rightly sees “all vocations are irreducibly linked

The reader can quickly see that “vocation,” in a general sense, and in particular realities, offers more questions than answers.

to the mission of the church ... [and] what makes us one is our common sharing in the one mission of the church.” Lennan makes the distinction between “mission” and “vocation” and highlights that all vocations build on an existing identity (e.g., a woman [identity] becomes an artist [vocation]) while mission is the singular identity of the church. It is on this singular identity, mission, that all other

vocations are built. Lennan continues this trajectory by emphasizing that no vocation is solitary. The vocation of any one individual is only possible through association and integration with the whole of the church and its mission. Lennan’s most significant contribution, however, is his understanding of the church’s relationship to God, history, and the world. Understanding mission and vocation in these terms, as Lennan says, “saves all discussion of vocation from declining into a narcissistic ‘God and me’ framework.”

Part Two of *The Disciples’ Call* offers an eclectic review of several writers within the larger tradition. Essays unevenly explore the contributions and insights of Aquinas, Ignatius, Luther and the Protestant tradition, the classic text *The Imitation of Christ*, and the theology of vocation of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The two strongest essays are on Saint Ignatius Loyola and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Anyone involved in vocation discernment should be familiar with the classical understanding presented here of vocation through significant voices.

Part Three provides significant contributions in furthering our understanding of vocation and its corollary task, discernment. All six essays offer some new lens out of which to view the current challenges of vocation ministry. In the first essay, Sister Cathy Jones, R.A. thoughtfully reviews and contrasts the contemporary experience of both consecrated life and secular institutes. Jones invites religious to consider that, “Research shows that those institutes of active religious life which are attracting new members offer a clear identity and purpose

precisely as religious and not secular. . . . [and] that the strong expression of the distinctive nature of religious life is integral to its future flourishing.”

In the next essay, Dr. Susan O’Brien of the University of Cambridge, extends Jones’ focus on apostolic religious life, and examines it through an historical lens. Using insights from Father John O’Malley, S.J., O’Brien suggests that the current understanding of religious life suffers from a categorizing that does not fit its historical reality. For example, as O’Brien points out, apostolic life for women is generally only acknowledged to have occurred in the church from 1900 on, when, in reality, apostolic communities of women have recently been found as far back as 1200. This type of “invisibility” blurs the boundaries between what has been recognized officially as religious life and what has in actuality occurred as a response to God’s call. O’Brien’s point seems to be to encourage young discerners to see the deep and wide tradition that religious life actually comes from—and not limit themselves to trying to fit in its present day expressions.

The next three essays explore issues related to priesthood and marriage, as well as psychological insights into vocation in general. Each essay clearly articulates the contemporary issues related to these topics. The collection is aided by voices from the Byzantine tradition and, earlier in the book, the Protestant tradition. The reader can quickly see that “vocation,” in a general sense, and in particular realities, offers more questions than answers.

The final essay, “A Culture of Vocation,” is perhaps the most intriguing. The editor, Father Christopher Jamison, O.S.B., describes the evolution of a “culture of vocation” from its first references by Pope John Paul II in 1993, through its specific development in Britain, to suggested future development. Three key tenets of the culture are: 1) life is a vocation given to all by God; 2) each person is called to a distinctive vocation within life; and 3) all members of the church are responsible for affirming and creating a culture of vocation. In this culture, the question for young people is not, “What is God calling you to do?” but rather, “What kind of life do you want to live?” Jamison cautions that we should not be surprised if the response young people make today is quite different from the response of previous generations.

Jamison ends his essay with what may be the key insight of the book, “The culture of vocation that the church is called upon to create is a Christ-centered meeting place for the world’s deepest needs and people’s deepest desires.” The role of discernment in such a culture is to affirm the life-seeking energies of young people today and aid them in seeing the beauty and joy of a “vocation.” ■



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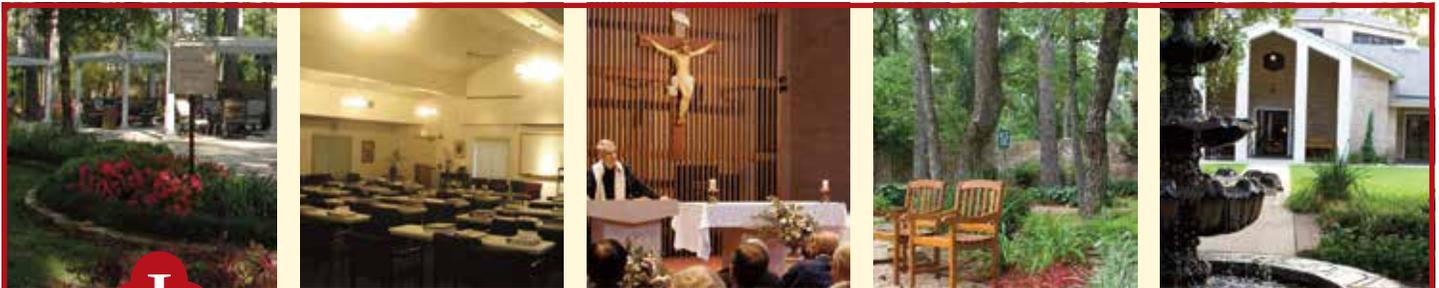
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