



Fresh approaches to vocation ministry

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Editor's Note

New ideas for a season of rebirth

BACK IN THE 1990S, I worked with another laywoman to create vocation materials for our diocese. “It’s strange, isn’t it, Carol, that a couple of moms like us are creating these handouts about being a priest or a nun?” I agreed with her at the time, but as I continued to work in vocation publications, I soon realized that it wasn’t strange at all. Why shouldn’t lay and religious *both* use their skills to promote church vocations? The whole church benefits when religious life thrives. And many times laity can bring needed skills and perspectives to vocation ministry.

Those are just a few reasons that laypeople have long been involved in developing vocation websites and literature, writing books about vocation, and having vocation conversations as campus ministers and parish pastoral staff. Full-time lay vocation ministers working for religious orders are still the exception. But our series “Lay vocation ministers speak out” (page 6) looks closely at the new models they are forging. As the spring season of new beginnings gets underway, perhaps they will inspire fresh ideas for the way your community organizes vocation ministry. Other articles in this edition also have a theme of newness.

Sister Amy Hereford, C.S.J. looks at new approaches to religious life in her article “The shape of religious life to come” (page 14). She explores changes in society that are filtering into religious life and beginning to affect how communities are organized and governed.

And again the theme of *new* emerges in the piece by Sister Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M., “Responding to new openness toward our life” (page 20). She urges vocations personnel to act upon the well-documented interest in religious life. Many young people want to consider consecrated life, but are they connecting and finding information?

Finally, a word about a new book that we review on page 35, *A New Generation of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity*, by Sister Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN.; Sister Patricia Wittberg, S.C.; and Dr. Mary Gautier. This book contains much of the data presented at NRVC’s popular 2013 gatherings “Women Religious Moving Forward in Hope.” Many participants expressed interest in sharing what they learned with their communities, and now the book is available to them.

Whatever new ideas or inspirations you might take away from this edition of HORIZON, all of us involved in producing it wish you the very best during this Easter season of new life. ■



Carol Schuck
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As the spring season of new beginnings gets underway, perhaps our writers will inspire fresh ideas for the way your community organizes vocation ministry.



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NRVC convocation to feature guest host, member discounts, fresh keynoters



Clarence Gilyard, celebrity guest host

A celebrity guest host and a special discount for guests of NRVC members are two features NRVC has added to its forthcoming 25th anniversary convocation, to take place November 6-10, 2014 in Chicago.

To heighten the festive atmosphere of this 25th jubilee event, TV actor, director, and author Clarence Gilyard will serve as guest emcee. Gilyard, a committed Catholic, is best

known for his starring TV roles in *Matlock* and *Texas Ranger*. His movie roles include *Top Gun*, *Karate Kid II*, and *Die Hard*. Gilyard currently is associate professor in the College of Fine Arts-Department of Theatre at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is a consultant to the Communications Committee of the U.S. bishop's conference, and is a member of the board of Holy Cross Family Ministries.

Also, as a special 25th anniversary gift, NRVC will allow the guests of members to attend at member prices. Members are encouraged to bring a guest from initial formation or from their community's leadership, formation, or communications ministries. To receive the discount, members must contact Sister Deborah Borneman,



Keynote presenters will be: Father Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, O.S.B.; Sister Colleen Mary Mallon, O.P.; and Sister Theresa Rickard, O.P.

SS.C.M. at (773) 363-5454 or debbiesscm@nrvc.net.

Fresh, new voices from within religious life will serve as keynote speakers on the theme "It is good that we are here: rise and have no fear." They are: Father Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, O.S.B., director of vocations, novice master and formation director for the Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria; Sister Colleen Mary Mallon, O.P., faculty member at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO; and Sister Theresa Rickard, O.P., former vocation director and current executive director of Renew International.

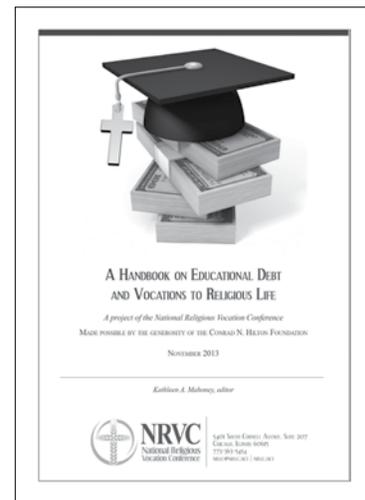
Register online and find other convocation details at nrvc.net.

Education debt project produces free handbook, appoints fund director

The NRVC project to address education debt—which prevents or delays many people from entering religious life—has produced a free handbook with guidance for communities; and it has appointed a director to oversee the establishment of the National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations.

A Handbook on Educational Debt and Vocations to Religious Life can be downloaded free at nrvc.net. The 23-page booklet has chapters on:

- The impact of college debt on vocations, citing the 2013 NRVC-CARA study of the topic
- Principles for leaders in working with inquirers
- Guidance for vocation ministers on working with discerners
- Practical and legal considerations





Mark Teresi

- Developing congregational policies regarding education debt

- Federal student loan forgiveness programs

In addition to producing the handbook, NRVC also appointed development professional Mark Teresi to oversee the startup of the National

Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations (NFCRV). The NFCRV will be an independent entity that financially assists religious institutes in welcoming new members with burdensome student loan debts.

While acting as project manager, Mr. Teresi will continue in his current position as vice president of institutional advancement at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, IL. As NFCRV project director, Teresi will design the business plan and oversee the fund's incorporation, establish a board of trustees, and search for an executive director. The goal is to complete these tasks by late fall 2014. The fund could then issue its first grants to religious institutes in 2015, which Pope Francis has designated as Year of Consecrated Life. The student debt project and NFCRV are supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the GHR Foundation.

Women religious seek “next steps”

Thirty-three sisters representing diverse approaches to religious life gathered in Chicago, February 18-19, to talk, pray, and seek “next steps” for encouraging a robust future for religious life in the U.S.

The goal of the “Next Steps in Hope” gathering, convened by NRVC and supported by the GHR Foundation, was to develop strategies for women religious to address new membership issues common to all women's institutes. The gathering was a follow-up to a series of women's gatherings sponsored last year by NRVC called “Women Religious Moving Forward in Hope.”

National Catholic Sisters Week initiated

Catholic Sisters across the U.S. commemorated the first-ever National Catholic Sisters Week March 8-14 by attending a kick-off event at St. Catherine University in Minneapolis, MN and through local media outreach.



Sisters discuss strengthening religious life at “Next Steps in Hope.”

Initiated by St. Catherine University, some 160 sisters and college women attended the inaugural event. It included worship, workshops and storytelling. In honor of the week, many religious communities did media outreach, garnering coverage in print and online media. ■



Among those taking part in National Catholic Sisters Week were three sisters from the Dominican Sisters of Peace with three college women who attended with them. From left to right, top row, are Sisters Pat Twohill, O.P.; June Fitzgerald, O.P.; and Linda Lee Jackson, O.P.; bottom row, Sheridan Marmo, Amber Mielke, and Tia Clifford.

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They are still a minority among vocation ministers, but lay people are forging new models for this ministry.

Arm in arm is a good approach to lay-religious collaboration in vocation ministry. From left to right are lay vocation minister (and NRVC board member) Dr. Nan Brenzel; Gabbi Carroll; Sister Mary Soher, O.P.; Sister Patricia Farrell, O.P.; and Molly Allen at the 2013 Los Angeles Religious Education Conference.

BY MARYELLEN GLACKIN, ANDREW O'CONNELL, AND LEN UHAL



Maryellen Glackin is vocation director for the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart. A counseling psychologist, she is married and has four children.



Andrew O'Connell is communications director for the Presentation Brothers in Ireland, with whom he has had a longstanding friendship.



Len Uhal is national vocation director for Divine Word Missionaries. He experienced SVD formation and is today married and father of three children.

Lay vocation ministers speak out

MAKE IT A PARTNERSHIP

by *Maryellen Glackin*

I WAS RECENTLY ASKED TO NAME MY OCCUPATION on a form. There being no check-off box, I wrote in, "Vocation director for the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart." The intake person looked quizzically at the form, "you're a vacation director for nuns?" "Excuse me", I said, "that's VO-cation, not VA-cation!" It always makes for interesting conversation when I tell people about my occupation!

When talking to students I encourage them to prepare appropriately, then "let go and let God" when it comes to choosing their path in life. I explain how being a vocation director never would have even crossed my radar screen. How could it? Only members did that work for their congregations. Yet, after more than a dozen years of doing this ministry for

two different congregations, I couldn't be happier, more fulfilled, or using more of the gifts and talents given to me by God. (But maybe someday I will try that *vacation* director job!)

The NRVC-CARA 2009 study on recent vocations to religious life found that having a full time person directing the vocation efforts of the community was a critical factor in the congregation's ability to attract new members. Because of this, many congregations, including the one I currently work for, have considered hiring a lay person to lead this ministry for them.

For congregations hoping to attract new members, finding someone within the community to do vocation ministry can be a problem. For instance, a younger member with the enthusiasm and creativity needed for this ministry might be needed in an external, salaried ministry. Seasoned members with the background and life experience for the ministry may have already been in the position and not be willing to be re-cycled. For some, the reality that the congregation is aging and that there haven't been new members in 5, 10 or 15 years, may lead them to seriously question the justice of burdening younger women with the realities of aging congregations, making it difficult to find someone within the community to do this ministry.

Over the years, many congregations have called me to discuss how they might benefit from hiring a lay person for vocation ministry. To begin I ask them to describe what they hope a lay person will bring to this role. When listening to what is expressed, their needs fall into a few general categories: skills in modern media communications; ability to understand and relate to a new generation of discerners; an infusion of enthusiasm and creativity into their present vocation ministry efforts.

Just a word of caution—no person, lay or religious, is the magic answer to securing new vocations. For vocation efforts to be successful, full community support, especially from leadership, is important. Having a vocation director (whether lay or a member of the congregation) is the beginning. Supporting vocation ministry financially and with full confidence in the vocation director sends a message to the rest of the congregation that says, "We are committed to the future of our community."

An honest assessment of the needs and motivations for hiring someone from outside the community is a helpful first step to determine the skill set required from the person to be hired. Following is a short-list of qualifications to consider when hiring someone from outside

the congregation. These will obviously depend on what the particular needs are for your congregation.

Understand contemporary religious life

For me the learning curve was not too steep since I had a long list of religious as teachers, mentors, and friends in my history. While it is helpful for the person to be acquainted with the congregation, a general knowledge of contemporary religious life is more important. Once hired, a lay vocation director could find it helpful to connect professionally with other vocation directors in your region because they represent the current diversity of religious life and its unique language with which most lay people are unfamiliar.

Expertise with the age cohort

Experience with people in the age group you hope to attract is important. As a mom with four teenagers, I brought an expertise with young people that was lacking in the first congregation with which I worked. Its ministries were primarily with the elderly and with unwed mothers. I was able to "normalize" behaviors (i.e. cell phone use, piercings, tattoos, pink hair) that seemed strange to the sisters. As my children have grown, they continue to reflect the cohort the congregation is seeking. My kids and their friends help me to stay current with the latest in social media, pop trends, music, and culture. Within Catholicism, their perspective on Pope Francis and the new translation of the Mass, for instance, have been invaluable.

Supporting vocation ministry financially and with full confidence in the vocation director sends a message to the rest of the congregation that says, "We are committed to the future of our community."

Understand human dynamics

Some background in psychology and sociology and the field of counseling or social work is helpful. Vocation directors are the gatekeepers for the community, so they need to understand human dynamics. Awareness of the complex issues surrounding a young adult today is essential. Just ask a young person to define "normal" family life!



Maryellen Glackin speaks during the 2012 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). As an NRVC board member, she helped organize the event.

Communicate well

Much of vocation ministry takes place in the virtual world. Having someone who is familiar with social media and a variety of communication methods is crucial. This can mean everything from responding to e-mails, to creating a web presence, to having a general comfort with technology. The vocation director doesn't necessarily need to know how to create a website, but he or she should know how to appropriately represent your community across all social media platforms.

Be rooted in faith

Doing vocation ministry requires the ability to turn your work over to God on a regular basis. I have often commented that it is a real gift that I am not a results-oriented, but rather a relationship-oriented person! It is essential that a vocation director, lay or religious, be grounded in his or her faith and able to share that faith with discerners. This is how we share "whose" we are with those who want to know "what" we are.

Looking at this list, many of you may notice how hiring someone from outside of your congregation might help fill a skills gap. On the other side is how the community can fill a gap for the lay vocation director they hire. I have always worked as part of a vocation

team. Having members of the congregation to mentor and minister with me has been extremely rewarding. My close relationship with them fills the gap in knowledge which comes from being outside of the congregation. I experience their witness of religious life on a daily basis. My working alongside members of the congregation also helps the other members see that vocation ministry belongs to everyone. Hiring a lay vocation director witnesses to the responsibility of every baptized person to nurture church vocations. The lay men and women I know who have taken on this role within congregations take seriously their responsibility to facilitate how others hear and respond to God's call to live their lives to the fullest.

Hiring a lay vocation director is most beneficial when it is a partnership. Currently, I work with a team that includes a member of leadership, a sister assigned to vocation ministry part-time, and five additional sisters who live and work outside of our motherhouse community. Working as part of a team has always been a blessing to me. The sisters on the vocation team bring the community perspective to our discussions. They help fill in gaps in knowledge about the community that I may miss. They also provide me with that personal, one-on-one experience of who they are so that I can more authentically represent them.

My job description includes attracting inquirers through various methods of advertising and relationship-building, screening them for appropriateness to the congregation, setting up retreats, managing virtual communications, telling the congregation's story through social media, and representing the community at school talks and youth events. It also includes talking with our sisters on a regular basis to help them understand vocation ministry. This is done through the community newsletter, afternoon presentations for the local sisters, special talks at area group meetings, and a dedicated time at their annual gathering. By handling these tasks, a lay vocation director can free the congregation to do what they do best: being present to those who are interested in your particular community. Lay vocation directors can tell people about you, while you provide the real, living example.

Taking advantage of trainings offered by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) and collaborating with other local vocation directors can have benefits for the entire congregation. Like many established communities, we are heavy on "seasoned" members who may worry how they can relate to newer members, or how to create space in their comfortable lives to let in

new members. Through the many programs I have attended and the other congregations I'm in touch with through NRVC, I am able to learn from the experiences of others who have faced the same fears and concerns.

Efforts to prepare the congregation for newer members are sometimes better received coming from an outsider. The lay vocation director might be seen as the professional and encounter less push-back from resistant members. One common issue is whether it is ethical to invite younger women into aging congregations. Challenging a congregation to see a new way, with the support and encouragement of leadership, can create new life among the members. Even the most cynical community members can be encouraged by positive responses from young adults to unique initiatives. In the end, any way we can generate hope within religious congregations, singly or collectively, we create hope for the next generation.

At the end of the NRVC video, *Absolutely Millennial*, one of the young religious exclaims, "I don't know what religious life will look like in the future, but I'm excited to be here!" If you are hoping to re-generate your congregation, hiring a qualified layperson can be a first step in defining that new future for which all of us work and hope.

4 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A LAY VOCATIONS DIRECTOR

By Andrew O'Connell

“IF YOU THINK it's expensive to hire a professional, wait until you hire an amateur!” The smiles on the faces of the religious with whom I recently shared this adage was testimony to its truth in the world of vocations ministry! Thankfully there are now many committed lay Catholics with valuable skill sets who want to invest their time and talent in the future of religious life.

I've been working with the Presentation Brothers in Ireland for several years now. My job title is “communications director” with a documented understanding that my primary role is to communicate the work and vocation of the brothers. The role could equally be described as assistant vocations director. I work with a brother who is our named vocations director, and I chair our Vocations Strategy Team whose membership includes our youth ministry coordinator and province leader.

As I survey the scene, here are some observations

that might help religious congregations curious about the potential benefits of a lay vocation director.

1. Top of the agenda

“Fewer people doing more work,” is how one colleague recently described the demands of religious life today. Vocations directors can often end up carrying several portfolios of responsibility for their religious congregations, and frequently vocations ministry ends up de-prioritized in favor of more pressing concerns.

This is less likely to happen when a congregation has a lay vocation director working from a tightly crafted job description and regularly held accountable for his or her performance.

For example, our Province Leadership Team receives a report each month from my office detailing work done and plans for the coming weeks. In addition, I have a regular face to face meeting with the Province Leader to discuss issues arising. In addition, I find myself sharing articles of interest regularly with the brothers and seeking feedback. This level of activity prevents a culture of passivity and inertia from setting in. Vocations ministry is kept on the agenda.

Lay vocation directors will typically occupy this ministry by choice and with conviction. Their enthusi-

Andrew O'Connell, communications director for the Presentation Brothers in Ireland, frequently speaks to young adults about vocation and the possibility of religious life.



PHOTO BY J. LOPUSZNSKI

asm in creating new initiatives should make it harder for a congregation to die in peace! It can also be a validating experience for a congregation to see a lay person promoting religious life with energy and belief.

2. Define roles, clarify responsibilities

“We need help with...” is a good place for a congregation to start when considering the roles and responsibilities of a lay vocation director. The Presentation Brothers made it clear to me that they needed assistance with establishing relationships and contacts with their target audience, i.e. young adults. Because I had an interest in media and communications and had good contacts in Catholic youth ministry, I was a good fit for this.

We have always had a brother as our named vocations director, and his contact details appear on our promotional literature. This involvement of a brother is crucial, as it prevents any sense that vocations ministry is now outsourced while also avoiding the danger of burdening the lay hire with the total responsibility for vocations. For instance, several brothers participate in our regular Vocations Weekends, giving testimonies and leading prayer.

Our Vocations Strategy Team meets every month, and we’ve been careful to ensure that it remains a forum for energy and ideas. I’ve seen how vocations committees can easily become wet blankets of tepid commitment

and inactivity with semi-engaged members meeting infrequently. Working in a team is important. That statement is more than a cliché. On the good days it’s great to be able to share success. And on the bad days it’s nice to have the support of a co-worker.

My duties range from the administrative to the strategic. I also keep abreast of the literature and provide summaries of recent publications to our vocations team. From time to time, if the vocations director is unavailable, I will meet a discerner and provide him with the initial information he needs.

3. What’s measured improves

It would be unfair to measure success solely by the number of annual entrants. Poor results on that metric does not necessarily mean poor performance. In Ireland the climate in which we are promoting vocations is very challenging. The very act of promoting religious life is something of an accomplishment in itself!

It is reasonable though to measure performance. Tools such as Key Performance Indicators, which are often used in the business world, can be quite helpful. For example, one can measure performance against this statement: “The vocations office will distribute X pieces of literature to Y university chaplaincies over the next 12 months with the goal that Z young adults in the target audience will attend each of our quarterly vocations

A COMMUNITY LEADER WEIGHS IN

Our employment of a lay person had its origin in our 2005 General Chapter. The theme was “Sing to the Lord a New Song.” The hiring of a layperson to assist our vocations efforts was one of our new melodies!

We also stated at that Chapter that “we believe that our Presentation way of life is an authentic response to God’s call, and we are called to call others.” In other words, we declared our belief in our vocation as religious brothers. Employing a lay person was a concrete way of expressing that commitment.

Andrew O’Connell was already known to many of the brothers, and

this helped in the acceptance of his new role as director of communications with a specific emphasis on vocation promotion.

I believe a substantial period of induction is essential for the layperson and for the members of the congregation who are to work alongside him or her. The layperson needs to have a good knowledge of the charism, the spirit, and the plans of the congregation if he or she is to act as a public representative.

The person will often bring useful experiences, practices and skills from his or her previous training and work experience. A religious commu-

nity should accept these as blessings and attempt to bring them to service of its mission.

Andrew’s work with us has promoted our congregation in Ireland, England, and elsewhere in ways that we did not envision when we employed him. He is able to express an image of Presentation Brothers that is inclusive, relevant, and young—all attributes that the 2005 congregation Chapter would have hoped for in “singing a new song to the Lord!”

—Brother Andrew Hickey, province leader, Presentation Brothers and former vocations director

weekends.” One can readily and fairly measure against that kind of a standard.

We also aim to have two solid applicants for the novitiate program each year. This really helps to keep activities in focus and sharpens professional practice.

4. Mind your mind!

Vocations ministry is tough. Period. It is often characterized by disappointment and frustration. There is a danger that lay vocations directors unfamiliar with this unique operating environment will respond with anxiety, dismay, and even workaholicism—all of which are destructive. A lay vocation director needs strong and defined support systems, both professional and spiritual.

Professional development opportunities, such as a master class in social media, and spiritual supports such as a guided retreat will pay for themselves with increased employee loyalty and satisfaction. The challenge is to keep professionally sharp and spiritually healthy in a climate often colored by decline.

Congregations nervous about taking on the responsibilities of a lay employee could also explore the option of engaging the individual as an external consultant with a regular invoice for services or a retainer fee. There is often help available for structuring such a setup from groups that assist charities and small businesses with human resources needs.

Finally, congregations stand to gain a great deal from the professional expertise and faith commitment of lay vocation directors. It is perhaps a sign of hope that lay people are prepared to be “co-workers for the truth” in ensuring that religious life will be presented to a new generation in a lively and credible way. ■

MY EXPERIENCE AS A LAY VOCATION DIRECTOR

By Len Uhal

IT WAS A SUNNY, BREEZY SUNDAY in June 2003. As the alumni director for the Divine Word Missionaries (S.V.D.), I was struggling to get tablecloths on tables for an alumni picnic. The provincial walked over and asked to chat—so we sat at a picnic table. He said he needed my help. I said, “Sure, Fr. Tom, whatever you need. What can I do to help?” He went on to ask me to take over the national vocation office for the S.V.D.s in the USA, Canada and the Caribbean! And so began my full-time ministry in vocation work.



PHOTO BY FATHER ADAM MACDONALD, SVD

Len Uhal and his son, John, meet and greet the public at the 2013 National Catholic Youth Conference. Involvement in the S.V.D. community has long been a family affair for the Uhals.

As a layman, I know that I am an anomaly in vocation ministry. Most vocation ministers who assist candidates with discernment are vowed and/or ordained. When I joined the National Religious Vocation Conference in 2003 and attended my first workshop, I think three laypeople were there. However, there are currently 16 lay NRVC members, and two laywomen have served on the NRVC board.

This emerging reality begs the questions: What is the role of laity in the discernment process of men and women considering a religious vocation? Is it good for a community to invite a layperson to collaborate in vocation ministry?

Certainly the laity has a role in calling forth new leaders for our church. The folks in the pews need to be concerned about, and involved in, the promotion of ordained and vowed religious vocations. While laypeople have more church leadership roles than in the past, we still need religious sisters, brothers, and priests. In the end, the leaders of each religious institute will have to consider whether a lay vocation minister makes sense for them. What I can share are my experiences during 10 years as the national vocation director for the Divine Word Missionaries. A vocation ministry model with a lay director has worked well for us.



Len Uhal talks to Divine Word College students about the online features of the college library.

Immersed in S.V.D. charism and culture

I am not convinced that formation experience is a necessity to be a lay vocation minister. In my case, however, I was in formation with the S.V.D.s for eight years (four years at our high school and four years of college formation). I left formation after earning my BA degree and just before entering novitiate. I married three years later and now have three children. I pursued a career as a certified drug and alcohol counselor and a licensed social worker, credentials I still maintain. I earned an MS degree in health care administration. During these years I always remained connected to the S.V.D.s—to individual members and to its mission. My family participated in many community activities. I would say the S.V.D. was part of our extended family and vice versa.

In 1999 I began working with the community full-time as the S.V.D. alumni director. In this position I also assisted the vocation office by making initial phone calls to candidates interested in learning more about the congregation. I was no stranger to vocation ministry, having worked for the vocation office as a work-study student in college. I am not the first layperson to work in the S.V.D. vocation office, but I am the first layperson to direct and manage it. While we have three USA provinces, our vocation office is a national, tri-province office where we coordinate all our vocation efforts for the U.S., Canada, and the Caribbean. In addition to being the national vocation director, I am also the vice president of admissions at Divine Word College, since we own and operate our own free-standing, college level formation

program in Epworth, Iowa. I am directly responsible to the provincial and his liaisons, the secretary for education, formation, and recruitment and our college president. My job description includes, among other responsibilities, supervising the vocation office team, leading the team in strategic planning with long-term goals and strategies, identifying advertising and marketing opportunities, preparing an annual budget, making direct contact with vocation candidates, and assisting them in their discernment process. I plan vocation events such as Come and See weekends, give vocation presentations at high schools and colleges, and attend vocation fairs.

We are fortunate to be able to have a large vocation staff. Our current team includes four S.V.D. priests, one S.V.D. brother, a lay support staff member and me as the director. Overall, this setup has worked well over the last 10 years. I find great joy in vocation ministry and consider my work a service to both the universal church and the Divine Word Missionaries around the world.

On a daily basis I field phone calls from interested candidates, assign new referrals to specific vocation directors based on a specific “territory” in the country, manage advertising efforts, and establish and maintain the budget. I coordinate out-reach efforts for various events, compile statistics, identify and implement strategic planning, and process all application materials for initial formation with our community in the U.S. (and all applications for non-S.V.D. candidates to Divine Word College).

About 60 percent of my job is administration. However, the other 40 percent is the most enjoyable—actually

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attending vocation promotion events and traveling to meet specific candidates in their homes, hosting them for Come and See visits, and walking with them on their discernment journey. I have individual candidates assigned to me just like the vowed religious vocation directors on our team. The S.V.D. priests and brother on our team dedicate all their time to promoting our community and having direct contact with our candidates. They model the charism of the Divine Word Missionaries. My role in the administrative functions frees them to concentrate on this important aspect of vocation ministry.

Like the vowed team members, I communicate regularly with my candidates, visit with them, meet their families, complete assessment reports on their appropriateness and help them with the formal application process. I am also involved with immigration issues for any international S.V.D. candidates (and international students attending our college). My role as the national vocation director for the S.V.D. is similar to what vocation directors for other communities do.

Generally I think the S.V.D. team has worked well over the years. I have worked with at least 13 different S.V.D. vowed religious members on the vocation team since I started as director. Some have worked a year or two; most have served two, three-year terms, although Father Trung Mai, S.V.D. is completing his ninth year of vocation ministry this summer. I believe there has been a mutual respect among our team members—they respect me as the provincial's appointee as director, and I respect their role as vowed members of the Society. As in any supervisory position, within or outside of religious life, there have been some bumps in the road as we improve communication and cohesion as a team. However, our common goal to promote the S.V.D. and invite new members to join our mission to spread the Gospel, unites us and helps us focus on our ministry—each of us with our unique role to play in the process.

Effective model for us

Some have said that if a congregation hires a lay vocation director, it reflects negatively on the community—that maybe the congregation is dying. Well, if we just look at the numbers with the S.V.D. model the past 10 years, we have had 217 candidates enter initial formation in the U.S., 66 have professed first vows and 73 professed perpetual vows as Divine Word Missionaries. As a team, I believe we are doing very well, and the Society of Divine Word is very much alive!

Many candidates are surprised that I am not a priest

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

or brother, but they are quite accepting of me walking with them on their discernment journey. In fact, some candidates feel relief realizing that a decision to enter formation is not a decision to profess vows. Many think that once they enter formation it is a "done deal." They do not realize that formation is ongoing discernment—that some will profess vows and some will feel the Holy Spirit leading them another direction. When I share my discernment journey with them, many seem relaxed and understand the process a bit better.

Every community must decide if collaborating with laypeople in vocation ministry is the right option for them. The Divine Word Missionaries have made a conscious decision to collaborate with the laity in important roles within the Society, including vocation ministry. It works for us. Yes, there are pros and cons. From supervisory and accountability issues, to budgeting, job descriptions, and perception, collaboration can be a challenge. However, when the fit is right, there are many rewards for the lay vocation minister, the community, and the candidates in discernment. May the Holy Spirit bless all of us in this ministry of presence and discernment as we help men and women more fully understand God's call in their lives. ■



Religious life may be moving toward communities that are smaller, more local, and more collaborative.

The kind of inter-community collaboration that is common in national organizations of religious will continue to grow and influence religious life, predicts Sister Amy Hereford, C.S.J. Pictured here are members of a variety of religious orders worshipping together at a convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference.

The shape of religious life to come

BY SISTER AMY HEREFORD, C.S.J.



Sister Amy Hereford, C.S.J. is a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet from St. Louis. She works as an attorney and canonist, consulting with religious institutes on a

variety of legal matters. She has been in religious life for 25 years, part of a minority cohort of post-Vatican II women religious. She has graduate degrees in spirituality and in communication, as well as in civil and canon law.

Reprinted with permission from *Religious Life at the Crossroads* (Orbis 2013). Learn more at orbisbooks.com.

One of the most common things said about the future of religious life is, “We don’t know what it will look like in the future, but it’s going to be different.” Sister Amy Hereford, C.S.J. has gone a step further. She has looked at contemporary trends and has risked drawing conclusions about what religious life will look like in the future: how the vows will be lived, what ministry, community and prayer will be like, and how communities will govern themselves.

*Sister Amy’s book, *Religious Life at the Crossroads* (Orbis, 2013), examines the emerging reality in detail. In this excerpt she looks at a single but crucial aspect of religious life: how it will be organized and governed. She begins with social and church trends affecting religious communities.*

WE ARE EMERGING FROM A WORLD in which there were dominant narratives about who and what are important and about the meaning of power. We are discovering that these so-called meta-narratives were illusions. They never spoke the truth of the majority, but instead embodied the dominant point of view that was

white, Western, educated, landed, male, and clerical. This point of view was established as normative, the yardstick by which all others were measured and found wanting. It is said that postmoderns have subverted the dominant paradigm. Perhaps it is more correct to say that postmoderns see through the dominant paradigm and seek to subvert the paradigm of domination. They see the rich diversity of languages, peoples, cultures, and ideologies as a blessing to be celebrated, not chaos to be controlled. As this diversity is empowered, the richness of the single common human story comes through: we live, we breathe, we love, and we are loved, and we come into relationships, networks, and communities. Postmoderns have a particular ear for minority stories and for the deconstruction of systems of power.

At the same time, postmoderns are able to organize themselves around meaningful centers and form overlapping circles of community and influence. They are learning to include everyone in spheres of influence that honor each one's commitment, balancing inclusivity and hospitality with the boundaries necessary for a community's sense of identity, cohesion, and need for sustainability.

Emerging church is the name given to communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This term encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches 1) identify with the life of Jesus, 2) transform the secular realm, and 3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they are able to 4) welcome the stranger, 5) serve with generosity, 6) participate as producers, 7) create as created beings, 8) lead as a body, and 9) take part in spiritual activities. *Emerging* catches into one term the global reshaping of how to "do" church in postmodern culture. It has no central offices, and it is as varied as evangelicalism itself. It reflects the collapse of inherited meta-narratives (overarching explanations of life). Why have they collapsed? Because of the impossibility of getting outside their assumptions. Those in the emerging church focus on praxis rather than doctrine, they critique the use and misuse of power, and they go out in mission in practical, local ways.

The starfish and the spider

Bookstores and Amazon always sport dozens of titles on the latest new management theory and the best strategy to get ahead, make money, and stay on top. However, there is also a growing literature on how to lead in a postmodern organization. Authors stress how to decentralize, flatten hierarchies, and support a sustainable economy that works for everyone. The book, *The Starfish*

and *the Spider* has an image in the title that embodies its central message. Some organizations are structured like a spider with specialized structures—a head that is in control and directs the operation of the spider. If you cut a leg off the spider, it is lame; cut off its head, and it dies. In contrast, the starfish has a circular neural network and all its functions are distributed throughout its arms. If you cut off the arm of the starfish, it grows another, and it has no head to cut off. This decentralized structure is proposed as a model for organizations. For some organizations it is an invitation to decentralize. For other organizations it is simply a description of how they work and move ahead in today's world. It describes how the Occupy movement worked and how intentional communities organize themselves. The book's authors also point to eBay, Wikipedia, and Craigslist as examples of decentralized, leaderless organizations that are nonetheless highly successful. They offer 10 rules that come into play in these organizations, rules that are more descriptive than prescriptive.

If you cut off the arm of the starfish, it grows another, and it has no head to cut off. This decentralized structure is proposed as a model for organizations.

Rule 1. Diseconomies of Scale The principle of economies of scale refers to the efficiency and savings that can be realized by combining smaller organizations into larger organizations. Diseconomies of scale refers to the problems that cause these larger-entities to become inefficient: communication costs, top-heavy administration, greater difficulty in responding to changing needs, and the well-documented phenomenon that individuals in larger groups tend to be less efficient.

Rule 2. Network Effect New communication technologies allow individuals greater access to people, information, and resources than in the past. This enhances the power of the individual and the group, and can be exploited for the good of communities.

Rule 3. Power of Chaos In highly organized systems, individuals and groups have to break through the systems of management in order to promote a new idea, product, method, or cure. However, in decentralized systems, any idea is as strong as those who are willing to develop it. If it works, they can promote it to those around

them; if not, they move on to the next idea. Good ideas spread through the network. Some ideas are great for a few individuals, who adopt them. Others are free to choose other paths.

Rule 4. Knowledge at the Edge Because of decentralization and the power of the network, all members have access to the knowledge necessary to refine their ideas and make them grow and flourish. Each person can also look

around for others with consonant vision and join with them.

Rule 5. Everyone Wants to Contribute While some enjoy being a cog in a wheel, studies also show that everyone enjoys being able to contribute to the overall goals of their organization or project. Smaller self-organizing groups allow for this.

Rule 6. Beware the Hydra

Response The hydra response is the ability for groups to break off and form their own organization, even in competition with the original group. This is acknowledged, even encouraged by the system; it keeps it vital.

Rule 7. Catalysts Rule Catalysts are the critical drivers of the organization but not its leaders. Everyone in the organization is a leader. Catalysts are the visionaries who propose new methods, ideas, and systems that inspire others and move them to action.

Rule 8. Values Are the Heart of Any Organization or Network The principle of cohesion is not structure or hierarchy but the values that inspire each individual. Because of the hydra rule, if individuals are not inspired by the vision and values of the organization, they can cut themselves off and reorganize with others of similar values. The new group may be an ally of the previous one, both working for similar goals, but each organized around the goals that most closely align with those in the group.

Rule 9. Measure, Monitor, and Manage Even in decentralized groups, basics of good organization are important.

Rule 10. Flatten or Be Flattened Flat organizations are

those without hierarchy. Christina Baldwin, who writes and presents on leadership and spirituality, describes the flat organization as a circle with a leader in every chair. In a small organization every person's commitment counts. Every person is in a position to make a difference. And every person is important in the life and work of the group.

No organization is completely centralized or completely decentralized, though most older and larger organizations are more centralized. And decentralized organizations may take on some elements of centralization in order to keep united and advance their goals. The key is to find the "sweet spot" between centralization and decentralization that is appropriate to the group and its organization. Current shifts in culture and advances in communication create an environment favorable to a shift toward decentralization, toward starfish organizations.

Thus far we have examined the way that late 20th and early 21st century movements organize themselves. These organizations show an impressive instinct for self-organization, shared power, and distributed authority. But what does all of this mean for religious life?

Emerging religious communities

Religious life arose through the Christian centuries when men and women set out to live the Gospel with fresh enthusiasm and renewed vision. Led by the Spirit and imbued with a vision for living the Gospel, they shared their inspiration, and others joined them to make it a reality in a religious community. Over time, these communities encountered the various forces of society, church, and state. Each of these forces shaped and molded the original inspiration. Over time these communities took on the structures that gave them more stability and permanence than they had when they first gathered. Structures must continue to evolve and adapt if they are to retain their vibrancy. Sometimes this can be done gradually and organically. At other times society continues to grow and change, and the community grows and changes as well; eventually, the structures may become outdated and need more radical renewal or updating. An accelerating rate of change in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has made it nearly impossible to keep pace in growing and adapting structures.

Today's smaller groups of religious can take inspiration from the various social movements around them. In fact, those coming to religious life today are likely to be "wired" differently than their elders who came to religious life in the mid-20th century. Gen Xs and Mil-

Today, it is much more common for religious to collaborate across congregational boundaries in formation and ministry. Increasingly, they are considering inter-congregational communities as well.

lennials have lived most of their lives in a postmodern world and have internalized its values. Admittedly, these values are both positive and negative. Their task is to use the positive values of postmodernism while trying to moderate the negative. Smaller self-organizing groups are more likely to succeed in the future.

At various times in the history of religious life, small, local communities have been very successful. There is also a trend in religious life toward centralization. For example, the Franciscan and Dominican orders maintained unity, particularly in the male branches, even as the orders spread from country to country. Both orders were founded as reform movements, and the unity was seen as a way to ensure that all members remained loyal to the founding principles. Friars professed vows in the order, with openness to being sent to any house of the order. This was in contrast to Benedictines, who professed stability to a particular monastic community. Later apostolic communities were also centralized, enabling them to coordinate hundreds of recruits in service of the group's missionary efforts. The mega-communities that resulted have made truly admirable strides in spreading the Gospel and in addressing social needs. In the wake of Vatican II, religious made efforts to decentralize. Doing so will enable the next generations of religious to return to smaller, more localized, self-organizing communities.

It is interesting to note that while men's religious institutes retained a high degree of centrality, women's communities often broke into smaller local groups as they spread across the globe. Witness the countless women's congregations of Dominicans, Franciscans, Sisters of St. Joseph, and Benedictines. Historically, women's communities are much more likely to have split into local congregations than their male counterparts. This is in part due to the fact that through much of history, women's communities were required to be under the supervision of either a men's community or a bishop. Often as women's communities spread, the local bishops sought to exercise control over the women's communities in their dioceses. Some groups split at the instigation of the bishop, who did not want "his" sisters answering to an outside authority. Other times the sisters sought independence from their distant founding community in



Taking part in a prayer service are participants in the event "Men Religious Moving Forward in Hope," sponsored by the National Religious Vocation Conference in December 2013. The event involved networking to address common problems.

order to have greater flexibility and ability to respond to local situations without waiting months for responses to arrive by letter from across the ocean.

The small, local groups of women were able to adapt to local situations and spread quickly in the developing American society. However, as the communities developed and came into contact with one another, there was in many cases a strong sense of isolation of one congregation from another. Only rarely did sisters from one congregation maintain ongoing community or ministry with those from other congregations. Today, it is much more common for religious to collaborate across congregational boundaries in formation and in ministry. Increasingly, they are considering inter-congregational communities as well.

With the advent of the Vatican's apostolic visitation of women religious in the United States, beginning in 2008, the collaboration among women religious reached a new high as they sought to study and respond to the questions put to them by the Vatican. The collaboration has brought into relief the many similarities among the various institutes, though they express their spirituality and mission in different terms. Religious are seen as part of a movement within the church and as strongly united among themselves. In this, religious life in the West has become more like religious life in the Eastern Christian churches, where it has always been seen as a movement. In the East, religious life has remained a united movement, lived in various local communities. It never knew

the division into various orders and congregations to the extent that was a reality in the West, particularly during the missionary expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries. With its elements of decentralization, Eastern religious life gives a glimpse into where the structures of Western religious life may be headed.

Networks of small, local groups

Although the 21st century has witnessed a greater collaboration among religious women, the infrastructure that divides them into separate congregations and provinces remains. This infrastructure tends to isolate the groups of women, even as they face similar problems of aging, a smaller pool of candidates for community leadership, and dwindling finances.

The answer to this dilemma is not collapsing all communities into larger and larger groups, but rather creative collaboration to enable sharing of resources and developing common solutions to common problems.

This will pave the way for younger religious to form small, local communities that are networked for mutual support rather than being established in a predetermined structure. The structures of religious life today have left aside much of the rigidity and hierarchy of the past; however, even the remains of these structures will probably not be helpful to the smaller emerging groups.

These smaller communities can take advantage of the strengths of each local community and be mutually supportive of the entire movement. They will all share the values of spirituality, mission, justice, and sustainability. But each local group will live these values in different ways, depending on the members within the community and their skills, interests, and the needs of the particular neighborhood in which they find themselves. "That post-French Revolution chapter of active religious life animated by the counter-modern spirit of the Tridentine night battle is drawing to a close ... and more ad hoc arrangements will be made," writes William J. F. Keenan in a 2002 article in the journal *Religion*.

In every age religious life has been the seed bed of evangelical innovation, meeting new needs in new ways while still integrating the tried and true wisdom of the ages. Saint Benedict writes in his rule:

But a third and most vile class of monks is that of Sarabaites, who have been tried by no rule under the hand of a master, as gold is tried in the fire; but, soft as lead, and still keeping faith with the world by their works, they are known to belie God by their tonsure.

Living in two's and three's, or even singly, without a shepherd, enclosed, not in the Lord's sheepfold, but in their own, the gratification of their desires is law unto them; because what they choose to do they call holy, but what they dislike they hold to be unlawful. But the fourth class of monks is that called Landlopers (Gyrovagues), who keep going their whole life long from one province to another, staying three or four days at a time in different cells as guests. Always roving and never settled, they indulge their passions and the cravings of their appetite, and are in every way worse than the Sarabaites. It is better to pass all these over in silence than to speak of their most wretched life.

These restless wandering monks proved to be disruptive in Benedict's time and drew his contempt. Benedict proposed a remedy of stability and the ordered life of community. Self-gratification and indulgence of passions cannot be the basis of a new way of life. But the stability and order that he proposes must be humane and flexible enough to gather and nurture the deep evangelical desires of itinerant postmoderns. William Keenan, who posits that postmodern religious life will likely give more place to "Sarabaites" and "Gyrovagues," proposes the following characteristics of 21st-century religious life:

- Borderless, globalized monasticism: cross-institute memberships,
- Eclectic, portfolio spiritualities: modularized ways,
- Customer-focus: monastic designer lifestyles,
- Time-limited religious "ad hocery": a life-stage approach,
- Deregulation: relaxation of Rules and de-centralisation of ecclesial control,
- Monastic marketization: niche-marketing and brand-imaging,
- Dialectic of detraditionalization and retraditionalization,
- Monastic mergers: spiritual and apostolic alliances,
- Mixed-mode monasticism: lay-clerical flexibility,
- Online monasticism: virtual religious communities.

It will take genuine wisdom and vision to form these new communities in the creative chaos of present-day religious life. Confidence in the age-old wisdom of the gospel and its incarnation in generation after generation of religious is critical. This life still has the power to enchant and inspire new generations, if those currently living it have the courage to let them try and hold them lightly as they come into their communities. The communities that form will spontaneously network with other intentional community movements that share many of their values. It may take time for the movement

to find its new form and to bring into it, from the storehouse of religious life, both the new and the old, in order to rebuild the life for the 21st century.

Community of communities is a term used by the intentional community movement. It refers to the notion that communities are small self-organizing groups, but that they often form a web of relationships with various other intentional communities having similar interests and goals. The individual communities clarify their vision and pursue their goals as a group. They maintain openness to other communities in their network who may be pursuing similar or complementary goals. Through a loose relationship of mutual support, they are able to enhance one another's communities, while at the same time remaining true to the vision that gathered and inspires each community and each member.

These new communities will be small and local and will not need the infrastructure that exists in many congregations today. They can rely on a growing network of communities to help support and sustain their life. Local religious communities can unite periodically and can network with others across the country and around the globe. These networks can be face-to-face and online.

As each community grows and matures, it will find itself in need of periodic renewal. As communities network, they can take from the history of religious life the custom of sending visitors to the various communities to help each community renew its life together, have the difficult conversations, and ensure that it is getting what it needs for its life and growth. The network can also explore those areas where centralized coordination could be useful. For example, the communities could have a travel directory so that traveling members might stay with a local community and share its life in a spirit of mutual renewal. Communities might also join to form cooperatives to provide the services that larger congregations are now providing to their members, such as formation, education, insurance, and healthcare.

We can imagine this movement will begin as women religious from various communities come together in their local areas to build community together. But as the movement matures, it is likely that others may wish to join. At that time the movement will have to begin to re-examine and re-imagine formation. We can begin that process even now, because if there is one thing sure about the current state of religious life, it is that "what is" is not sustainable. Even those entering current religious communities should be prepared not so much for what is as for what will be. ■

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Many young people are willing to consider religious life. Can we go out to them? And can we invite them into our lives?



A young woman shows her enthusiasm for religious life.

BY SISTER DEBORAH
BORNEMAN, SS.C.M.



Sister Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M. is a Sister of Saint Cyril and Methodius. She has been the associate director of National Religious Vocation Conference since

2011. Prior to that, she was a certified Catholic Campus Ministry Association campus minister and served as vocation director for her institute for 10 years.

Responding to new openness toward our life

LAST YEAR I CONDUCTED AN INFORMAL SURVEY of young adults and their attitudes about religious life for a graduate course I was taking. While the sample was not scientific (it was built on my own network of contacts from my years in campus ministry), I was still pleasantly surprised by the openness to religious life that it revealed.

Before looking at my data and conclusions, I want to pause and recognize what is meant by *vocation*. I like this definition by Sister Laura Leming, F.M.I. in *Vocation and Social Context* (Brill 2007).

Judeo-Christian understanding of vocation (from the Latin *vocare*, “to call”) entails hearing a divine call (sometimes embodied in a human voice) to go somewhere, do something, or be someone in the context of

a relationship with the Divine.... Vocation doesn't happen in a vacuum. Rather, it is a social interaction, a relationship of mutuality where call is both heard and responded to.

My own role in encouraging young people to listen for and hear God's divine call takes many forms, and one of them is coordinator and co-presenter of the workshop "Orientation Program for New Vocation Directors," presented regularly by the National Religious Vocation Conference. I want to present accurate information to new vocation directors about youth and emerging adults. Thus, in my research, I wanted to know if young adults are considering a vocation to become a religious sister, brother, or priest. I wanted to know where young adults are experiencing the presence of God and living their faith. Are these sacred spaces the places religious are or can become present?

I also wanted to know if young people have had any personal experiences with women religious. If given the invitation, would young people spend 24 hours in a convent, and if so, what would they desire to experience? How can vocation directors be relevant and use social media to promote a culture of discipleship? Is there hope for new membership among young adults, or should congregations focus on a future of diminishment? Most importantly, can young adults offer concrete suggestions on promoting religious life vocations and provide insight on why women do not enter religious life?

A total of 343 people between ages 18 and 40 from 22 states took my survey, which was distributed to young people through campus ministers; 79 percent of respondents were women.

Where young people encounter God

The first question was written to find out where young adults gather: "Where are you most involved in living your faith and experiencing the presence of God?" They had 34 choices for answering this, and respondents were encouraged to check as many as applied. The top five answers in order of popularity were:

- Weekly Mass, 57 percent
- Retreats, 29 percent
- Parish events, 27 percent
- Catholic campus ministry, 23 percent
- Volunteer experiences, 22 percent

We can conclude from this that all the sacred spac-

es are very accessible to religious (not just vocation ministers) to build relationships. Consider joining a multi-generational choir, as 17 percent reported they belong to a parish or campus choir. Since a significant amount of young adults participate in Catholic campus ministry, religious also need to be more visible on campuses, especially the colleges their religious institutes sponsor.

People are considering religious life

By being present in the places where young adults encounter God, vocation ministers will be building on an existing interest in religious life. In my study, 143 young adults (42 percent) responded that they have considered entering religious life as a sister, brother, or priest. While this was a high percentage (the majority had a connection to campus ministry), the fact is that several recent studies have also uncovered that a large number of U.S. Catholics have given serious consideration to a religious life vocation. The box on this page highlights some of the most significant findings. I believe vocation ministers have not yet comprehended the impact of these high numbers. With this many Catholics reporting they have considered religious life, what is happening at a deeper level that stops young adults from considering, discerning, and then applying to enter religious communities? My data suggests young adults need more information and more exposure to women and men religious and more opportunities to experience religious life. Presence

RELIGIOUS LIFE INTEREST BY THE NUMBERS

- ✓ 250,000 never-married Catholic women in the U.S. have thought seriously about religious life.
- ✓ 350,000 never-married Catholic men in the U.S. have thought seriously about being a priest or brother.
- ✓ 37 percent of former full-time volunteers have considered religious life or priesthood, 27 percent of them "seriously."
- ✓ Approximately one half of men involved in either Catholic campus ministry or diocesan young adult ministry have seriously considered priesthood.
- ✓ Roughly a third of Catholic women with these involvements have seriously considered becoming a sister.

First three facts: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 2013. Last two facts: Dean Hoge and Marti Jewell in *The Next Generation of Pastoral Leaders: What the Church Needs to Know* (2010).



Young women visit the Daughters of Charity convent during a London “Nun Run.”

PHOTO: SISTER CATHY JONES, R.A.

and availability are the hallmarks of religious life, and the Millennial generation is also asking for women and men religious to spend time with them. “Church-going Catholic Millennials might seem more serious and fervent about their faith than either of the preceding two generations, Baby Boomers or Generation X,” reported Heather Grennan Gary in the 2011 *U.S. Catholic* article, “Retro-Actives: The Religious Practices of Millennial Catholics.”

Archbishop Joseph Tobin, C.Ss.R., in his keynote address to the NRVC 2012 convocation noted: “A problem for consecrated life in the United States may be that we are slow to recognize the religious aspirations of young people today. We should admit that there is no excuse for such ignorance.”

What would it take for a van full of members to be present for campus ministry events or at parishes for Sunday Mass?

Come to the convent

While it is important to go out to young adults, they also express an interest in coming to us. My research showed that a significant number of young adults would spend 24 hours in a convent.

I would have never predicted that four out of five young men and women would accept an invitation to visit a convent, let alone that nine out of 10 single, Catholic females would report a willingness to pay such a visit. What is even more surprising is what they want to experience. Half of the respondents wanted to “be a sister” for a day, to experience an ordinary day.

Young adults are not so much interested in a convent tour as they are in engaging with the women who live in the convent. For instance, respondents made comments such as these:

- I would like to see what everyone does during the day. Is everyone on similar schedules, or do people do as they please? Does everyone eat and pray together? I think a day in the life of a nun would be cool, exciting and informative.
- I’m curious as to the life that sisters and nuns lead. I’d like a window into their relationships with one another and into their day-to-day lives.

One third of the young adults (33.8 percent) interested in a convent visit wanted to pray with the sisters, to experience the rituals, the devotions, and communal prayer. Over a quarter of the respondents (26.4 percent) wanted

to experience community life, to learn how sisters handle conflicts and converse with one another.

Vowed communal life and prayer are distinct characteristics of religious life that perhaps point to an emerging global consciousness and global solidarity. Can this desire to experience communal prayer and community life among religious be attributed to a culture of broken commitments, strong individualism, and fractured families of the Generation X experience? Or can this be attributed to the Millennial generation's positive experiences of group identity and team projects? It does affirm the 2009 NRVC-CARA study of newer members which found they are attracted to and sustained in religious life by: community life, communal prayer, Eucharist, and visibility. (See the full report on the study, "Recent vocations to religious life," at nrvc.net.)

Here are comments from Catholic, single females who have considered religious life and would like to visit a convent:

- I would like to see how they keep a sense of community while being independent of each other and how each follows the order her own way.
- What is the community like? Is there conflict at all, as there is with families/friends? Also, how is conflict resolved?
- I'm interested in community dynamics, so I'd love to be a fly on the wall during a community meeting.
- I would love to see how they interact with one another and work out their issues.

Nineteen percent of young adults want to experience the ambiance, the environment of peace, joy, and silence of the convent and its sisters. As for experiencing the ministry and service of a sister's life, 16.9 percent of respondents would like to see this aspect.

Even young adults from other faith traditions, who have had minimal experience with women religious and have not considered religious life, wrote about the value they would find in visiting a convent:

- I think it would be wonderful to witness the relationship that the sisters have built with each

other. I would like to see how they support one another and how that lifestyle serves God.

- It's a culture that I would love to be a part of just to gain knowledge. Obviously, these women love Christ as do I, and I would love to see things from their point of view and have my views expanded and modified.

- For my job, I've spent a lot of time working on Catholic non-fiction books. I love to learn about the work that the nuns are doing to promote social justice and reduce poverty.

- A day in the life of the sisters—from their service, to their contemplative prayer, to their mission. Mostly, though, I think I'd like to hear their call stories. I

think they would be very powerful.

TOP 9 PICKS FOR ONLINE VIDEOS

Asked what they'd most like to watch in an online video produced by women religious, young adults chose:

- Community life
- Living simply
- Comedy
- Finding balance
- Vocation stories
- Discernment
- Finding meaning
- Words of wisdom
- Prayer

Interest versus reality

Another reality uncovered in my research is that while young people showed an interest in knowing more about religious life and their faith, the reality is that religious communities may not be connecting effectively with them. For instance, social media is one important way to communicate with young adults, particularly through the popular site, YouTube.

I created a question on my survey to uncover topics for vocation presentations and discernment retreats on YouTube. Respondents were asked: "Imagine Catholic sisters/nuns creating a three-minute YouTube video. What five topics would you view/share?" They could select from 41 possible themes. (See their choices in the box above.) I did a quick search on YouTube to find the only topic on which women religious are present consistently is vocation stories. This gap in social media suggests that one way to promote vocations might be short videos on the topics of interest to young adults.

Stepping out in hope

In light of the interest in religious life that exists among young people, much can be done by religious communities and vocation ministers. Taking action is a sign

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of hope. And hope has always been a stronghold of the Christian faith. John Caputo, author of *After the Death of God*, reflects:

Meister Eckhart said there is a little spark in the soul (*ein Seelenfunklein*), which is the point where God and the soul touch. In postmodern theology the event lends things, we might say, a kind of divine glow, what Deleuze calls a brightness and splendor, “the splendor of Being.”

The first women apostles possessed *ein Seelenfunklein* and I have noticed *ein Seelenfunklein* in both vocation ministers and young adults who proclaim boldly and fearlessly the good news of the risen Christ.

I urge vocation ministers to discover the spark within themselves. With members of their community they can create new ways to open their doors with the expectation that young adults are willing to come if in-

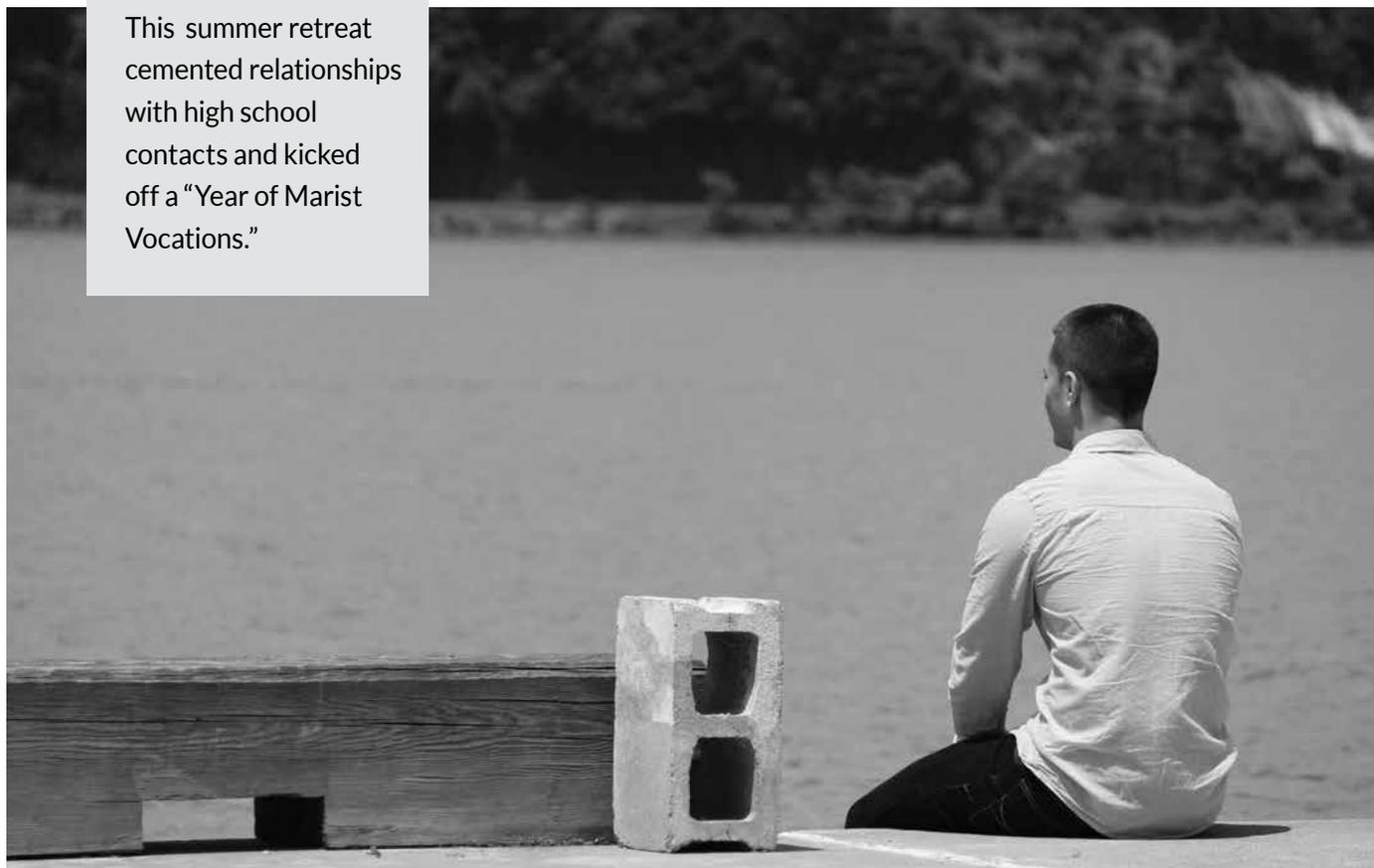
I urge vocation ministers to discover the spark within themselves. With members of their community they can create new ways to open their doors with the expectation that young adults are willing to come if invited.

Many young adults in my survey already report a consistent involvement with women religious, and they want to be around women religious more frequently.

Women religious have much to offer as spiritual mentors, and young adults have much to offer women religious as technology tutors. (Just imagine young adults and religious creating a comedic YouTube video explaining the differences between all the Franciscan communities!) We have much we can learn from each other. In addition to “Come and See” in the convents,

women religious are also being summoned to “go and listen” to young adults in the sacred spaces where they gather. Inspired by the Gospel tradition, let us not linger. It is time to go quickly as did the first vocation ministry team—Mary Magdalene, Mary, Salome, Joanna, and other Biblical women. We must go and announce the Good News! ■

This summer retreat cemented relationships with high school contacts and kicked off a “Year of Marist Vocations.”



The Foundation Stones retreat included time for both personal and communal prayer.

Summer retreat kicks off vocation year

AFTER PARTICIPATING in the 2012 NRVC program “Keys to the Future: Moving Forward in Hope,” I met with my vocation co-director, Brother Dan O’Riordan, F.M.S. to discuss what had been presented and to brainstorm ways to advance our province’s culture of vocations. Capitalizing on the fact that our schools are the primary way many young people experience the Marist charism, we decided to coordinate a Year of Marist Vocations to run from June 2013 to May 2014. I present here an overview of the retreat we organized to inaugurate the year.

With the help of our Province Vocation Committee, we came up with the theme for the year: “Marist: An Authentic Response to God’s Call.” Our goal was to increase awareness and appreciation of the vocation of everyone involved in our schools—brothers, lay faculty, students, staff, parents, and alums—to “be Marist.” The Vocation Office, along with our local Vocation Teams, provided activities, prayer services, and ministry opportunities for all to celebrate their Marist call throughout this year.

To kick off the Year of Marist Vocations in June 2013, we held the first of what we intend to be an annual event: the Foundation Stones week. The

By BROTHER MIKE SHEERIN, F.M.S.



Brother Mike Sheerin, F.M.S. has been the vocation co-director for his community, the Marist Brothers, since 2007. Readers interested in learning more

about the program featured here can contact Brother Mike at bromikes@gmail.com. They may also view a video summarizing the Foundation Stones retreat experience in the words of the young men who attended it. Go to YouTube.com and type “Marist Brothers Foundation Stones” in the search bar.



PHOTO: CRAIG BARCOCK

Participants in the Foundation Stones retreat take part in a group exercise.

intent of Foundation Stones is to invite selected students graduating from our Marist high schools to retreat together at our center in rural Esopus, New York. Foundation Stones offers the opportunity to explore the Marist Brothers' way of life through a seven-day experience, including time to live, reflect, relax, and work side-by-side with the brothers. Support from the province leadership was very strong, as was support from individual brothers. Ten students took part, eight first-timers and two members of our Marist Accompaniment Program (our college program for young men inquiring and discerning a Marist Brother vocation).

Prayer, learning, service with brothers

So what happened each day during Foundation Stones? The basic schedule consisted of gathering daily for morning and evening prayer. Various forms of prayer were experienced, highlighting our Marist charism, the Liturgy of the Hours, Taize prayer, meditation, the rosary, Holy Hour, the *examen*, and silence. Learning and singing the *Salve Regina* each morning and night was also part of the experience. By the end of the week, the young men could sing the hymn without the Latin words in front of them.

Each morning from Monday through Thursday the young men participated in conferences and discussions facilitated by various brothers. Topics included; celibacy, spirit of our founder, St. Marcellin Champagnat, developing personal spirituality, and Marist life from the perspective of our youngest member. Each afternoon they worked side by side with brothers in service projects on the property, including refurbishing a Stations of the Cross pathway circling our cemetery and creating a grotto to Mary, our Good Mother, on the grounds. Time was also devoted to ice-breaking activities, rock

wall climbing, one-on-one interviews, and opportunities for theological reflection, journal writing, and quiet time. Community recreations included eating all meals together as well as relaxing together at various times during the day.

Friday was a day of relaxation which began with Mass and included a two-hour boat ride up the Hudson River, joined by about 12 more brothers. Most of the young men were impressed to meet the many brothers who visited Foundation Stones to share a meal, work side-by-side, pray with them, and basically show an interest in who they were. We brothers were able to demonstrate what often comes so naturally to us: our way of living together and supporting each other. Young people do not always get to see this part of our lives since they know us primarily as their teachers, administrators, counselors, coaches, and campus ministers. Foundation Stones accomplished its ends by enhancing their knowledge and experience of who Marist Brothers are.

The young men were from all parts of our province: New York, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, and Illinois. Many came alone, and after overcoming those awkward opening silences, quite easily formed bonds that will carry them through further explorations of Marist life as they attend college. "It meant a lot to me to come together for a whole week with other guys considering the brother's life," was a sentiment echoed frequently in our follow up discussions and evaluations with retreatants.

Five of the eight first-timers have since joined our Accompaniment Program. Said one participant at the program's end: "This week was an eye-opener for me, living together with others and being immersed in the life of a brother. I thought I knew everything about the brothers, but I realized I learned a lot more during the week."

"I never did anything like this before. I am happy I came, as it opened up a new door in my life to consider," recalled another. Other comments also captured the spirit of the experience: "I didn't realize how much praying the brothers did. I was surprised and pleased to see that brothers began and ended their day with prayer." Another participant said, "The best thing about Foundation Stones was being together from activity to activity and being treated like brothers already."

This experience offered our province a firm "foundation stone" upon which to build a solid discernment process to carry these young men into their future. It also solidified a new program which seems likely to become a strong annual event in our vocation recruitment efforts. ■



The Poor Clare Sisters of Arundel in the UK pray together.

Enclosed life requires certain strengths and dispositions. An insider shares her wisdom about helping a discerner attracted to this life.

The must-knows about discerning enclosed life

This article is from a talk given to vocations personnel at the invitation of the National Office of Vocations for England and Wales. The talk was delivered in October, 2013 at Birmingham University Catholic Chaplaincy in the UK.

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING me the opportunity to share with you something from my own experience as a Poor Clare of accompanying people and helping them to discern the will of God for their lives. I can only speak about what I know, what I have lived, so inevitably it is limited. I also speak from living in a particular place called Arundel, in the United Kingdom, where I live and breathe the spirit of St. Clare.

I'd like to look at two questions, which perhaps are really only one question, just written slightly differently. First: What will help someone discern, if he or she is called to the enclosed life? And secondly: How might someone accompanying a discerner help that person to discern if the call is to enclosed life?

So you can see that the two questions are very close to each other.

BY SISTER GABRIEL DAVISON, O.S.C.



Sister Gabriel Davison, O.S.C., entered the Poor Clares in 1994 and is currently serving as novice mistress for her community in Arundel, UK. She is also a councillor

for the Federation of Poor Clares in Great Britain. Additionally Sister Gabriel works in vocation discernment and spiritual accompaniment and enjoys cooking and gardening in her community.



Father Peter Funk, O.S.B., of the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Chicago, reads Scripture and prays.

Bishop Kieran Conry of Arundel and Brighton in a recent pastoral letter said,

Hearing and seeing are very important parts of how we know anything or anyone. We know God by what we have seen and what we hear. We see God in the created world, we see God in the community of the church, and we see God in the person of Jesus Christ. We hear God in the words of Scripture, and the teaching of the church.

Get to know contemplative communities

So for all of us who are working in vocation discernment and may be guiding people who are discerning a contemplative vocation: what is it that we need to be hearing and seeing for ourselves firstly, and then, secondly, what does the discernor need to hear and see?

It helps to think about these questions for a moment before you continue to read on:

- What personal feelings are generated in you when you think about the contemplative life, just now, just for a few seconds?
- What have you seen, heard and experienced personally about the contemplative life?
- What personal experience have you had in the last year with an enclosed community?

I think it is very important, if you are going to help someone discern a contemplative vocation, that you have a personal experience of this way of life for yourself.

What it is to pray in a Carmelite, Cistercian, Benedictine or a Poor Clare house? It is important to know and to feel the difference of each charism—through the atmosphere of the guesthouse, the guest mistress, the liturgy, perhaps through meeting a member of the community.

I do believe in some mysterious way an interior call to a contemplative way of life is also often accompanied by a call to a *particular* community. So it is important that you know, have seen, heard, and experienced the presence of God in a contemplative community. Why? Because the question then to ask oneself is: With what you know, have heard, seen, and experienced—could you advise someone to go to this place for a retreat, or a live-in experience—is there life in this place? Will a discernor be enriched by having an experience in this place? Is it a place of beauty? Could you stay one week in this monastery without losing your faith? (I remember once staying in a monastery where the singing was so bad I thought it would destroy my soul if I had to stay much longer!) It is important that you know good places to send people.

We can't discern the will of God in the abstract. We can't help someone else discern the will of God in the abstract. When someone comes to us, we need to feel where they are; we need to have all our sensory powers alert and we need to listen deeply to what is *not said*. Often they are looking for something they cannot describe until they see it and experience it. It is our job as vocation ministers to be as knowledgeable about good and life-giving communities as possible and to help those who come to us discern and discover the place where they can best seek God. In my own story I had a live-in

experience in a Poor Clare community, and I knew deep in my soul this was the place God wanted me to be. It wasn't rational, it was quite intangible, and I couldn't say to you what it was that drew me. Then I went to a Carmelite community, and I knew that it definitely wasn't the place for me (no offense to any Carmelites reading this!).

When you accompany someone who has this question of the contemplative life, four points are worth considering. It will be important to explore them with the person who is discerning.

1. Enclosure: poverty of space

The first point, and it is the only thing we cannot find at all in the apostolic life, is enclosure. All of us in religious life have mission; we all have contemplative prayer, community life, the vows, etc. But what is particular to the contemplative life is enclosure: "the poverty of the space." So, this person, this discerner who is before you, can he or she live the whole of their vocation in one particular place? That place may not be very big. Does this person have the psychological balance to live in a small space, where he or she can potentially find freedom and build a new life in Christ?

As a novice mistress a frustrated and tearful postulant once cried to me, "All I want is to do something 'normal'—buy a newspaper or go shopping in a supermarket!" Imagine, that seemed like an exciting option from what she was living each day in the monastery.

2. Life commitment to a group of people

The second point is that the community a person enters will be the same community for all of his or her life. Can this person before you build something with this particular group of men or women? Can he or she grow with this same group of religious? Can this person be him or herself with this group of people? The idea of a lifelong commitment to a particular place is not one that will be familiar to many discerners. They may not know very many marriages that have lasted a lifetime. One postulant said to me she couldn't wait for the group that was coming to visit at the weekend, just so that she could see a new face and talk to someone who wasn't a nun!

3. Regular, simple, scheduled life

The third point to explore with a discerner leaning toward the enclosed life is this. The contemplative vocation

sustains a very regular life and timetable. It works its magic by the medium of regularity. There is no opportunity to have a teaching, nursing, or pastoral career. Our life is very simple; one learns how to give oneself quietly to an unexciting and perhaps repetitive task. One learns how to be patient with the inefficient contemplative way of getting things done. Does the person you are accompanying have the psychological and spiritual strength to live this? Can this person deny what he or she could have become in a career? As one postulant I accompanied said, "I was a great teacher before I entered, and now all I do is clean toilets!" Our life is not usually a wise option for the fainthearted and delicate!

In the final analysis our life requires a deep attraction to prayer and a capacity for solitary communion with God, expressed through a particular charism with a specific group of people.

4. Adherence to an old tradition

The fourth point is that one enters into a spiritual *tradition*, and most of the time it is a very old tradition. Is this person ready to become a disciple and not a reformer? An imperfect human being is progressively transformed by the spiritual tradition, and by God's grace, to become holy. Humble perseverance in submitting to a way of life is a spiritual tradition that has stood the test of time. It is difficult to be a disciple, to have to learn a new way of living and being.

In my experience a new person entering can always find something that he or she is better at than anyone else in the community. That may be true, but it is not the point. First the new member has something to learn. When I was a junior, a postulant entered who was very strong and robust, and she was put with me to work in the garden shifting wheelbarrows full of manure ... a lovely job. Along she came at breakneck speed, and I did all I could to keep up with her, but to no avail. She wasn't entering into a tradition of manual labour as a way to seek God; she was showing us what she could do, how quickly, and without any help from me, thank you very much.

In the final analysis our life requires a deep attraction to prayer and a capacity for solitary communion with God, expressed through a particular charism with a specific group of people. So when you think of these four



On her knees, Sister Miryam Anastasia, O.P. takes simple vows to join the Queen of Peace Monastery in British Columbia.

points, of enclosure, of living with one particular group of men or women, of the regularity of the contemplative life, and the spiritual tradition that the person hopes to embrace—could this person you are helping to discern be happy and in peace with God and that particular community?

Discernment in the Poor Clare tradition

Having addressed in general terms the contemplative life, I would now like to share something about discernment from my own Poor Clare tradition. When St. Clare speaks about our life, she begins, “If, by divine inspiration, anyone should come to us with the desire to embrace this life...” Thus, the discernment from the person and the novice mistress is to recognise this “divine inspiration” ... is it a dream or is it from God? Is this person in a personal relationship with God, and is this call from God or is it from me? God has an idea; God sets it free in the person, and we journey together to see where it will take us.

St. Clare goes on to say, “And if she is suitable, let the words of the holy Gospel be addressed to her: that she should go and sell all that she has...” So, *if* it is divine inspiration, she has to go and sell all that she has—that is, this person must leave her life before. She must let go of what is familiar, come to this place to seek God, embrace something new, and follow and be a disciple.

St. Clare then says, “Thereafter, she may not go outside the monastery except for some useful, reasonable, evident, and approved purpose.” Our way to answer the call of God and to follow Christ is to live in this place with this group of people. There is nothing to look for outside, everything we need to seek the will of God is inside this space. The monastery and the community is the place where we seek God, where we struggle, where we fight our demons, and also where we build the kingdom.

St. Clare continues: “The abbess shall carefully provide a Mistress from among the more prudent sisters of the monastery...” The person who enters has to become a disciple. It is a time to learn, to be taught, to listen with humility and docility. There is the whole question of discipline, of obedience, here.

Finally, in the process of canonizing St. Clare, Sister Benvenuta, who lived with her for 29 years, reported that St. Clare taught her three things: *to love God above all*—so it is a love story; *to have an open heart*—that means to open yourself to another, to walk with someone; and *to meditate on the passion of the Lord*—you take up your cross and follow Christ.

Doing our best in the face of mystery

After we have done all of the above, ticked all of the boxes, given people all the tools they need to make a good discernment, all we can say to the person is: “There is still a massive risk, and I can’t be sure you will be happy because it is for you to discover for yourself.” I have seen people who have a great desire to live our life. They are generous and give up a lot to come and enter. They love the community, the place, the liturgy, and they feel loved and respected as persons, but they are not happy, a deep happiness I mean. It is a real mystery, this discernment of vocation ... to listen to one’s heart and be guided by it into mystery, toward God. The discernor has his or her part to do, and we have ours.

One of our jobs is to become aware, as best we can, of our own unconscious prejudices, and seek to neutralize them because no one in the ministry of vocational discernment claims infallibility. We must be attentive to our own inner work, developing as persons whose hearts are open and discerning, whose faith, hope, and love are tangible. We must tend our own spiritual growth and self knowledge. Then we simply do the best we can for those whom God sends to our doors. We have a most difficult job and yet also a most blessed one because we have the privilege of walking with others and to help them to “Seek the face of God.” ■

Please celebrate with us in Chicago this November!



November 6-10, 2014
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Register online for the 2014 Jubilee Convocation:
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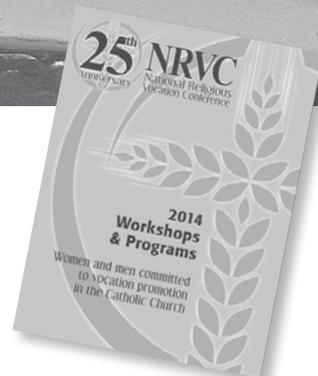
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The lives and witness of our newest saints, John Paul II and John XXIII, have shaped our church and continue to stir our faith and ministry.

These two men inspire us

THE FULL MOON HAD RISEN OVER ROME as we settled down in St. Peter's Square to listen to Pope John Paul II. It was the evening of the Feast of the Assumption, and the pope was opening World Youth Day during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

Our excitement at the pope's arrival had now given way to a more reflective silence. The Holy Father started to speak, and though we were tired after a day under the Roman sun, we listened.

Midway through the address, John Paul looked up from his script, paused, and said, "Today I wish to tell you that I believe firmly in Jesus Christ our Lord."

And we believed him.

You could say that it's a pretty basic job requirement for a pope to believe in Christ, but for me and the other young people in the square that night, John Paul was speaking to our greatest faith concern; "Is God real?"

John Paul answered with a strong "yes" and—for us—he spoke with authority. It wasn't necessarily the authority of his office but the authority of his life experience. This was the credo of a man who had experienced

BY ANDREW O'CONNELL



Andrew O'Connell is the Communications Director for the Presentation Brothers in Ireland. He has published articles in *HORIZON* and *VISION*, and he is a member of the Editorial Board of the National Religious Vocation Conference.

the evil of two totalitarian regimes and known the pain of personal loss and physical suffering. This was a man who, in his youth, had other life options. He could have been an actor, an athlete, or an academic. But he chose to follow Christ as a priest. This credo had credibility.

He finished his address with some vocations advice: “Do not let the time the Lord gives you go by as though everything happened by chance.” And during that week, many young people meditated deeply on that message. Vocations to religious life and diocesan priesthood were discovered and confirmed. In fact I personally know

people who trace the defining moment in their vocation journey to the experience of faith and community during that week in Rome.

In a postmodern culture of indecision and doubt, Pope John Paul was encouraging belief and certainty. It wasn't that we were set-

ling for easy certainty in the complexity of a complicated world. This was no comfort blanket religion. Rather, in an undisciplined world which placed no demands on us, John Paul II was encouraging us to go beyond mediocrity and to use Christ's agape love as the yardstick for our lives. In a world of great freedom John Paul was preaching responsibility.

I have no memories of Pope John XXIII. For my generation, he is a figure on the grainy black and white news reel. But for another generation, this was the pope whose word and witness excited and inspired. Many religious have told me about the exhilaration of those years in the '60s when the church set out on John XXIII's new course of dialogue and engagement with the world.

You won't hear Vatican II mentioned too often by my generation, and this worries many. That's because we take the Second Vatican Council as read. It's a given. It's the air we breathe. For us, with no memories of the church before the Council, this is how life has always been. It's just so naturally part of our understanding of Catholicism that it's literally unremarkable.

My generation knows that the legacy of John Paul II was built on the vision and courage of John XXIII. Many of the iconic moments of John Paul's pontificate were made possible by John XXIII: the 1986 visit to the synagogue of Rome and the 2001 visit to the mosque in Damascus, to name but two.

In addition, the ministries of many young Catholics active in the church today, including my own, though inspired by Pope John Paul have been enabled by Pope John XXIII.

It would be nice to think that this could be a time of healing and reconciliation in a church sometimes polarized by differing ecclesiology. Now is a good time to reach beyond caricatures and misunderstandings.

We can learn a lot from our two pope saints. For a start, both had an impish sense of humor.

The story is told that, upon his arrival at the Santo Spirito (Holy Spirit) Hospital in Rome, Pope John XXIII was greeted by the sister in charge. “Holy Father,” she said, “I am the superior of the Holy Spirit.”

“Wonderful!” the pope replied. “I'm only the Vicar of Christ!”

The joyful example of both popes supports Pope Francis' repeated calls for Christians not to be sour-pusses!

For aging religious, it's also worth noting that Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in his 81st year, while Pope John Paul taught his most valuable lesson during the sickness of his final years. This should be a great encouragement to aging religious. Age and ill-health don't mean that a life of witness is not possible.

And, regardless of age, religious should stay close to young people. John Paul, quoting a Polish proverb, believed that, “If you work with the young, you will never grow old!”

For religious tasked with the promotion of religious vocations, these two popes also had a sense of urgency that should spur us on. During the planning of the Council, on being told by a worried aide that it was impossible to open the first session by 1963, Pope John replied, “Fine. We'll open it in 1962 so!”

Similarly Pope John Paul was driven by St. Paul's admonition, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.” Perhaps that explains why, in the final years of his life, he was to be found in places like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Armenia.

Though aging, both men kept their hand on the plough until they were called home from the vineyard. So, let's draw inspiration from our two pope saints and, in the words of Good Pope John in that famous “Speech of the Moon” delivered the night the Council was opened: “Let us continue to love each other, to look out for each other along the way: to welcome whoever comes close to us, and set aside whatever difficulty it might bring. Let us continue along our path.”

Amen. ■

For religious tasked with the promotion of religious vocations these two popes also had a sense of urgency that should spur us on.

Insightful data and analysis of sisters

WHEN MADE AWARE OF DATA on Catholic sisters, many audiences are shocked to learn about the precipitous decrease in members in recent decades. In 1965, the *Official Catholic Directory* reported the number of sisters at 179,954; by 2013 the number was 52,557, down by 127,397. How did this drastic decline happen? What was behind the enormous demographic change? How have the diminishing numbers affected the ability of institutes to attract new members? How do generational cultures, with their differences and similarities, shape religious life today? What possible futures await sisters in various age groups and distinctive types of congregations?

If these questions intrigue or perplex or unsettle you, *New Generations of Catholic Sisters* by Sister Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN., Sister Patricia Wittberg, S.C., and Dr. Mary Gautier will provide the most comprehensive responses ever assembled. To examine these questions, they offer a vibrant narrative, interweaving a journal-like story of vocational discernment with extensive data from research studies. These contrasting resources add to the validity, interest, and usefulness of the findings.

In discussing the possible reasons for the decline in the number of sisters, the authors quote several media representatives, whose assessments about the future of religious life are usually dismal. These sources mention various causes for the downward spiral, which they believe has made it difficult to attract new members. For instance, some blamed shrinkage on women's institutes "reassessing their missions and rules of life at the same time as the women's movement was transforming social attitudes and practices." Other sources blamed lower numbers on the "rigid and unreasonable restrictions on women's institutes" by the Catholic Church. Yet another perspective placed blame on the sisters for changing from their traditional way of life.

Reasons for the decrease in Catholic sisters are described more compellingly by the authors through their review of social science research and their knowledgeable interpretation of the facts. Beginning with Sister

NEW GENERATIONS OF CATHOLIC SISTERS

The Challenge of Diversity



Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN.
Patricia Wittberg, S.C.
Mary L. Gautier

BY SISTER KATARINA SCHUTH, O.S.F.



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Religion at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN. She has authored five books on theological education and church ministry, including *Educating Leaders for Ministry*, and is currently working on a book about changes in seminary education since Vatican II.

Marie Augusta Neal's 1982 groundbreaking national study of sisters, research has been wide-ranging in its scope and findings. Sister Neal, already perceiving the decline more than three decades ago, mentioned changes in society, a failure to invite candidates from among immigrants, and "the reduced probability of young sisters coming in direct contact with sisters in ministry," as contributing factors. Other major studies followed, offering reasons for the drop-off as a general crisis in faith, structural changes in religious institutes, individualism, lack of distinctive identity, and the widening of women's professional opportunities. According to the authors of *New Generations*, recently it is the gap between generations that seems to deter interest, especially of those under 40.

In their analysis of various NRVC-CARA studies,

Johnson, Wittberg, and Gautier consider in detail the different forms of religious life, as well as the ages of entrants, their ethnicity, and their choice of religious institutes. Their appraisal details the distinctions among the many alterna-

Each generation needs to search for mutual understanding through dialogue if religious institutes are to thrive and survive.

tives available to young adults who are considering a religious commitment. They believe it is necessary for each institute to define and make known its distinct identity. Certain tensions arise out of these many forms with their diverse theories about and practices of religious life. Church documents, importantly among them *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Vita Consecrata*, along with several Vatican interventions, have contributed to the present state of affairs. In contrasting the content of these documents and reports with a document coming from a 2004 World Congress on Religious Life, the authors suggest that "the differences in language, tone, and emphasis regarding the evangelical counsels, mission, charism, and role in the Church shed light on the strained relationship of some religious institutes with the institutional Church." On closer scrutiny, it is unclear, however, that the intent of the statement of the World Congress was to provide a contrasting view of the key elements of religious life. Rather, that meeting dealt with a much wider agenda. Nonetheless, differences are apparent.

Other chapters of *New Generations of Catholic Sisters* explore the religious and spiritual landscape impacting the younger generation. Among the striking findings are the data related to recent entrants. An almost equal percentage of women join institutes associated with LCWR

and CMSWR, but since LCWR comprises about four times more institutes, candidates are "spread out" over a larger base. The age of candidates attracted to each group differs radically, with older candidates moving toward LCWR congregations, and younger ones tending to favor CMSWR institutes. Chapter 4 captures the challenges for leaders and members as differences are manifested in community living, communal prayer, and ministry.

The next three chapters spell out the many generational challenges facing institutes as they emphasize their charisms and sources of identity. Some built their identity on ministry and social justice, while others accentuated their tradition of Eucharistic devotion. Helpfully the narrative points out that U.S. Catholicism is not monolithic, which suggests that young women with a more activist leaning may well find appealing the more traditional sense of stability and permanence, while women who desire a more "conservative" approach may be dedicated to a ministry of social justice. In any case, a clearly articulated identity is preferable in order to draw new members.

Numerous informative bar graphs show dissimilarities and likenesses among generations. For example, Chapter 6 deals with prayer, spirituality, and the vows; and Chapter 7 looks at community and ministry. Taken as a whole, the findings reveal more commonality than might be expected, but differences are also noteworthy. For instance, younger members lean toward communal life and shared ministry, while older members favor living with those involved in varied ministries. As the authors point out, each generation needs to search for mutual understanding through dialogue if religious institutes are to thrive and survive.

The concluding chapter, "Inviting the Future," is filled with wisdom and sound, practical advice for leaders, vocation directors, and all members of religious institutes—in fact, for anyone sincerely interested in the Catholic Church in the U.S. The goal of articulating "the Gospel message in a language that resonates with changing worldviews" will require all parties to understand "the beliefs, values, desires and preoccupations that attract young people to, or repel them from, considering a religious vocation." It compels generations who hold divergent views to get to know each other and for older generations to actively invite younger candidates to join them. The task for all sisters is to examine their life of prayer and ministry and commit themselves "to widen the space of their communal tents" for the sake of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ—and of regenerating their own institutes. ■



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