

HORIZON



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THEOLOGY OF VOCATION

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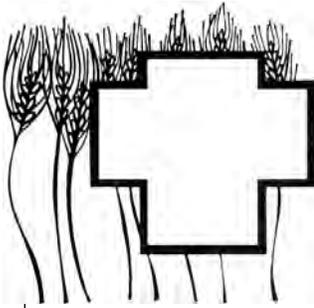
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HORIZON

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

HORIZON serves as a resource:

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

HORIZON has a threefold purpose:

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

National Religious Vocation Conference

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

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

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Theology matters

YEARS AGO, before I got involved in vocation publishing, I considered the theology of vocation an esoteric, way-out-there field of thought. But I now have great respect for it because I see how profoundly it can impact the life of the church and the lives of individuals in discernment. There is a great distinction between understanding vocation as a joyful adventure and understanding vocation as a guessing game that you better get right for fear of divine punishment.

This edition includes a variety of thought exploring the theology of vocation. We hope our contributors help you to refine your own theology of vocation, grounding you on firm footing for ministering to the many people you meet in this line of work.

I want to also take the opportunity in this column to call your attention to our new electronic forms of *HORIZON*. As publishing moves more and more to hand-held electronic forms, we want to be available to our readers in those forms, too. *HORIZON* will continue to be available on paper, but in addition it is now available in the following forms as well:

- in formats that can be read on e-readers such as Nooks, Kindles, Ipads, tablets, etc.,
- on the NRVC website in PDF form,
- and in a more interactive “flipbook” form on our website.

These new forms of *HORIZON* allow readers to carry *HORIZON* with them as they travel. And as those using e-readers already know, electronic documents can be more easily searched, notes can be added, and a dictionary—and often the World Wide Web—is always a click away as you read, allowing readers to look up information or order resources as they learn about them.

As 2012 rolls along, we hope the insights from this edition enhance your ministry, and we hope our new electronic forms make *HORIZON* more readily available and useful for you.



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

UPDATES

Snapshot of vocation ministry

HORIZON expands electronic forms



In February 2012, *HORIZON* expanded its electronic forms so that subscribers with tablets or e-readers (such as the Nook or Kindle) can download the journal in an easy-to-read form from www.nrvc.net.

Subscribers can also enjoy a “flip-book,” Internet-based form of *HORIZON*, which is also now available at www.nrvc.net.

This Winter 2012 edition of *HORIZON* is now posted in e-reader form, as will be all subsequent editions. To access the electronic forms of *HORIZON*, a subscriber needs to log in using his or her e-mail address and password.

Plan now for Convocation 2012

The National Religious Vocation Conference will host its 2012 Convocation in Plano, TX November 1-5. This is the premier opportunity for religious community vocation ministers to network, learn, refresh and renew.

This year’s theme will be: “Vocation Ministers as Ambassadors for Christ: A Reconciling Presence.” Keynoters will be Archbishop Joseph William Tobin, CSSR,

Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and Sister Kathryn J. Hermes, FSP, author and retreat director.

The pre-convocation workshops will be held November 1, 2012 from 9 a.m - 4:30 p.m. They include:

- RECOGNIZING SUBTLE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PERSONALITY DISORDER Presenters: Dr. Adeline Boye, PSy.D. and Sister Cindy Kaye, RSM.
- THE VOCATION DIRECTOR’S MARKETING TOOL-BOX Presenter: Kim Cavallero, director of communications, American Province of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.



• VOCATION MINISTRY AND THE ISSUES OF CIVIL, CANON, AND IMMIGRATION LAW Presenters: Father Daniel J. Ward, OSB and Anne Marie Gibbons of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and Legal Resource Center for Religious, respectively. Further details and registration forms will be forthcoming and will be posted at www.nrvn.net.

NRVC workshops help vocation ministers with communications, ethics, assessment

The following workshops are available to any vocation minister who wishes to further his or her ministry understanding and skills. Additional details and registration information are available online at www.nrvn.net.

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT I

Father Raymond Carey, Ph.D. presenter

July 16, 17 & 18, 2012 (The workshop begins at 9 a.m. on Monday and ends at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday), DePaul Center, Chicago, IL

ETHICAL ISSUES IN VOCATION AND FORMATION MINISTRY

Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., presenter

July 19-20, 2012 (The workshop begins at 9 a.m. on Thursday and ends at noon on Friday), DePaul Center, Chicago, IL

ORIENTATION FOR NEW VOCATION DIRECTORS

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC, NRVC Executive Director and Sister Deborah M. Borneman, SSCM, NRVC Associate Director, presenters

July 23-27, 2012 (The workshop begins at 9 a.m. on Monday and ends at noon on Friday), DePaul Center, Chicago, IL

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR VOCATION MINISTERS: ORAL, WRITTEN AND DIGITAL

Father Vince Wirtner III and Lisa Ripson, presenters

July 30-August 1, 2012 (The workshop begins at 9 a.m. on Monday and ends at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday), DePaul Center, Chicago, IL

Workshop to help communities address issues raised in new member study

A June workshop entitled "Moving Forward in Hope: Keys to the Future" will be held at the Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, TX, in order to train participants to facilitate congregational discussions on the areas of community life, communal prayer, visibility, and the celebration of Eucharist. The days will be facilitated by Sister Lynn Levo, CSJ, who will

also provide participants with an in-depth knowledge of the NRVC-CARA Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life. As *HORIZON* went to press, NRVC was in the process of reviewing applications to attend the workshop. Costs are being underwritten by a generous grant from the GHR Foundation.

College debt affects vocation decisions

Contemporary college graduates have such significant education debt—an average of approximately \$24,000—that religious orders are now being negatively affected by that burden. A study verifying that college debt

is taking a toll on the ability to pursue religious life was released in February 2012 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. It was commissioned by the National Religious Vocation Conference. NRVC notes:



- The study highlighted the fact that there is no national vehicle for addressing the issue of educational debt as it relates to religious vocations. The NRVC hopes to gather in the near future entities with a stake or interest in this issue to develop comprehensive strategies to mitigate this heretofore unrecognized barrier to religious vocations.
- NRVC will assemble guidelines for communities to help them to approach the question of applicant education debt. This resource will be announced in *HORIZON* and online by NRVC when it is prepared.
- In October 2011 President Obama introduced changes in debt repayment structures to favor student borrowers and make repayment easier, but these changes only affect those currently in college and not those who have already graduated.

The study, "Educational Debt and Vocations to Religious Life," and related information are posted at www.nrvn.net.

Class of 2011 confirms trends

"The Profession Class of 2011: Survey of Women and Men Religious Professing Perpetual Vows," released by the U.S. Bishops Conference in February, confirmed several trends in religious life, including the trend toward ethnic diversity, younger consideration of religious life, parental resistance to religious life, and the positive significance of taking part in a "Come and See" or discernment retreat. Details of the report can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/news/> ■

God's calling may come early; it is very personal; and it needs to be confirmed by others in the church. Our lives are an adventure spent plumbing the depths of that call.

Vocation as a lifelong, personal adventure for every Christian

BY ARCHBISHOP JEAN-LOUIS BRUGUÉS, OP

The following was presented at a July, 2011 conference of the European Vocation Service and is published here with permission. Although Archbishop Brugués' task was to discuss the theology of vocations to the priesthood in particular, his thoughts relate to every type of calling, and we present them here to further explore the theology of vocation. Special thanks go to **Sister Marguerite Marie Fortier, CSC** for translating this article from French into English.

I. VOCATION, A PERSONAL ADVENTURE

Baptism, the first call

I would like to begin with very simple things. Every Christian life is an adventure. It begins with the Lord's call at the moment of our baptism. We spend our total existence delving



Archbishop Jean-Louis Brugués, OP is a member of the Dominicans and currently serves in the Vatican as Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education for Seminaries and Institutes of Study. Prior to that appointment, he was bishop of the Diocese of Angers, France.

into the meaning of this call: What does the Lord expect of me, and how can I best answer this call? The correct answer is given to us by one of the most beautiful passages of the Bible. To young Samuel who had heard his name called out many times during the night, the elderly Eli gave this advice: "Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). From this account, I wish to stress three elements for our reflection: the call may come to us early in our existence (Samuel is very young); the call is always identified as something very personal (Samuel is called by his name, while others hear nothing); there is a need for a third person to verify the authenticity of the call, which is often heard in the dark (here is the role of the prophet Eli).

Let me mention this again: for Christians, the call is first heard at baptism. We are chosen by Christ when we first receive our name. In a way, he identifies his property: whether we know it or not, whether we want to or not, we belong to him. Like a jealous God, until our dying breath he will claim us as his own: "You belong to me, completely to me. You belong to me forever, and never will I turn my face away from you. I have marked you with an indelible sign; I have forged an eternal alliance with you. You can pretend that you have heard nothing, you can turn away from me, you can behave as if this baptism never existed, for I love those who are free. But you can also risk this adventure with me, you can respond to

my love for you by a love for me. However, know that I have given you a name and that this name marks you for eternity.”

Universal call to holiness

Christian tradition names this beautiful adventure as holiness. Throughout the whole Bible, the call to holiness is omnipresent: “Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2. These words can also be translated as, “Be holy as I am holy.”) This holiness might appear terribly farfetched, not to say impossible: how can we imitate the holiness of an invisible God, one who remains, at the risk of death, unapproachable? Christ, who is the perfect image, by his incarnation rendered the image of the invisible God capable of being grasped by humanity.

Thanks to his presence, holiness was made more accessible, I would like to say more familiar. “I am gentle: you, also, be gentle. I am compassionate: you, also, be compassionate.” In this same way we could go through every one of the beatitudes. For the baptized, holiness consists of imitating the holiness of Christ. The Vatican II Council stressed the fact that the call to holiness is addressed to all the baptized without exception, a notion which seems to have been lost during the last few centuries: “... all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the

perfection of charity;” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40). For those who are baptized, holiness is not an option but rather an obligation.

A personal call

If the call to holiness is addressed to everyone, nevertheless, it is always presented in a personal fashion. Here the importance of the name takes on all its full meaning: God calls each one by name, and each one will respond uniquely to this call. Holiness is always particular to each one; the extraordinary diversity of the personalities of the saints clearly demonstrates this. In fact personal holiness cannot be compared with any other type of holiness; each one is unique, each one is original. The call is personalized: “You, come and follow me”—you, not the other.

The response to this particular call is identified by our character, our personal history and all the events that have fashioned our being. Our lifetime is spent trying to comprehend the Lord’s call; the dream that God has nurtured for each one of us. If we wish to be faithful to our baptism, we spend our life trying to respond to that call. You know that in the Bible the name of a person holds the essence of his total being.

For Christians, the call is first heard at baptism. We are chosen by Christ when we first receive our name. In a way, he identifies his property: whether we know it or not, whether we want to or not, we belong to him.

In this case, the name takes on a double personalization, personalization of the One who takes the initiative to call: “You, Samuel,” “You, Philip,” “You, the fishermen mending your nets,” “You, the money changer”... (the synoptic Gospels faithfully recount each one of the calls made to the individual disciples), also, personalization of the one who responds to this call. Therefore, it can be said that vocation consists of a double reality: objective (the action of calling) and subjective (the action of responding).

II. FROM THE LORD’S PART

Mediation of the church

In the biblical story of Samuel, referred to at the opening of our reflection, we have witnessed the actions and words of three persons: the child, the voice that woke him in the night, and the person who interprets the event. The fact is that the

The Bible shows us that the Lord has always chosen freely according to criteria which are not ours and which are at times most unexpected.

adventure called vocation does not play itself out through the intervention of only two persons, as the individualistic approach seems to imply—God and myself—but rather through the interaction of three persons. Who is the third party? To respond to this question, let us remember that God has

made personal holiness a collective adventure. This communal adventure is called church. The church is nothing else but a community adventure in the pursuit of holiness; in summary, the adventure of all humanity. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (773) we read:

In the Church this communion of men with God, in the “love [that] never ends,” is the purpose which governs everything in her that is a sacramental means, tied to this passing world. [The Church’s] structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members.

A specific call to the priesthood

The harvest needs workers, and the mission needs people to serve. That is the reason why the Lord chooses priests. He calls forth men to be like him in their very being (in words,

in acts, even in their physical identity), to act in his name by becoming pastors of his people. As noted in the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (12): “...the priest sacramentally enters into communion with the bishop and with other priests in order to serve the People of God who are the Church and to draw all mankind to Christ...” To serve, without any doubt, this is the key word which allows us to accede to the mystery of the priesthood. Why this one rather than the other? Why me? Why have I been called to become a priest?

God alone knows the answer to these questions. It may be useful here to recall the beautiful and difficult theology of election. In fact, the Bible shows us that the Lord has always chosen freely according to criteria which are not ours and which are at times most unexpected. Why choose Israel and not another group of people? They were certainly not the best group. Why the youngest and not the eldest? Why the youngest who had the least experience (as in the choice of David)?

God chooses with sovereign freedom. Only in God’s presence will I understand the reason for my priestly vocation. This leads us to a crucial question: on one hand I must depend on my intuitions, my aspirations, my desires, even my dreams to discern that God is calling me to his service as a priest; on the other hand I must not make of these aspirations an absolute but submit them to the judgment of others, to the church. Eli understood that the voice came from God, but the child did not understand, even if he was the chosen one. Only the church can identify this call as authentic and make it its own.

It is up to the church to call or not to call to the presbyterate ministry those who feel attracted to this ministry. A little after May 1968, the Archbishop of Paris had been invited to participate in a television broadcast. The interviewer wanted to question him concerning the crisis in ministry. I remember clearly that at one moment, to the dismay of the other participants, the archbishop turned to the cameras and looking directly at the spectators called out, “I need you! I am now hiring!” He did so just as the master of the harvest of the evangelical parable had done.

The archbishop was right: the church calls priests to serve its mission. Let us note that we have surely experienced some dramatic situations where the candidate is wounded by the refusal of the bishop to call him to ministry. Great is the temptation to look for a more understanding but perhaps less lucid bishop: hunting more or less honestly from one seminary to another represents, frankly speaking, a scourge for today’s church.

Like a mother

The church discerns vocations. The church calls priests. The church forms candidates. When the bishops come for the ad limina visit, they come to our congregation, and we always repeat the same message: the formation of priests is so important that you should place your best priests in the seminary as educators. No doubt, in the short term, these priests will be missed in pastoral ministry; however, the future of the diocese depends in great measure on the quality of the future priests. Finally the young priests will receive from the church the mission best adapted to their capacities.

Giving birth, educating, sending forth on life's journey: if we reflect on this, all these activities are by their very nature maternal. Therefore, we need to rediscover the maternal dimension of the church. I remember a past incident. I had gone to visit a large region of my diocese where a group of eight adolescents were preparing to receive confirmation—the first group to request the sacrament in 28 years! I admired their simplicity and good humor and especially their ability to pray: they entered into a state of prayer as a duck takes to water!

They asked me what the church meant to me. I told them that I had learned to love the church like a mother. They were happy with this answer. However, their animator responded with surprise, "Like a mother? I had never thought of that. Don't you think that this notion is somewhat old-fashioned?" No, for it is impossible to know what the church is really all about unless we accept considering her as a mother. That is the very reason why the priest is called to nurture a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, mother of the church and thus his own mother.

III. RESPOND TO THE CALL

We have been reflecting on the nature of the call by God, what we have named the objective aspect of vocation. Now we need to talk about the subjective aspect of vocation. We are faced with two general questions: how to reach the conviction that the Lord calls me to this particular existence, in this case the priesthood? How to respond to this call?

Signs of the call

How can I know exactly where and for what the Lord is calling me? How can I arrive at the conviction that will seal my decision? We are all familiar with the classical responses which hold their weight of truth: pray, ask for counsel within



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the framework of spiritual direction, and especially open your heart to be receptive to divine will. Here again, the response given by the prophet Eli to young Samuel appears to be the best option: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." But exactly how does God speak?

If I may say so, God uses all manner of means to indicate his project for us. At times he does so in the most surprising

The ancient advice inscribed on the gates of the temple at Delphi has not lost its pertinence: "Know thyself." He who does not know himself is incapable of making a choice.

ways; a book, a movie, a television program (in the United States newspaper ads promote entry into the seminary or other religious communities), significant encounters, a positive testimony from a priest happy in his vocation and worthy of imitation (just as the negative image of a disillusioned priest can be a counter-witness). Here then are a few objective

signs used by the Lord to help us recognize his will for us. Everything becomes a sign for the one who has already disposed his heart to hear God's will.

Knowing who I am

I would like to linger a little longer on one of these signs. In fact, the best sign remains ... myself! In fact, it is in self-knowledge that one discovers progressively that the particular way of living baptism brings us eventually to a choice of life. Our character, our temperament, our aspirations, and as we have mentioned previously, our dreams, in a word our personality is in itself an element of the first stage of discernment. The ancient advice inscribed on the gates of the temple at Delphi has not lost its pertinence: "Know thyself." He who does not know himself is incapable of making a choice. Mistaken in his self-perception, he will necessarily be mistaken in the choice of his future. In reality by making a definite commitment he would be committing someone other than his true self. I must grasp who I am before involving myself in ministry.

Consequently one must reach real maturity before making a decision. This is no doubt one of the major challenges of our society facing the vocation to the priesthood. The culture of our society encourages a lack of determination, a kind of

immaturity, suggesting that it is best to wait as long as possible before facing the moment of decision; all this in order to keep one's freedom intact. Furthermore today's culture intimates that no definite choice can possibly be made for a lifetime. This is what I have learned in marriage counseling. I used to ask the couples the following question: today, you feel a strong love for one another, but what if tomorrow, and this seems inevitable, your sentiments weaken or disappear, what will you do? The response was always the same: if we change, our commitment will also change.

The day that I understood that it would be impossible for me to be faithful to the promises of my baptism outside of religious life and that this state of life was the best way for me to live my Christian faith, I knocked on the doors of the Dominican order. This is just as true for the one called to holiness through the sacrament of holy orders as it is for the one called to married life.

A unique call

From what I have exposed here, I retain a personal conviction that for each one of us there is but one vocation. The Lord does not offer us multiple possibilities; we are never equally distant from diverse possibilities—only one is truly meant for each one of us. No doubt the moralists would easily point out that in matters of freedom there is no indifference.

Thus it can be said that vocation is not a call that comes from outside of our self and that remains foreign to us; no, for the Lord has oriented our total being in order that we may respond to his specific call. We were conceived and fashioned in every fiber of our being to respond to that call. In other words, vocation does not rest on indeterminate beings, but

Some Scripture passages about call

Samuel 3,1-21	Call of Samuel
Psalms 139	God formed us in the womb
Sirach 15, 16-17	Choose life
Matthew 4, 18-20	Call of first disciples
Matthew 9, 9-13	Jesus calls Matthew
Mark 10: 17-27	Sell everything and follow me
Luke 1:26-56	The Annunciation: Mary's call

is truly programmed (in the same way we speak of genetic programming), according to the essence of who we are. Here, I will use the Augustinian expression of predestination but according to a different meaning from the original sense of the word: considering vocation, yes, we are effectively predestined.

Here, we need to quote the wonderful psalm 139: "A word is not yet on my tongue before you, Yahweh, and yet you know all about it. You fence me in behind and in front, you have laid your hand upon me... You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb... Where shall I go to escape your Spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence? If I speed away on the wings of dawn, if I dwell beyond the ocean, even there your hand will be guiding me, your right hand holding me fast." There is only one call in life and no other. God calls, and in a manner of speaking, he would never offer more than one real possibility.

Why respond with a "yes"

If you share this conviction, you will feel more at ease to respond to the second question that has been asked. Why respond yes to the Lord? Because it is impossible to do otherwise, not because the Lord imposes his will like a sovereign arbitrator. It is possible to say no, but refusing the call would be to deny our essential being since we have been prepared for this mission since all eternity. As the Bible points out, the Lord has placed each one of us before a definite choice: between life and death we are free to spread out our hand toward one or the other (Sirach 15, 16-17). But is choosing death truly a choice?

Why answer yes if the Lord is calling me to the priesthood? Simply because my happiness depends on this response: enter the priesthood to find happiness. Of course this lifestyle will demand sacrifices: giving up marriage (but not friendship), giving up children (but not spiritual fatherhood), and giving up social prestige (in order to best communicate the very life of God)... Besides, all human existence entails sacrifices of one kind or another. As a priest I can be happy in spite of the sacrifices or because of them and this becomes a way of living the reality that there is no greater happiness than giving one's life for those we love. Choose to serve because serving brings profound happiness to our life.

To conclude this reflection, I would like you to hear a moving account of an incident in the life of Pope John Paul II. In 1994 on September 18, he met with the youth of the Archdiocese of Lecce, Italy. He spoke to them about vocation,

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about all forms of vocation. This wonderful link between vocation and happiness is also applicable to us.

A young person begins to formulate a life's project; he holds on to this project and tries to accomplish it; he lives in preparation of fulfilling this project. In other words this is called "vocation"; for indeed, this project that you have owned, that became your property, my friend, comes equally from God; it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. You need to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in order to identify it, to deepen its meaning, and to finally bring it to its full expression. For indeed, this is true happiness; for the project thus fulfilled carries within itself the perfect joy to which God calls us. All of us are called to happiness in God through the means of this project which also comes from Him. We accept it, we bring it to full realization, and through God, Himself we bring it to its ultimate fruition. ■

Consumer culture—with its emphasis on choice—colors our perception of everything, including faith and vocation. However, we can combat this commodification and sharpen our discernment of God’s call by engaging in Christian practices.

Overcoming the influence of consumerism on vocation

BY EDWARD P. HAHNENBERG

CHOICE HAS BECOME perhaps our primary lens on reality. Fueled by a consumer culture, choice transforms almost everything we encounter into a commodity. Vincent Miller, author of *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*, argues that the global stretch of advanced capitalism, the ubiquity of advertising, and the commodification of culture itself has not only reshaped our world, but it has also reshaped the way we look at the world¹. In such an environment, religious believers are trained daily—in a way that is subtle but pervasive—to relate to their surroundings in the model of consumer choice. Everything becomes a commodity, even the beliefs and practices of our faith.

In this commodified form, the Christian tradition loses the power to do what it ought to do: offer an orienting and co-

herent framework for life—a narrative of meaning. “The problem is that when people are trained to lift cultural/religious objects from their traditional contexts, they are less likely to be influenced by the other logics, values, and desires mediated by the religious traditions. Therefore they are unlikely to construct syntheses which enable them to develop forms of life that differ from the status quo.”²

For centuries the Protestant doctrine of vocation struggled to resist its slow concession to the social status quo. In the mercantile enthusiasm of the Puritans, God’s call was not so much integrated with the world of work as it was overwhelmed and absorbed by it. Today, the power of the market to co-opt extends beyond vocation to all aspects of Christian identity and practice.

On the one hand, the modern market has made available to first world Christians the resources of their religion on an unprecedented scale. It has never been easier to access the riches of the tradition. Sitting at our laptops after dinner, we can browse the works of Teresa of Avila or Thomas Aquinas, read serious biblical commentary, download podcasts of brilliant preachers, or buy popular books on theology written by accomplished scholars.

On the other hand, the same processes that bring these resources to us also work to pull them apart from one another. The faith becomes fragmented. The overarching narrative and the rich internal complexity of the tradition are lost. Christianity appears to the spiritual consumer like a shelf full of

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stuff. “But for all the profundity and quality of this material, it leaves the spiritual consumer responsible for maintaining the discipline and sustaining their commitments. This spiritual consumer is constructed as an individual, in the single-family home, attempting to make sense of and to transform his or her life without the momentum provided by communal affiliation and support. One need not reduce the consumer’s motives to selfishness to see the likelihood that such engagements with spiritual traditions are not likely to lead to long-term commitments.”³

Constant search for the “next thing” —impediment to true discernment?

We have come to understand vocational discernment not as the discovery of some secret plan hidden in the mind of God but as a search for harmony between a particular decision and one’s fundamental self-awareness before God. Thus for discernment to work depends on an honest sense of ourselves, a kind of inner freedom that only comes through an ongoing process of conversion and personal transformation that makes significant demands on the individual. Vocational discernment cannot be reduced to the moment of choice. It requires an inner openness to the will of God that takes some time to learn. And, like any extended process, it requires commitment.

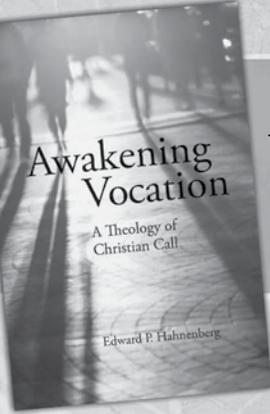
Commitment is a struggle in our contemporary consumer culture. But, as Miller admits, the fault does not lie

with choice itself. “Just as the freedom to choose a life partner does not automatically result in infidelity, choice in itself is not a sufficient cause for our broader lack of commitment.”⁴ The issue is more complicated. Not all spiritual seekers are narcissistic consumers looking to have their needs met. They turn to meditation, spiritual direction, or personal study of Scripture, seeking God in all sincerity. The point that Miller wants to make is that, as good as such independent spiritual exercises are in themselves, they are extremely difficult to sustain over time. Torn out of their supporting communal infrastructures, commodified spiritual practices become the sole responsibility of the practitioner. She is left on her own to maintain a discipline that—because it involves conversion of heart and mind and life—is no easy task. Thus Miller pushes his argument beyond a superficial critique of religious consumerism or “Cafeteria Catholicism” to explore the deeper dynamics of consumer culture and the formative influence it has on us.

For Miller, the problem is not that we choose; the problem is that we are constantly encouraged to choose. Consumer culture fuels a form of never-ending desire. We are trained always to be looking for “the next thing.”

He writes, “The commonsense assumption about con-

Consumer culture offers us very little practice at the kind of patience needed for personal transformation. In fact, consumer culture aggressively works against it.



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sumer desire—that it is desire for possession—might be consistent with religious commitment. Brand loyalty could correlate with denominational stability. As we saw in our discussion of seduction, however, from a thousand different directions we are constantly being tempted to consider something new. While individual manufacturers use advertising to cultivate brand loyalty and to channel consumption into integrated product lines, this takes place within the broader competition for consumer interest.⁵ In our culture of consumer choice, it is not about “having” but about “getting.” It is the actual process of the purchase, and not the enjoyment of the product, that lies at the heart of consumer culture. Once we get something, we are pushed to get something else. I buy my groceries, and immediately I am handed a stack of coupons prompting me to buy again.

The dynamism of desire fueled by the imperative of economic growth and the urgency of advertising focuses us on the instant of consumption. This focus on the act of consumption is what wears down any effort at sustained commitment—spilling over from our economic lives to our spiritual

lives. “Advertising encourages us to choose and to purchase, but not to keep and to use. Likewise, spiritually we are trained to seek, search and choose but not to follow through and to commit.”⁶

If vocational discernment demands conversion as its prerequisite, if it demands a commitment to continued transformation, then we have to be honest about how difficult this really is. What Miller argues is that the difficulty comes not only from the fact that conversion and personal transformation are hard, which has always been the case. The difficulty also comes from the fact that consumer culture offers us very little practice at the kind of patience needed for personal transformation. In fact, consumer culture aggressively works against it.

All of this is not to say that the individual seeker cannot make his way, coming to hear and respond to the call of God. It is simply to highlight the challenges that our present context poses for the kind of sustained commitment to the life of discipleship that is the necessary condition for vocational discernment.

Antidote: embrace Christian practices

What is the alternative to a commodified religiosity? In recent decades, a broad cross-section of theologians—mostly pastoral theologians, systematic theologians, and ethicists, many of them drawing on the narrative theology inspired by Karl Barth and the philosophical framework offered by Alasdair MacIntyre—have turned to the category of practice to talk about religious identity and continuity in an increasingly fragmented and commodified world.

A keen observer of this trend, Robert Wuthnow, embraces it, suggesting that a “practice-oriented spirituality” serves today as a rich alternative to the dwelling-oriented and seeking-oriented spiritualities that have so dominated the recent American religious landscape.⁷ For both practitioners and researchers, it seems that directing our attention to concrete practices, such as private prayer and corporate worship, social service and active charity, offers the key toward that personal and social transformation made so difficult by consumer culture.

The language of practice allows a way to talk about how an individual narrative is drawn into a larger narrative, and how that larger story comes to shape the story of the individual. It helps to illumine the dynamic interplay between church community and subject. Near the end of his magisterial *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor turns with some hope to practices:

“Now if we don’t accept the view that the human aspiration to religion will flag, and I do not, then where will the access lie to practice of and deeper engagement with religion? The answer is the various forms of spiritual practice to which each is drawn in his/her own spiritual life. These may involve meditation, or some charitable work, or a study group, or a pilgrimage, or some special form of prayer, or a host of such things.”⁸ Taylor points out that these kinds of personal practices have always been a part of historical Christianity, as “optional extras” for those already embedded in ordinary church practice. Today, however, it usually works in reverse. “First people are drawn to a pilgrimage, or a World Youth Day, or a meditation group, or a prayer circle; and then later, if they move along in the appropriate direction, they will find themselves embedded in ordinary practice.”⁹ The individualism of our present preoccupation with the spiritual quest need not be individuating.¹⁰

Christianity, as Louis Dupre reminds us, has always started with personal conversion of the heart. And it has inevitably drawn people into relationship with others. Even today, many people find their spiritual home in churches; their individual faith is not individualistic but rather finds form in a kind of “collective connection.”¹¹ As Taylor argues, this movement from individual to community is not guaranteed, but it does not seem altogether exceptional even in today’s consumer culture. The key, of course, is whether this “collective connection” becomes that form of sustained participation through which the individual not only joins the community but is also formed and transformed by it.

The notion of practices highlights the importance of individual agency (“this is something I do”). But the best accounts show a sensitivity to the way in which a genuine spiritual practice draws the individual out of her or himself and into something larger (“this is something we do”). This was one of the seminal insights of MacIntyre’s discussion of practices, virtues, and tradition. Paraphrasing MacIntyre’s own definition, the ethicist William Spohn described practices as “complex social activities that are intrinsically interesting and rewarding. They are rich human activities that draw us into themselves, thereby reorienting our initial intentions and motivations.”¹² When we are deeply engaged in a practice, we “leave ourselves” and get lost in the practice itself. This is true when we play chess; it is true when we pray.

Staying connected to community

The danger, of course, is that these practices—secular or spiritual—become ends in and of themselves. Then they be-

come isolated and individualistic, exercises that become so engrossing or all-encompassing that they cut us off from others. Speaking specifically of spiritual practices, Spohn noted, “Problems arise when a lived spirituality is cut off from an adequate reflective framework, that is, from traditions and communities that could provide normative theological and ethical guidance. In their absence, spiritual practices are often justified by appeal to unexamined cultural commonplaces or narcissistic good feelings which are ripe for self-deception.”¹³ The danger is that there is no check or challenge to our own spiritual dysfunction, that the practice becomes affirming but never transforming. To avoid this individualistic interpretation of practices, Craig Dykstra explains MacIntyre’s crucial qualifier “social.” What is meant here is not group activity. Indeed, what is conveyed is a deep embedment in tradition and community. “Practice is participation in a cooperatively formed pattern of activity that emerges out of a complex tradition of interactions among many people sustained over a long period of time.”¹⁴ A true practice cannot be abstracted from its past or from other people. It cannot be commodified. True spiritual practices work by drawing us out of ourselves and into a larger narrative of meaning, a larger community of concern.

Ultimately, Christian practices draw us into the narrative of Jesus. Terrence Tilley describes Christian discipleship as the practice of following Christ. “To be a disciple is to learn how to have faith in God by following Christ. Discipleship involves, indeed is, a way of life. This life is composed of various activities: one learns how to engage in prayer and worship; service with, to, and for others for the sake of righteousness and justice; reverence for all there is as God’s gift; sustaining a community of disciples and so on.”¹⁵

Taking practice as his hermeneutical key, Tilley reconstructs Christology around the reconciling practice of Jesus, embodied above all in Jesus’ healing, teaching, forgiving and table fellowship. Tilley signals the implications this “practical Christology” has for the question of discernment: we discover God’s will in practice.

“As Christians, we discover God’s will in the reconcil-

True spiritual practices work by drawing us out of ourselves and into a larger narrative of meaning, a larger community of concern.

ing practices that constitute living in and living out the *basileia tou theou* [kingdom of God]. For in the practices of the Jesus-movement, we can recognize and display the overflowing love of God as present. We stop committing sins and refuse to give our allegiance to social and personal sin that blocks the realization of the reign of God. We live in and live out a tradition that seeks to overcome evil and sin not by ‘overpowering’ them but by reconciling sinners and saints, perpetrators and victims, the warriors and the vanquished, the exploiters and the exploited, insofar as that reconciliation is

possible for those committed to living in and living out that tradition.¹⁶

Through ... concrete practices of holding ourselves open to the other, we come to participate in the open narrative of Christ, and so open ourselves to God’s call.

By our participation in the reconciling practice of Jesus we come to that clarity that Rahner described as an honest awareness of our fundamental stance before God. This honesty, this clarity, this freedom helps us to better see what God

is calling us to in any particular decision before us. To Tilley’s reconciling practice—an image of drawing others together—I offer the complementary image of opening out and opening up to others. Drawing on Lieven Boeve, I see the practices of healing, teaching, forgiving, and fellowship as part of Jesus’ critical-liberative praxis of the open narrative. It is through just such concrete practices of holding ourselves open to the other that we come to participate in the open narrative of Christ, and so open ourselves to God’s call. ■

1. Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2003.
2. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 210.
3. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 142.
4. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 141.
5. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 141.
6. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 142.
7. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
8. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

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- University Press, 2007, p. 515.
9. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 516.
10. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 516.
11. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 516.
12. William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*. New York: Continuum, 1999, p. 43.
13. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, p. 35.
14. Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice,” in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, eds. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991, pp. 35-66, at 43.
15. Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples’ Jesus: Christology as a Reconciling Practice*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008, 14. Tilley’s work represents a sustained Catholic engagement with the questions of narrative and practice. The trajectory of his thought can be traced through *Story Theology*; *Postmodern Theologies*; *The Wisdom of Religious Commitment*; *Inventing Catholic Tradition*; and *History, Theology and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic*.
16. Tilley, *The Disciples of Jesus*, 228-29.

For 48 years, the church has celebrated an annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Each year the pope offers a message. What themes have those messages stressed, and what kind of theology of vocation do they offer?

What do the popes say about vocation?

BY FATHER BRENDAN LEAHY

For nearly half a century the pontiff has delivered a message to the worldwide church during the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations—a day to honor and call attention to church vocations. The following article examines the 48 papal messages dating back to Pope Paul VI in 1964.

BEGINNING WITH ONE of the earliest messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Paul VI in 1970 put forth a threefold goal for the day: 1) to reflect on the multiple reality of vocations in the church; 2) to commit everyone to collaboration, and 3) to commit us to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send workers for his church. However, in the course of 48 messages Popes Paul VI, Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI have offered us much, much more than each year's annual text.

In his introduction to "Messages for Vocations," Bishop Giuseppe Pittau describes the World Day of Prayer for Voca-

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tions messages as being "like a small encyclopaedia of the theology and pastoral (care) of vocations."¹

In this short paper presenting the magisterium of the pontiffs in the annual messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I cannot claim to do full justice to the encyclopedic richness of teaching and observation, spiritual wisdom and analysis, example and recommendations contained in the 48 messages. In approaching my task, I have been guided by a remark again made by Bishop Pittau. He writes that the "great themes of the Council on the Church"² run throughout World Day of Prayer for Vocations messages. On this basis, I propose to draw together the many rich strands of the papal Magisterial teaching under three themes that were prominent in the Second Vatican Council (an event that each of the three popes experienced so personally and profoundly), and that return again and again as significant keys to reading the theological, pastoral and spiritual dimensions of a vocation. These three themes are: mystery, communion and mission.

Mystery, communion and mission

In the 1992 apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 12, Pope John Paul II referred to mystery, communion and mission as the three theological keys that summarize the council's teaching on the church. In the first three of the six messages he has offered to date, Pope Benedict has focused precisely on these three central themes.

It's important to note before going any further that the theme of vocation relates to every human being and particularly to every baptized Christian. Ultimately each person finds his or her truest identity in the "sincere gift of self" (as *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24 puts it) that is at the core of every vocation. Several of the messages for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations underline this. The 2001 message, for instance, says "every life is a vocation." The 1971 message speaks of the "common vocation to be Christians" within which "each of us is called to carry out a particular function for the realization of the design of God" (Romans 12:4, 7; 1 Corinthians 12:4).

The popes invite us on several occasions to meditate on how during his earthly life, Jesus takes the initiative in calling people to discover their truest identity in following him.

All Christians are called to help one another to discover and realize each other's vocation.³ Pope John Paul II wrote: "The discovery of each man and woman that he or she has his or her place in the heart of God and in the history of humanity is a starting point for a new vocational culture."⁴

The primary focus of most of the World

Day of Prayer for Vocation messages is, however, on vocations to the priesthood, to the consecrated life and to missionary service (be it lay or ordained). As Pope Benedict puts it: "God has always chosen some individuals to work with him in a more direct way, in order to accomplish his plan of salvation."⁵ The examples are many and are referred to in the messages: Moses and Aaron, Peter and Mary, Nathaniel and Paul, the Curé d'Ars and John Henry Newman.

It is these "vocations to work in a more direct way" with God that the messages have in mind. With these introductory remarks, I now begin.

Vocation is born in the "mystery" of God among us and in prayer

The very first word of the very first message broadcast by radio in 1964 is "pray." It's the invocation suggested by the Lord himself in the line that returns like a chorus throughout all of these messages, "therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37). Yes, vocation is a grace; it is rooted in a "love story"⁶ that starts not with us but in the mystery of God come among us in Jesus Christ.

From all eternity God has thought of each one of us in view of a specific word that he wants to announce to humankind as it unfolds in his Jesus-centered plan. In the "Letter to Ephesians" we read: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ ... just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.... With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will ... that he set forth in Christ ... as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1: 3-4; 9-10).

The popes invite us on several occasions to meditate on how during his earthly life, Jesus takes the initiative in calling people to discover their truest identity in following him. We see this in his call, for instance, of the first disciples, Andrew, Peter, James and John.

Throughout the messages for World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we are reminded to pray for this calling with trust. The popes want us to recognise that we are not despairing outsiders revering a distant God but rather people of faith who believe in Jesus' promise that in the Holy Spirit "until the end of time, right to the ends of the earth, he will be seeking out people of good will"⁷ who will co-operate in furthering his plan of uniting humankind in one family. When God makes a promise he does not deceive.

Faced with the decline in vocations in certain parts of the world, we need, therefore, to avoid negative attitudes, discouragement or pessimism. Pope John Paul in particular underlined the presence and assistance of the Risen Christ.⁸ We can rely on Jesus' promise: "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:19-20). Our prayer, calling and response (the three "passwords" in care of vocations as Pope John Paul II called them in his first message) need to take place within this horizon of hope.

Vocation offers new life

Recognizing that a vocation is born in the mystery of God who has come among us, the popes invite us to contemplate the beauty of the life that a vocation offers. The first disciples were fascinated in their conversion by the new life that opened up for them. Everything became secondary compared to it.

Pope Benedict reminds us that the weight of two millennia of history risks making it difficult to grasp the newness of this life, the "captivating mystery of divine adoption" that has

opened up for us both collectively and individually in Jesus Christ: “The vision is indeed fascinating: we are called to live as brothers and sisters of Jesus, to feel that we are sons and daughters of the same Father. This is a gift that overturns every purely human idea and plan.”⁹ We need to go against the tendency “to feel that we are self-sufficient to the point that we become closed to God’s mysterious plan for each of us” (2006).

Pope John Paul often recalled that the World Day of Prayer for Vocations occurs between Easter and Pentecost, a liturgical time when we are presented with the Risen Christ, the Good Shepherd, calling us to a new life. Vocation is, as he put it, a “call to life: to receive it and give it.”¹⁰ This is what those who encountered Jesus discovered. In him we find divine life (“in him was the life,” cf. John 1:4) and our life becomes unified around him and the kingdom. That’s why, as Paul VI puts it, “Nothing, no pleasure, no love can overcome or surpass” one’s vocation.¹¹

We are free to choose

While a vocation is born in the mystery of God come among us and while the life that is on offer is fascinating, there is also the mysterious nature of our response to a vocation. The exemplary form of response to is to be found “when some fishermen of Galilee, having met Jesus, let themselves be conquered by his gaze and his voice, and accepted his pressing invitation: ‘Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men’” (Mark 1:17; Matthew 4:19).¹² In this “letting themselves be conquered” we see a theme that is often mentioned in the messages—the theme of freedom. The popes urge us to contemplate the great dignity and awesomeness of our human condition. We don’t *have* to say yes to God. The dignity of our Christian liberty is that we *can* say yes. Freedom is the essential basis of every vocation.¹³

The Spirit of the Father and of Jesus certainly continues to make resound within each person the most personal callings to what Pope Paul calls “an adventure of love.”¹⁴ As the great missionary, St. Paul, puts it: “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

People face many difficulties in responding freely to a calling. The popes are well aware of this. They name some of them. For instance the world of religion no longer exercises the attraction it once did. Indeed in some ways it is incomprehensible to the psychology of young people.¹⁵ There is

the issue of the church itself in its permanent contradiction between ideal and reality. Unfortunately, the scandals in recent years have only increased that challenge. Today too there is a widespread mentality that favors personal non-commitment. A greater personal courage is needed today more than before to go against the current.¹⁶

Crisis in faith, love?

In their annual messages, the popes have also addressed the reasons behind the diminishment in numbers of clergy and religious in much of the developed world. The popes list both a crisis of faith and a crisis of love among the causes. Every vocation is born from faith, lives in faith, and perseveres with faith. After all, “no one follows a stranger. No one offers their life for an unknown.”¹⁷

Education in faith is necessary. But it is true to say that education in love is also needed. Every vocation is an act of love in response to the One who asks, “Do you love me? Do you love me more than these?” (John 21: 15, 17). Without knowing the logic of faith that works through love, without training in the high, indeed measureless measure

of love, young people ask “is it worthwhile”? So Paul VI asks: “Perhaps there’s a crisis in love, before a crisis of vocations?”¹⁸ Young people have to be helped to see that the positive values of human love, wealth, professional success, pleasure, success, power, in themselves good things, are not ultimate things, and so be helped to take the risk of abandoning themselves to the call of highest love of all, God, and in him to serve Jesus Christ in their neighbor.

People face many difficulties in responding freely to a calling. The popes are well aware of this. They name some of them. For instance the world of religion no longer exercises the attraction it once did.

Favorable conditions needed for listening

A vocation is born in mystery and is responded to in freedom. There are certainly problems, and worrisome issues, today, especially in certain regions of the church, but in his 1970 message Pope Paul VI affirmed that the lack of church vocations should be sought in ourselves rather than in young people! With the crisis of consumerism and the crisis in ideals, many



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young people are searching for an authentic style of life. This is fertile terrain for opening the topic of vocation. The popes encourage us toward a new “creativity in love” and new imagination in ways we might meet these searching young people, not least by making intelligent use of the modern means of social communication to get the message across: “Open your hearts to Christ.”

What comes across in the messages, however, is the need to help people attune their “spiritual senses” (hearing the voice, seeing the beauty, developing a taste to help others and serve the church¹⁹) to the call and beauty of a vocation. For that to happen, we certainly need to help young people use the classical means of discovering one’s vocation: listening to the Word of God, participating in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and penance, personal and liturgical prayer, spiritual direction, love for the Virgin Mary and ascetical practices.²⁰

In the course of these messages, the popes also under-

line the need to create favorable conditions for young people to perceive a vocation.²¹ They suggest two major paths we should travel in our vocation programming (a programming that Pope John Paul said was necessary): the pathway of communion and the pathway of mission.

Pathway of communion: renewing the ecclesial fabric

The whole church is called to renew an atmosphere where vocations can spring up and grow.²² Already in 1972 Pope Paul pointed out that the way of communion is important today, not least because a communitarian sensibility is so alive in today’s world. Pope John Paul speaks of remaking the Christian fabric of the church communities in the light of the ecclesiology of communion.²³

And that means renewing the life of communion within the church itself at every level—from the family which John Chrysostom called the “domestic Church” (called “first seminary” in the 1994 message and “permanent school of the civilization of love” in the 1998 message) to the “local Church,” from the “parish community” to the “school.” Since “the Church was born to live and to give life,”²⁴ all expressions of the life of the church must be sure it is generating the life of communion Jesus came to give in abundance.²⁵

The life of communion is characterized by the “rhythm” of “receiving-giving” that is nothing less than sharing in God’s own life.²⁶ In the 2003 message, Pope John Paul affirmed: “When interpersonal relationships are inspired to reciprocal service, a new world is created, and, in it, an authentic vocational culture is developed.” This is important in creating “a church for young people.”²⁷ An essential first step in promoting vocations, therefore, is ensuring that the Christian vocation itself, based on baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist is kept alive, that it be “perfectly Christian” (see Matthew 5:48).²⁸ And that means a renewed discovery of the Gospel: “A community that does not live generously according to the Gospel cannot but be a community poor in vocations.”²⁹

Only life generates life as the 1982 message puts it. All are called to be witnesses to the joy and fulfillment that comes from living in communion with Christ and one another in the light of the Gospel. Above all, those already within a special vocation—be it as a priest, a consecrated person or a missionary—are called to let themselves be attracted, conquered by the vocation, living it authentically in communion. By so doing, they will fascinate and attract others.

The subjective and objective dimensions of vocation

Several messages clarify why life in communion with others helps in distinguishing the “voice” of God. We are reminded that each vocation involves two aspects.³¹ On the one hand, there is the “interior” subjective expression of the voice within us, that of the Holy Spirit, the “silent voice” within the depths of each person. There can indeed be moments of “flashes of lightning” where an individual senses a calling. But then there is the need for a loudspeaker that helps that voice be heard in the “exterior” instruments of the human, social and concrete means of the church, such as the Word of God, the hierarchy, the explicit calling, the private chats and the encouragement of the family.³¹

It is imperative in a culture that so often highlights the subjective, feeling dimension of choices to remember the objective, exterior dimension. A vocation is not just our interior feeling. It comes from outside us. It is something that is prompted, encouraged, discerned and confirmed in interaction with others. If the life of communion is truly alive, it provides the atmosphere where vocations become clarified, difficulties are overcome and it is easier to say “yes.”

As Pope Benedict puts it, “This intense communion favors the growth of generous vocations at the service of the Church.... In order to foster vocations, therefore, it is important that pastoral activity be attentive to the mystery of the Church as communion because whoever lives in an ecclesial community that is harmonious, co-responsible and conscientious, certainly learns more easily to discern the call of the Lord.”³²

Being and speaking; personal chats

In considering the contribution of the life of communion, we can note a twofold task in vocational promotion: “being” and “speaking.”

All of us are called to “be” or “witness” by our lives to the new life of communion that has opened up in Jesus Christ. Unless young people see that life, they will never hear the call. As the 2010 message puts it, “witness awakens vocations.” We ourselves need constantly to be evangelized as well as to evangelize.³³ And in the light of the ecclesiology of communion, that entails also a ministerial conversion to collaboration among pastors themselves and among pastors and lay faithful.

But we must also speak of the life of communion. “Be a community that calls,” John Paul wrote in his 1986 message,

indicating the need to move from a pastoral “of waiting” to a “pastoral of proposing.” In the messages the words of the great missionary, Paul, are cited often: “And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Romans 10:14). A rector of a German seminary once said: “there are many Samuels but few Elis”! These messages remind us it is important to speak. Having the courage to open up the topic of vocation with a person is a sign of esteem for that person and can be a real moment of grace for him or her.

The “personal chat” as Pope Paul puts it, is an important instrument in the care of vocations. This is the logic of the “*cor ad cor loquitur*” coming from “the order of charity” that remembers each person is a unique person.³⁴ We need to develop more this personal chat with young people, helping them make good choices. In his last message Pope John Paul commented that there is a pressing need to implement an extensive plan of vocational promotion, based on personal contact. Seminarians too should be the “first animators of vocations among their peers by communicating their discovery to others.”³⁵

Some of the most beautiful passages of these messages are when the popes speak directly to young people.³⁶ It would be worth putting together and publishing a selection of some of these strikingly personal and direct texts.

Having the courage to open up the topic of vocation with a person is a sign of esteem for that person and can be a real moment of grace in their lives.

Pathway of mission: encourage young people’s generosity

The second major pathway in the care of vocations that runs through these messages is that of mission. The life that is born in God, lived and communicated in the community, is one that is destined to reach out to all. The messages suggest we foster vocations by a true education in the faith that gets young people to look outward not inward, knowing how to take “risks” for the Gospel and be builders of a new world as the faith inspires (2008).

In the 2003 message we read that: notwithstanding certain contrary forces, present also in the mentality of today, in the hearts of many young

people there is a natural disposition to open up to others, especially to the most needy. This makes them generous, capable of empathy, ready to forget themselves in order to put the other person ahead of their own interest.³⁷

Young people of today do not want words but facts. They want to build a new world. We need to build on this youthful dynamic and foster missionary engagement. Families can create such an atmosphere and “communicate a taste for helping one’s neighbor and serving the church, and cultivate good attitudes to welcoming and following the will of the Lord.”³⁸ The Catholic school as well as giving reasons for saying “yes” to a special vocation, needs also to “favor experiences and create an environment of faith, generosity and service that can help liberate young people from those conditions that make the response to the call of Christ ‘incipient’ or impossible.”³⁹

On a sociological-religious level, it is good that young people be helped hear the cries of humanity reaching them, pushing them to find a way to respond. It is essential they hear the cries of the poor, the suffering and the sick; the cries of those embittered looking for consolation, the cries of the hungry looking to be fed. Paul VI speaks of a “symphony of the vocation” that is heard in these cries.⁴⁰ The values of solidarity, fraternity,

Young people of today do not want words but facts. They want to build a new world. We need to build on this youthful dynamic and foster missionary engagement.

sacredness of life are clarified in reaching out to those in need. In this sense too, as Pope John Paul put it in his 2003 message, “*diakonia* is a true vocational pastoral journey” helping people to better understand their vocation.⁴¹ They begin to see that “life must be consecrated to something big”⁴² if Christians are to respond adequately.

Help to read “signals of the Spirit”

Involving young people in apostolic mission is good but it is not enough. We need people who will commit themselves to apostolic missionary life—for life! That is why, as Paul VI pointed out, young people need to move onto the religious-psychological level, and read the mysterious “signals of the Spirit” calling them to holiness.⁴³

Young people cannot do this on their own. For this a “charism” is needed.⁴⁴ They need to be engaged in a faith-journey that helps them bridge the gap between faith and life, faith and culture. Young people have to be helped to see that “the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes.”⁴⁵ They need also to be presented with the great missionary calling “which always stands in need of radical and total self-giving, of new and bold endeavours.”⁴⁶

Radical call to service

The popes remind us that young people need to be given the experience of being “volunteers of the Cross and Glory of Christ.”⁴⁷ The Jesus who attracts is the one who took the form of a servant (Philippians 2: 7-8) and laid down his life for others. The Good Shepherd said: “I offer my life ... I offer it myself” (John 10:17ff). As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, he offered his life to the service of the church: “Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). It is in following him in the call to serve that young people discover their truest identity in a sort death and resurrection that every call to mission entails.

Ultimately, it is in learning to love the Crucified Christ that people begin to realize there is a logic that leads them in directions they could never have imagined: “Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own

Read the popes’ messages for World Day of Prayer for Vocations

- Go to www.vatican.va.
- Click on “Messages.”
- Click on “World Day of Prayer for Vocations.”

The easiest way to access messages from more than six years ago is to do a Google search with the terms “Message World Day of Prayer for Vocations [year].”

belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go” (John 21:18). It is in responding yes to this logic, hidden in Christ, that people find true freedom and happiness.

Call to action for whole church

And so, we conclude. In this article, I’ve attempted to bring together the strands of the pope’s messages around the three central themes of mystery, communion and mission. They cannot be taken as three separate dimensions in the pastoral care of vocations. There is, of course, a mutual interaction between them.

No doubt readers of these messages will hear the popes’ concern—there is an urgent need for vocations to ordained ministry, consecrated life and missionary life. The pastoral care of vocations is one of the most important issues facing the church. Priests are needed because the church’s very constitution demands there be such vocations in the very structure of the church willed by Christ (“As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” John 20:21). Consecrated men and women living the evangelical counsels are necessary because everyone is poorer without those who point to the eternal. In addition the worldwide missionary mandate cries out for consecrated men and women.

The call to action from these 48 papal messages is addressed to the whole church but especially to bishops, presbyters, consecrated men and women and educators. In his 2005 message (written August 2004), Pope John Paul II concluded: “Young people need Christ, but they also know that Christ chose to be in need of them.” Ultimately, the messages address a very personal word to each bishop, presbyter, consecrated man and woman and missionary: offer your personal witness. Many are waiting to hear from us our story and the joy and fascination we have experienced in being called. After all, as Pope Benedict said to young people in Madrid for World Youth Day, “It is hard to put into words the happiness you feel when you know that Jesus seeks you, trusts in you, and with his unmistakable voice also says to you: ‘Follow me!’” (Mark 2:14). ■

1. See Leonardo Sapienza (ed.), *Messaggi per la Giornata Mondiale di Preghiera per le Vocazioni* (Rome: Rogate, 2003), pp. 14-15. All references to Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II’s

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messages are taken from this collection. The paragraph number refers to the paragraph in that book. Pope Benedict’s messages are available on line.

2. Ibid., p. 15.
3. 2002 Message, n. 383.
4. 1998 Message, n. 351.
5. 2007 Message.
6. 1984 Message, n. 236.
7. 1972 Message, n. 122.
8. John Paul, 1979 Message, n. 185.
9. 2006 Message.
10. 1982 Message. n. 207.
11. 1974 Message, n. 133.
12. 2007 Message.
13. 1968 Message, n. 52.
14. 1967 Message. n. 36.

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15. 1968 Message, n. 54.
16. 1974 Message, n. 144.
17. 1977 Message, n. 170.
18. 1977 Message, n. 173.
19. 1981 Message, n. 203 and n. 204.
20. See this summary in the 1990 Message, n. 286.
21. See for instance, the 1970 Message, n. 81.
22. 1975 Message, n. 153.
23. 1996 Message, n. 330 quoting *Christifideles Laici*, 34.
24. 1982 Message, n. 209.
25. The title of the 1982 Message is “Life Generates Life.”
26. 1982 Message, n. 213.
27. 1995 Message, n. 323.
28. 1970 Message, n. 85. See also 1983 Message, n. 222.
29. 1970 Message, n. 86. See also the 1996 Message n. 344.
30. See Pope Paul VI, General Audience, 5 May 1965, 17.
31. The Venerable Bede is quoted in the 1974 Message, n. 138: “The Lord who called Levi exteriorly with the word, with a divine inspiration prompted him interiorly that he might immediately follow Him who called him.”
32. 2007 Message. See also 1997 Message, 345 and 346.
33. In the 1976 Message, n. 158, Pope Paul writes: “now it’s up to us... to welcome his word and give it; to live it and bear witness to it; to be evangelized and to evangelize.”
34. See General Audience, 5 May, 1965.
35. 1984 Message, n. 233.
36. In his 1995 Message, n. 322, Pope John Paul points out that young people risk being deprived of authentic growth because they find no one to whom they can put the question the rich young man put: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
37. 2003 Message, n. 392.
38. 1981 Message, n. 204.
39. 1989 Message, n. 277.
40. 1974 Message, n. 135; also John Paul II, 1985 Message, 242.
41. cf. *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 27c quoted in the 2003 Message.
42. 1971 Message, n. 101.
43. 1974 Message, n. 136 and 1971 Message, n. 106.
44. 1974 Message, n. 136.
45. 1969 Message, n. 63 quoting *Lumen Gentium*, 31.
46. 2008 Message quoting John Paul II’s missionary encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 66.
47. General Audience, 5 May, 1965, n. 19.

Four vocation ministers relate their experiences and offer their tips on exhibiting at the National Catholic Youth Conference or World Youth Day.

Vocation exhibits at large events: What happens? Is it worthwhile?

BY BROTHER DAVID HENLEY; SISTER DURSTYNE FARNAN, OP; SISTER MICHELLE SINKHORN, OSB; AND SISTER PAT DOWLING, CBS

GLENMARY AT NCYC: CRUCIAL PLACE TO BE PRESENT

by Brother David Henley

GLENMARY HOME MISSIONERS has been a regular exhibitor at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) for the past 10 years. Glenmary's Vocation Department participates in this and similar events for one reason—as vocation directors we must be present where young people are present. And this year there were more than 23,000 faith-filled Catholic youth present at NCYC 2011. How could we not be there, too? For communities like Glenmary, which doesn't have its own school or other institution that serves youth, I think it is crucial to be involved in the major Catholic youth events around the country.

At this year's NCYC our vocation booth was a joint effort with the Glenmary Sisters. Sharing a double-sized booth allowed us to have a large enough space to chat with both young men and women. To catch people's attention, we had a display board, signs and maps. But given that there were over 80 other religious communities with booths we wanted to have something unique to make us stand out. Since one of the NCYC traditions includes teens wearing and trading goofy hats, we decided to hold various drawings at our booth to give away hats. Not only did our hat drawings attract people to our

booth, but it also provided us with e-mail contact information for everyone who entered.

Apart from the hat e-mail list, which will allow us to follow up with the youth who stopped by, we also encouraged young men who seemed like particularly good or interested candidates to fill out an information sheet, giving us a means to continue to be in contact with them, too. Many of the youth we meet at events like these are beginning their discernment, so instead of waiting for them to contact us again, we will follow up with them.

Free popcorn kept crowd coming

We also set up a popcorn machine at our booth because, as we all know, the smell of fresh popcorn draws a crowd. We considered it our mission to “feed the hungry” conference goers with a free bag of hot popcorn. And the line of people waiting for popcorn provided a captive audience to listen to a pitch about Glenmary and the home mission need. On more than one occasion I heard people say, “I could smell that popcorn on the other side of the room and had to search out where it was coming from.”

The best compliment came from another vocation director who said, “Thanks to Glenmary for the popcorn; you drew more participants to the entire Vocation Village, which benefited all of us.” I think that the popcorn was a good way to draw

people in, but I would not recommend it for an event I was working by myself because I would be too busy popping corn and not visiting with people. Luckily we had a number of seminarians and other volunteers at our booth to make the popcorn, which allowed my associate and me to talk with visitors.

Making contact with the youth who attend NCYC and other similar events is important for many reasons. It allows our community to plant the seed of a vocation. It provides young people contact with a vowed religious person, which they may not have at home because of the diminishing number of religious. And our contact allows us to share a significant moment with young people—a moment in which they are excited about their faith and are hungering for more.

At events like these I find the conversations vary. Some young people say they have never thought about religious life, while others mention that they want to get married and have children someday. Some of the youth say they have never been invited to consider religious life until that moment, and others come prepared with a list of questions about religious life. I think the key is to be approachable and welcoming and to try to assess each person who stops by our booth by asking a few questions and answering a lot of questions, too.

My recommendation to any religious communities interested in finding prospective new members is to have a booth at NCYC in the future. To be honest, I was surprised that fewer than 100 communities were present this year. I would hope to see more at future events, because I think that an increase would not signify more competition but more collaboration. More communities present would mean that those attending NCYC would have more opportunity to interact with religious and hopefully would feel more encouraged to respond “yes” to a call to religious life.

If we want to find and attract youth, then we have to be present where young people are present. Our task as vocation directors, counselors and promoters is to invite. An event like this gives us valuable face time with teens. They get to see we are real people. They get a chance to play and joke with us, and we get a chance to listen to their concerns and the questions as they struggle to find their call. High school students may be too young to join our communities, but nevertheless we have to plant, water and nurture the seeds so that when they *are* old enough to join, they are already familiar with our community.

Establishing relationships

The CARA study entitled, “The Class of 2011: Survey of Ordi-



Brother David Henley at the popcorn machine. The popcorn giveaway drew many visitors to his booth and surrounding booths.

nands to the Priesthood” states, “On average, ordinands from religious institutes report that they knew the members of their religious institute six years before they entered the seminary.” I think this statistic would also be similar for those who are joining communities of brothers and sisters, too. I knew my own community, Glenmary, for over 10 years before I was ready to join.

Vocation directors need to meet prospective candidates at a young age in order to start building a relationship. NCYC, like other Catholic youth events, provides a valuable place to start, a place where youth are already excited about their faith and longing for more. As vocation directors we need places to meet these young Catholics so that we can continue inviting them into a deeper relationship. The 2009 CARA study, “Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference,” found that “institutes that sponsor vocation promotion and discernment programs directed toward college students and young adults are more

likely to have new members than those who do not sponsor programs for these groups. Although the relationship is not as strong statistically, targeting high school students also appears to have an impact on attracting and retaining new members.” From the relationships we begin at events like NCYC, we can build a group of potential candidates to invite to “Come and See” events we sponsor within our own communities.

Finally, one last reason I recommend exhibiting at the National Catholic Youth Conference is the fantastic, high-energy spirit of the event. There was little or no time to sit at the booth and wait for the youth to come to us. They just kept coming (maybe it was the free popcorn!). It was essential that we were on our feet and ready to engage with each person; otherwise people might walk on by. At our booth we were on our feet for 10 hours on both Friday and Saturday. I recommend that any vocation director exhibiting at NCYC invest in a comfortable pair of shoes! The physical demands aside, sponsoring a booth at NCYC was a joyous 20 hours of being present to young people and sharing the mission and spirit of Glenmary Home Missioners.

Brother David Henley is vocation director for the Glenmary Home Missioners.

ADRIAN DOMINICANS AT NCYC: ENTHUSIASTIC FIRST-TIMERS

By Sister Durstynne Farnan, OP

LAST WINTER I PONDERED whether to attend the National Catholic Youth Conference scheduled for November 2011. I wasn't really sure whether my community should have a booth, but the more I thought about it, the more I felt we had to go. In fact, we even became a sponsor of the event. I had never chosen to do this before, but I decided to take the risk and go for it. (The good news is that because the event is biennial, you have two years to make sure you have enough money in the budget to accomplish such a task.) So, how do I feel now that we've been to NCYC? I believe it was one of the best decisions about vocation outreach I could have made.

First of all, there is nothing like the energy of youth, and there is nothing quite like their curiosity. But it's not just the energy of the teens that is uplifting but also the enthusiasm of the other exhibitors as well. All of us had a great passion to provide the best possible experience for the attendees. So, what exactly took place during our time there?

First, as a bronze sponsor our name and logo was on a certain amount of name tags that participants received. They were nicely made and very visible. They provided a great way for the kids to go on a scavenger hunt to find the vendor that was sponsoring their name tags, and several teens did just that.

We decided to bring two signs to help define our booth, and it just so happened that two of the four of us were on the 7-foot banner we brought along. That was great because the teens could see that the women on the poster were real and they were at the conference. It made our banner more authentic. Like other vocation directors, we had candy at our table, but we also had spirit and information that described who we were. We gave out our magazine featuring the profession of a new member with our prioress, and inside we placed our brochure and prayer card for vocations. We also put our

QR sticker on the magazine for reference when the students got home. (A QR, or quick response, code is a symbol that takes smartphone users directly to a particular Web page.) This was really fun. We created our own Dominican stickers and sayings, such as, “Dominic: Stellar Scholar,” “Dominic: Friend of God,” and “Dominic's Footprint was Carbon Neutral.” These were fun to hand out because they gave us a way to interact with kids and tell them a little about Dominican life. “We've got stickers” was an entrée to the students; then we continued to invite them to consider the great life we have. I was amazed at how responsive the students were and at their willingness to take time to converse with us and learn more about our Dominican life. Since 2007 we have been making our own buttons with our vision: “Seek Truth, Make Peace, and Reverence Life.” This too gave us a chance to say more about who Dominicans are. The NCYC teens were very responsive. We invited them to consider this vision as part of their discernment.

I imagine we met around 3,000 students out of the 21,000. This number can keep you busy for sure. Someone had advised me not to go alone, so I arranged to have Sister Erin, second year novice; Sister Mary, a former vocation outreach director; and Sister Mary, an elder, join me at our booth

There is nothing like the energy of youth, and there is nothing quite like their curiosity. But it's not just the energy of the teens that is uplifting but also that of the other exhibitors as well.



Sister Durstyne Farnan, OP with visitors at the Adrian Dominican booth at NCYC.

that weekend. This was an excellent decision. It was a great way for the teens to see us all working together and using our own gifts as we talked to them. There was no barrier, only a variety of conversations going on around the booth.

Over the course of the weekend, we met co-workers of some of our sisters, former students from our schools, former parishioners and even relatives of our sisters. One young man asked us if we knew his great aunt, and I said sure and proceeded to tell him a great story about his aunt. These were wonderful stories to take back home. I got out my iPhone and typed in names of students, parishioners, etc. so I wouldn't forget who was who and so I could take messages home to sisters. We also took pictures of those related to sisters or connected to places where our sisters ministered. We always asked the teens for written photo permission, and we then exchanged names, e-mails and Facebook names. This was awesome.

Would I ever do this again? YES! And I would like to invite other Dominican communities to join us. We all have a similar charism, with different ways of expressing it. I hope to arrange a conference call about how various Dominican communities could collectively depict the charism together. I en-

vision something like every hour stopping and chanting a psalm antiphonally with the students at the booth. I believe kids are looking to us for some ways to engage them and give a glimpse of who and what we are. I have no doubt that this could be a wonderful witness. I know there was a big investment on our part to be at the booth this year. But I know it was worth it on many levels; we enjoyed the vendors we shared space with, and we enjoyed getting to talk with the students.

I would recommend that everyone, especially those in the Midwest, attend the NCYC conference and support it. You never know what the outcome might be. But for sure you can say you witnessed the faith of the young today, and that it is palpable and powerful. We need to support one another on this faith journey that is vocation ministry. What better way than to be present at the National Catholic Youth Conference? I hope to see plenty of vocation ministers in 2013 in Indianapolis!

Sister Durstyne Farnan, OP is vocation director for the Adrian Dominican Sisters, headquartered in Adrian, MI.

FERDINAND BENEDICTINES AT NCYC: ENERGIZED AND UPLIFTED

By Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, OSB

AS THE DIRECTOR OF VOCATION ministries for my community, I attended NCYC for the first time in 2009 in Kansas City, KS. When it came time to plan for this year's NCYC, there was no doubt in my mind that we would have an exhibit. In Kansas everything was new to me and slightly overwhelming. This time, I was ready and excited for the event. It is a wonderful opportunity to connect with young, enthusiastic Catholics who are on fire for their faith. Many of them have never even met a religious sister before, and the vocation area of NCYC's theme park provided a wonderful opportunity for them to meet and interact with a large variety of religious communities, women and men alike.

Each religious community that exhibited at NCYC was provided a space of about 10 feet wide and 4 feet deep, a 6 foot table, two chairs, and a small waste basket. For my community's exhibit I had a display board with our core values and pictures of our sisters on it. On the table for people to pick up I had general vocation brochures, a volunteer-program brochure, a special vocation booklet, DVDs and pens. I also had a paper for them to sign and leave their contact information if they wanted to stay in touch.

When I got to the convention center, following the directions provided for me, I found the loading docks and had 30 minutes to unload. Because I drove, I was able to take a push cart with me, which was a real God-send. I took my materials to my exhibit area and went back to park my car. It took me about 30 more minutes to set up my exhibit space.

Besides the brochures, DVDs and pens, I also kept behind my display a few special bracelets and buttons for trading with young people—that is big at NCYC. Many youth groups, regions or dioceses create an item to bring with them, and then they trade those items with young people from other dioceses for their items. It was fun to become a part of this trading, not so much to get things but to show an interest in what young people are interested in and to hear about where they



Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, OSB at her booth at NCYC.

are from. Many youth were excited, and most were willing to talk about themselves and their youth group. I even scored a cow hat on the first day, which I proudly wore for the rest of the conference since cows were the trademark for the Indiana region. By the end of the conference I had buttons, pins, necklaces, bracelets and more from all over the nation!

Throughout the conference many young people and adults stopped by our booth. Some knew of our community; some had been to Ferdinand, and others had no idea where Ferdinand even was. I stopped many groups that walked by, big or small, and offered them pens. Many times I traded items with the youth, too. Both the pens and the trading provided good conversation starters.

At one point a high school girl, who looked to be maybe a junior, stopped at my booth and asked lots of questions about how we live religious life, and she asked if she could talk to me the next day. She shared

with me that she has a great desire to enter religious life but said it was overwhelming to consider because of the many communities and the variety of lifestyles. I acknowledged that what she said is true and that she had a wonderful opportunity there at NCYC to look at various women's communities. I gave her a quick "low-down" of the types of communities and congregations to help her understand what she was seeing as she visited the exhibits. True to her word, she came back. She had visited all the exhibits of religious women. We had another wonderful conversation, which she walked away from animated about her vocational call and relieved that she didn't have to figure it all out that day or even this year.

The vocation area constantly had young people and adults wondering around. Directly in front of my booth was a Corn Hole game where the youth could stop, put down their things and play. It was a joy watching them have so much fun. On one end of the vocation area there was what was called The Coffee House where various bands played off and on. This created an atmosphere of enthusiasm and movement. At times it made it hard to talk with people at the exhibit, but mostly it wasn't a problem.

I stopped many groups that walked by, big or small, and offered them pens. Many times I traded items with the youth, too. Both the pens and the trading provided good conversation starters.

At a personal level it was exciting to see many young people I knew from the deanery where I lived before I entered the Ferdinand Benedictines. Many came to my exhibit and greeted me with a big hug. I also met youth with whom I had worked in a program called Faith in Action, and they remembered me and were happy to see me again. Still others were adults who knew me from events in their deanery, and some knew me from when I was a teenager. I even met some youth from St. Henry, the parish in Owasso, OK which I attended as a child.

All these things were rewarding, and it was good to make connections, share our way of life, and be present to these young Catholics, but for me the best part of NCYC was to see and experience firsthand the zeal and sheer joy of our young church. It gives me great hope for the future of our Catholic faith. Anyone who was there and experienced a stadium full of 23,000 faithful cannot deny God is alive and well in our nation's young Catholics!

I was asked if I would recommend having an NCYC booth to other vocation directors. To that I would give a resounding, "YES!" Is it a lot of work? Yes. Is it exhausting? Yes. Is it expensive? Possibly. Is it worthwhile? Absolutely!

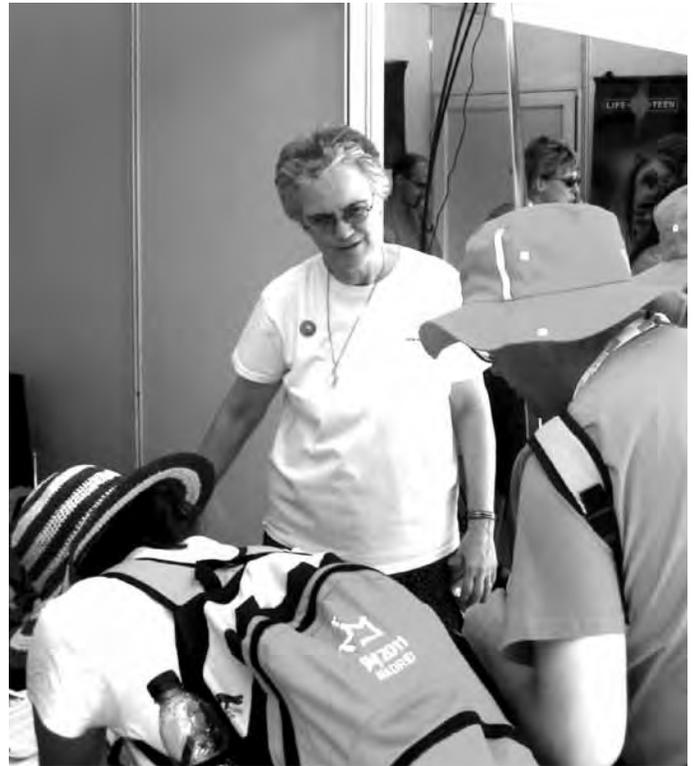
Sister Michelle Sinkhorn, OSB has served her community, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, IN, as director of vocation ministries since 2007. She has been a presenter at the community's long-running workshop, "Awakening: A Rebirth of Enthusiasm in Vocations," and she has served on the community's Monastic Council for six years.

SISTERS OF BON SECOURS AT WORLD YOUTH DAY: A QUALIFIED SUCCESS

By Sister Pat Dowling, CBS

IMAGINE BEING in another country in the midst of one and a half million people with the air charged with anticipation in spite of sweltering 100-degree heat. The atmosphere feels like a festival, with music and people chanting and singing in the streets, waving large country flags as groups process down roads, claiming ground space for a chance to see the world's most famous person.

All this and more were my experience in Madrid, Spain, the site for World Youth Day (WYD) 2011, an event that drew young adults from every country imaginable—China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Pacific and Indian Ocean island nations, Rwanda, India, Korea, Dubai, Cuba, European and South American countries, etc. They came to celebrate their Catholic faith.



Sister Pat Dowling, CBS talks to World Youth Day pilgrims who stopped by her community's booth in Madrid.

They attended liturgies and received the sacraments, and went to days of catechesis to hear bishops explain the transforming message of the Gospel and to grapple with the most pressing questions of our day. They came to pray together and to hear and see Benedict XVI and to experience the universality of the church. WYD culminated with a pilgrimage walk to Cuatro Vientos, an airfield where pilgrims held vigil all night with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by liturgy celebrated by Pope Benedict the next day. Even though the closest pilgrims could get to the pope was to see him via a jumbo screen, his being there was a highlight.

I went to World Youth Day in Toronto nine years ago as a vocation exhibitor with the hope of raising awareness about religious life and the Sisters of Bon Secours and also with the hope of contacting young adults who might form relationships with our community. My goals for WYD Madrid 2011 were somewhat different. We went to share our love of the consecrated life and to show that this life is a valid, viable option today; and we went in hope of giving witness to the richness of global diversity since we are an international congregation of diverse cultures. After reorganizing our structures

as an international congregation in 2009, collaborative projects became easier. World Youth Day became an opportunity for our country vocation directors to participate together on a large-scale project. Though we went as vocation directors from Bon Secours, we also went as pilgrims to participate and learn. And yes, we hoped that our presence at a vocation booth would lead to potential vocation contacts with whom we might follow-up.

The Sisters of Bon Secours were one of 75 exhibitors. Not all exhibitors were vocation directors; some represented movements or organizations such as Life Teen or pro-life groups.

Our connected, box-styled kiosks measured 7-feet wide by 7-feet high and 6-feet deep and came with a locked closet. Each secured rolled door kiosk had a small round table and two chairs and came with a wide awning. Like most congregations we distributed informational material and holy cards. In a desire to promote the Gospel message of global unity and peace, we made single bead bracelets as a giveaway, and pilgrims wrote their name and country on cut-out feet placed on our Path of Peace. Thousands of pilgrims passed by our booth, and talking with so many young people who were excited to be at WYD and proud to be representing their country was just as exciting for us.

What we learned

Similar to Toronto many young people visited the booth out of curiosity, and many browsed the booths as something to do to pass the time; others stopped to gather useful material to carry back to their country, while the very few intentionally visited booths to ask questions and gather information to consider for their future.

A vocation director from Region 4 attending WYD as a pilgrim saw me on the street and asked if having a vocation booth at WYD was worth the cost, time and effort. It was too early to answer fully at that time. By the end of WYD, my answer was a qualified yes, depending on one's goals for being there. The ability to give witness to our life and to be present to young adults who are searching to understand their path in life was worthwhile for participants and for us. We met pilgrims from countries represented within our congregation, and this did not go unnoticed by the visitors to our booth. Though we had individuals sign-up for follow-up information, it has not led to significant response to our e-mails in the U.S., although Bon Secours vocation directors from other countries have had more fruitful correspondence with WYD contacts. While we saw young people from many countries,

we did not experience a large number from the U.S. at our booth. Many U.S. citizens gathered at the air-conditioned Palacio de los Deportes, a site where two or three English speaking religious communities from the states had exhibits and co-sponsored talks, prayer and concerts with the Knights of Columbus. (VISION Vocation Network was present at this location.) Because of our location, we did not have focused exposure to those from the United States.

In the end I believe our participation did give witness to our life choice as women religious, and the experience was fruitful. We were able to witness first-hand the enthusiasm of many young adults gathering to celebrate their faith in Jesus and see their unity as young Catholics. This was an incredible experience, and it gives hope for the Catholic Church of the not so distant future. ■

Sister Pat Dowling, CBS has been vocation director for the Sisters of Bon Secours since 2001.

The next big thing

WORLD YOUTH DAY Rio de Janeiro, second half of July, 2013 See en.rio2013.com

NATIONAL CATHOLIC YOUTH CONFERENCE Indianapolis, IN 2013
Details to come.



Pilgrims with the World Youth Day Cross

Younger sisters are engaged and hopeful and are already beginning to develop the networks and skills they will need as they grow and develop in religious life.

Qualities of younger women in religious life today

BY SISTER SUSAN ROSE FRANCOIS, CSJP

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING in vowed religious life. Can you feel it? Can you name it? Is it an intangible hope, or something more embodied and real?

It seems to me that one way to get a better handle on this “something” is to look closely at the types of conversations we seek to have with one another about religious life. While in 2010 our women in leadership searched for “Hope in the Midst of Darkness,” the theme of the most recent 2011 Leadership Conference of Women Religious Assembly was “Mystery Unfolding.” Meanwhile, formation folks and others gathered at the 2011 Religious Formation Conference Congress posed this question: “Prophetic Religious Life: If Not Now ... When?” We have shifted our attention from the midst of darkness to a mystery that is unfolding, not in some distant future, but now, in this precious present moment.

I was not privy to those particular conversations, but I

was part of a group of younger women religious who invited sisters of all ages to join in intergenerational circles of conversation at the July 2011 Giving Voice National Gathering in Chicago. More than 150 women, ranging in age from 25 to 88, accepted our invitation to “Engage the Emergence of Religious Life in the 21st Century.” Again, the emphasis of our conversations was not on some far off future, but rather how we live this future that is already emerging now.

It strikes me as significant that we have shifted our important communal conversations from imagining or talking about the future of religious life to actively engaging that future in our present reality. We may not know where God is calling us, but we are already on the way. Perhaps we’re even at a place where we can confidently welcome those brave souls who are coming to walk with us into this emerging future.

Large-minded, courageous souls

When Margaret Anna Cusack, known as Mother Francis Clare, founded my religious community, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, in 1884 she sensed the “something” that was happening in her time. She sought women to walk with her into that emerging future. “We are beginning a new order,” she wrote. “We want brave, noble, large-minded, courageous souls.” Such women came, to my congregation and to yours, first in twos and threes, and later in larger novitiate classes. They opened hospitals and homes for the blind, educated

Sister Susan Rose Francois, CSJP recently professed perpetual vows with the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. She is on the staff of the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center in Seattle, Washington and is a member of the national core team for Giving Voice. Prior to entrance, Sister Susan served as City Elections Officer in Portland, Oregon. Her blog is Musings of a Discerning Woman (www.actjustly.blogspot.com)



children, cared for orphans, and provided safe spaces for low-income and marginalized women to thrive.

Today we find ourselves in a different space with different needs—in our increasingly globalized world, in our church and in our religious communities. And yet, it seems to me that not only are brave, noble, large-minded, and courageous souls needed today, God is calling them. Perhaps even more astounding, in light of cultural, social and economic conditions that make such a choice seem illogical at best, a new generation is answering God’s call to religious life.

In a culture which deems commitment an irrelevant dream, women are coming in twos and threes to discern a life commitment in service of the Gospel. In a society where virtual relationships abound, women are consciously choosing to

live in real-life intergenerational local communities and religious houses where they might be the youngest member by 30 to 50 years. In a time of economic crisis, rising poverty and uncertainty about the future, women are seeking ways to live more simply and gently on this earth.

Just as every generation has before, my peers in religious life—women in their 20s, 30s and 40s—bring unique gifts to our common “program of religious life” in and for the world (Schneiders).¹ Younger women religious bring energy for mission, capacity for leadership and inter-congregational connec-

It strikes me as significant that we have shifted our important communal conversations from imagining or talking about the future of religious life to actively engaging that future in our present reality.

Generations in religious life today

GENERATION NAME	BIRTH YEARS	AGE IN 2011	PERCENT OF U.S. ADULT POPULATION
Millennials	1977-1992	19-34	30%
Generation X	1965-1976	35-46	19%
Boomers	1946-1964	47-65	34%
Silent Generation	1937-1945	66-74	7%
G.I Generation	Before 1936	75+	9%

tions that would seem entirely appropriate, and needed, as we engage the emerging future of religious life. That is not to say that it is all up to the newer generation, but that perhaps collectively, younger and young-at-heart, “we are the ones we have been waiting for.”²

Talking ‘bout my generation

Speaking of “my generation” in religious life is a bit of a misnomer. Younger women entering religious life today span two generations—Generation X and Millennials. As I enter my fourth decade of life later this year, I fall firmly within the former category. It

is also important to name and recognize the increasingly intercultural reality of religious life. Just because I am relatively close in age to my novitiate classmate from Kenya does not mean that we share the same experiences or expectations.

To further complicate matters, if I count my peers in religious life based not on year of birth but year of entrance, then the group expands to include members of the Boomer generation as well. Moreover, if I count as my peers those with whom I pray, live and minister on a daily basis, then the group expands even wider into the intergenerational mix that is religious life. Given our intergenerational reality, it would probably behoove all of us to look more closely at the wide range of generations living religious life today (see chart on page 33.)

What does the mix look like in your congregation? I was struck by the realization that while Generation X and Millennials together make up 49 percent of the overall adult population, we are a very small minority in contemporary American religious life. More than 90 percent of perpetually professed women religious are over the age of 60 (Bendyna, 5).

Is it any wonder then, that many of the conversations at the Giving Voice National Gathering this summer centered around our intergenerational reality? As one of the Boomer participants asked during the conference, “How do we bridge



Younger and older sisters share their perspectives on religious life during a Giving Voice conference.

the gap between our younger members and our older ones? Gap = age, culture, energy, desires for community, dying vs. living” (Giving Voice, 3). This gap is experienced not only by the younger members but by all generations in religious life.

Mind the gap

I was lucky enough during my novitiate experience to spend three months living with our sisters in London, England. Each day as I would wait in the underground station, I would see the signs painted on the train platform that said, “Mind the Gap,” warning of the danger of stumbling into the subway train tracks. In religious life, it is important to recognize and name the gap, even as we look for the gifts that younger women bring. I am not saying that we need to obsess about the gap, but we also cannot afford to ignore it. We must mind the gap, paying attention to the challenges as we welcome the blessings it brings both for religious life and the world.

During that same novitiate year, I also spent three months living with our sisters in Jersey City, NJ. One night, trying to make conversation as we were preparing our evening meal in the kitchen, one of my sister housemates asked: “Su-

san, where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?” As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she realized her mistake! At the same time however, it was hard for her to imagine that she was having a seemingly peer-to-peer relationship with someone who hadn’t experienced this world-changing event. “I wasn’t even born when Kennedy was shot or when we landed on the moon,” I replied. We bonded over our own “Pearl Harbor” moment, which to me epitomizes the challenges and blessings of the gap. You can imagine the conversations that followed, engaging our very different life experiences on everything ranging from Vatican II to cultural diversity.

Yes, there are other spheres, such as families and workplaces, where generations come together. But where else do such a wide range of generations join their lives, daily rubbing elbows, praying together, gathering at table, sharing hopes and dreams and saying goodbye to dear friends? Perhaps this is one of the gifts that contemporary religious life itself can bring to our troubled world. We are a living experiment in intergenerational living and dialogue.

Wisdom women

When my Giving Voice friends gather for our “young nun fun,” we often share our experiences of living with the gap. While our age-peers outside of religious life trade tips on the best pre-school or discuss career developments, we know more than we should about the latest in hearing aid technology and hip replacements. Coming together to share stories, there is a relief in being able to let off steam in a safe space where our crazy intergenerational living stories don’t seem that crazy.

Yet we also share a common sense of being blessed to have access to a resource that none of our age-peers outside of religious life have—the wisdom women in our communities. “We have the great gift of learning from many wisdom figures and pioneers in our communities,” said Sister Jessi Beck, PBVM in her talk on the opening night of the Giving Voice National Gathering. “No doubt, they inspired many of us to enter religious life. Right now I look to these women in my own community for their strength, resilience, and wisdom to help me find the way forward with them” (Beck, 2).

While being in relationship with our community wisdom women is a gift for us, it is also a challenge and a responsibility. As the remnants of the large novitiate classes of the 1950s and 1960s continue to age gracefully, those few of us “younger ones” will need to shift to more of a caretaker mode. We will be caretakers not only for these women we have come to love

deeply, but caretakers of the dreams, passions, charisms and very future of religious life. Hopefully some of the wisdom rubs off on us so that we are up to the task!

It is also crucial to name and honor the reality that we will also be saying goodbye to our wisdom women. In our more serious moments at Giving Voice gatherings, this “elephant in the living room” usually comes to the fore. I will never forget one of my first Giving Voice retreats when a 20-something novice remarked with deep feeling how hard it is to get to know our infirm sisters one day, and attend their funeral the next. You could have heard a pin drop in the room as we all thought of some of our own dear friends we have lost. I hope and believe that by developing peer relationships, we will be able to be community to each other across congregational lines as we balance the reality of diminishment with our belief in the emerging future.

While they may be novices to religious life, younger members are by no means a blank slate or an unmolded lump of clay waiting to be formed.

Lived experience

Religious life is my “second career.” I entered community at the age of 32 after spending 11 years in municipal government administration. While I do hope and pray that I absorb some of the wisdom of my elders, I also recognize that I and other members of my generation bring many gifts and skills that are welcomed and called upon in community. Ask any newer member, and I am sure she will be able to recount multiple examples of serving as unofficial “tech support” for her sisters.

Most of the women entering religious life today, whether they are Millennials or members of Generation X, bring with them real world experiences well beyond their family of origin. While they may be novices to religious life, they are by no means a blank slate or an unmolded lump of clay waiting to be formed. Most have professional, spiritual, ministerial and community living experiences to draw upon. They have experienced and appreciate the rich cultural diversity present in their workplaces and friendships.

While they may seem “young,” especially in light of the age gap present in most communities, they have also lived

life. This poses both challenges and opportunities for creative imagining as we look at our religious formation programs. As you might imagine, this too was a common topic of lively conversation at the Giving Voice National Gathering. The conversations I heard expressed a common desire for formation programs that honor the lived experience of newer members, recognize our increasingly intercultural reality, and operate as an adult model of incorporation that is life-giving.

Energy for mission

In the business world, there has been a good deal of research into the attitudes and aptitudes different generations bring to the workplace. The emphasis is normally on generational differences. Perhaps this is why I was so surprised by the commonality I found in one such report. When asked what keeps them motivated or satisfied at work, the number-one answer for all four generations—Millennials, Generation X, Boomers and Silent Generation—was “challenging, stimulating, and varied work” (Scheef and Thielfoldt, 7). Translated to religious life, you might say that each of us is committed to the challenging demands of prayer, ministry and community in our common program for the world. Otherwise we would not be here!

Women entering religious life today bring great energy for mission. No doubt part of this is the energy that comes with chronological youth, but there is something more. I believe that it is also intimately connected to the drive to be part of something bigger. In 2012 a young woman can do the *what* of our life as a single or married woman. Why then enter a religious community? The answer seems to lie in the *who* and *why*.

When I decided to make the leap into religious life, I was largely motivated by the *why*. After more than 10 years as a civil servant, I wanted to more intentionally connect my work for social justice to God’s project for a better world. A few years later when it came time to discern ministry during temporary profession, the *who* came into play. Who am I in ministry? Answer: a Sister of St. Joseph of Peace. I decided to seek a ministry opportunity in one of our co-sponsored ministries. In addition to the *what*, I actively sought manifestations of the *who* and the *why*: public witness, corporate action and shared mission in service of the Gospel.

My experience resonates with one of the findings of the 2009 vocation study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. “When asked about various ministry settings, most respondents express a rather strong preference for ministry with other members of their institute and ministry spon-



Teresa Posakony speaks at the Giving Voice gathering in Chicago in July 2011

sored by their institute” (CARA, 86). While this desire might seem more traditional or limiting to members who may have felt pigeon-holed by assigned corporate ministries in the past, it seems to me that our “rather strong preference” is tied to our energy for mission. We bring our energy to the common program, and we are energized in return.

Capacity for leadership

We will certainly need this energy! If we exist for the world, then given the current state of affairs we have a big job ahead of us. And, as we all know, there are not hordes of young women breaking down our doors ... at least not at the moment. Diminishment is part of our shared reality across the generations.

Over the five years that I have been attending gatherings of younger women religious organized by Giving Voice, I have noticed an interesting shift. While my earlier experiences were marked by funny stories about our struggles in this life, my more recent conversations have given me an impression of a generation reconciling its belief in the future of religious life with the reality of diminishment. Questions keep bubbling up to the surface like:

“How are we called to be in these days or years of transition when the immense and growing needs of God’s people demand that we do so much?”

“How can I re-found my community?”

“What are we willing to do as a community and as individuals to meet the challenges of religious life today?”

“What is our generation’s gift to the church?” (Giving Voice, 1).

These actual questions are not those of elected leaders but of women with five to 10 years in community. Do you read what I read in those questions? Hope? Action? Willingness to engage the messiness? Capacity for leadership?

It would seem that the young women coming to religious life today are hitting the ground running. We know there is so much work to be done for our common program, for the world. We also know that our cohort of co-workers is dwindling and weary. We do not have time to waste complaining or moaning—although this will of course happen and at times can be very healthy. We’re ready to have the critical conversations and dig in. Whatever the reasons for this shift, I believe it demonstrates a capacity and readiness for leadership on the part of many younger women religious today. This in turn is a tremendous gift to religious life as we live the future now.

Inter-congregational connections

Lastly, I believe there is also a less obvious gift hidden in the fact that most of us are the youngest members of our own community by many years. Because of necessity, and with the support and encouragement of our wisdom women, we have sought out age-peers in religious life. Whether through inter-congregational formation programs, Giving Voice gatherings, or Facebook, we are building connections and relationships with other younger religious across the country.

These relationships hold both personal and collective power. On the personal level, younger sisters receive life giving and sustaining support on the journey. We have age-peers who understand religious-life-speak without translation! On the collective level, I think we are only beginning to understand the transformative power of inter-congregational connections.

We give each other energy as we confirm each other’s love of our own religious community and commitment to religious life. We provide one another with a safe space to engage the tough questions. In some ways, we are our own leadership lab. The relationships we are building today will provide road maps and traveling companions as we journey into our shared unknown future.

We may not be able to clearly and succinctly name the “something” that is happening in religious life, but we have experienced it, and today at least that is enough. As my Giv-

ing Voice T-shirt says: “I ♥ Religious Life and believe in its future.” ■

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1. Sandra Schneiders, IHM argues that religious life does not exist for itself or for its members but for the world. Religious life “exists for a program articulated 2,000 years ago in the Gospel of John”—“For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16).
 2. This is a saying attributed to the native Hopi elders that has had deep meaning for me and several of my younger women religious friends. (<http://www.spiritofmaat.com/messages/oct28/hopi.htm>)

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BOOK NOTES

Minding the gap between our vision and our reality

BY SISTER CINDY KAYE, RSM

ARE WE, RELIGIOUS SISTERS, brothers, and priests living on the side of a wide gap—a gap that separates our vision for the future from our stark reality of not knowing how to respond to globalism, individualism, consumerism, and the other “isms” that face us and the wider society on a daily basis? What does religious life have to offer today’s world and our own places of call and commitment—our convents, rectories and monasteries, those places we call home?

In his recent book, *Living in the Gap: Religious Life and the Call to Communion*, (New City Press, 2011) Father Dennis Billy, CSs.R, challenges those who live religious life and priesthood to, in a sense, mind the gap. This in no way is meant to avoid the gap or to step around it. Moreover, he encourages us to recognize and acknowledge the gap as well as acknowledge the futuristic visions that lie on the other side, and for whom those visions reside. A more familiar term for minding the gap in this sense may be the invitation to conversion. In par-

Sister Cindy Kaye, RSM is a full-time doctoral student at The Wright Institute of Psychology in Berkeley, CA with an emphasis on adult assessment. She is a membership consultant to a number of congregations, does behavioral assessments, and offers workshops on topics related to vocation ministry.



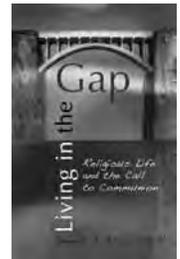
ticular, the author expresses a concern for conversion in the way we religious live our call to communion or community.

Prior to addressing concerns regarding community, he puts forth these opening questions: To what extent do religious orders express the incarnation of Jesus? How do they represent attitudes, words, or events in his life? How do they express love? As a reader and a religious sister, these three questions pose great challenge, a springboard to look deeper into my own community and into my own life. Moving toward conversion requires the acknowledgement of loss and pain, the breakdown of myths and the ability to remain in an empty space—to remain in the gap.

When imaging the “gap,” I am reminded of trapeze artists. When two swing on one bar, one of the two lets go and is somewhere between the first bar of perceived security and the second of unknowing. Here lies the gap. In the gap, one can’t go back, but has not reached the other side quite yet. Whether named “the gap,” “liminality,” or “somewhere in between,” it is that space that we are invited to live into, a space that may look dark, scary and uninviting, but a place that eventually requires action and change.

In Chapter 1 the author observes:

Confronted by an aging constituency, a steady ex-



odus of younger members, and fewer vocational prospects, many have become disillusioned and look for antidotes to their mounting misfortunes. These solutions take many forms. Some display nostalgia for the not too distant past. Many have resigned themselves to “inevitable corporate extinction.” Others doubt the very relevance of religious life in the postmodern world. These responses to the crisis in religious life, however, are inadequate.

To move forward, religious congregations need not resign themselves to escape and denial. They can choose a language of conversion by which they can give an honest account of themselves, help them to integrate their private lives with their corporate existences, and show them how, together, they can respond to such doubts.

Another element that I would add is the way in which community members present themselves to the exterior world. In other words, how do others see us? Do we look burned out, exhausted, lumbering through life with mild depression looming near? Some questions to ponder are: Am I serving at my best? Do my skill sets match with my desire to serve? Where is my desire grounded? Am I grounded in an ego desire, leading to the service of my ego rather than the truth of where my gifts lie? Mimetic desire? Do I hope to be like another, in denial of my own gifts and serving out of a “want to be” area of myself? Do I serve from a desire that moves me beyond myself into the realm of what is the best for the most? I add these reflection questions because if we religious are not ministering and acting from our giftedness, we are in denial and struggling. Hence, this struggle is brought into life with others and can sap communal energy, promote escapism, and add to a feeling of corporate extinction.

While the author acknowledges the struggles communities face, his book emphasizes the value of religious life, in living the call in the spirituality of communion. He reminds us that according to Pope John Paul II, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, communion is at the heart of the Christian message. Communion is also one of the main themes of this book. The spirituality of communion is “the ability to see and know the positive in others as a gift from God, to bear each other’s burdens, and to resist the temptation to selfishness.” While he focuses this theme primarily on religious life, it could be extended to anyone who is seeking “right relationship” with God.

Chapter 3, entitled “Called to Community,” is an ex-

ample of how the material from this book can be used by religious and laity alike. In his initial paragraph, Father Dennis states that most Catholics “recognize the importance of community in the journey of faith.” Here he also states that agreement does not always signify understanding and that agreement “may even prevent deeper examination of what is taken for granted.” The call to “community” is at the very center of a response to God, and life in community is intrinsic to a relationship with God. Community leads to the very mystery of who God is. The author questions how many of us “actually acknowledge these ideas in our day-to-day-life.” Reflecting on our call to live community can teach us how to discern and live authentically, regardless of where our vocation may draw us.

Later in the chapter, Father Dennis focuses on 10 practical realities for forming a strong communal life. He provides wise counsel in this section. For example, he treats the practical reality of “intimacy and interaction” within a religious community. Intimacy, he says, invites community members into friendships which are open and inclusive. When close friends close off friendship to others, the community has potential to divide. He poses these questions: Do my friendships contribute to the life of the community? Do they detract from its goals and purposes? Do they make room for others and invite them to participate in their activities and reflections? Avoiding cliques and exclusive partnerships will enhance the potential for a more solid yet flexible community.

Regarding “interaction” Father Dennis advises that communities avoid closing themselves off from the world and risk losing touch with reality and an ability to make sound and prudent decisions. Also, he warns against swinging in the opposite direction, whereby the members’ interior life suffers due to their being absorbed solely in exterior activities. It is the inner life with the delicate balance of exterior presence that creates a healthy, grounded community.

I am grateful for having read Father Dennis’ book and have personally enjoyed the simplicity and the profound underlying depth of Father Dennis’ writing. While reading, I was envisioning the variety of ways his book could be studied, reflected upon and used in communal theological reflection, choice making or discernment, especially for religious communities that know they need internal and external conversion. With an epigram at the beginning of each chapter and corresponding questions at the end of the chapters, *Living in the Gap* is a versatile book that could serve religious who are in formation, in leadership groups, novitiates, spirituality groups, or committees seeking conversion of heart and of spirit. ■

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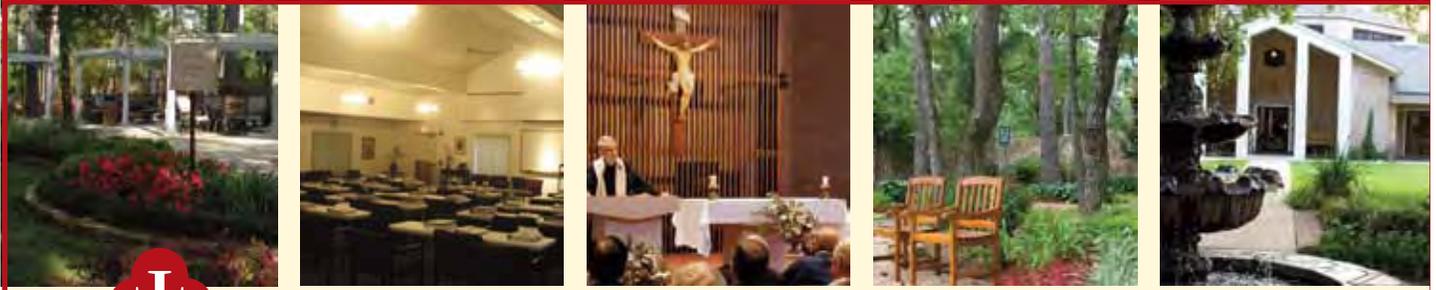
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