



Rise, have no fear

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>9 Head into the deep BY BROTHER PAUL BEDNARCZYK, C.S.C.</p> <p>12 11 reasons to keep building our future BY FATHER BERNHARD ECKERSTORFER, O.S.B.</p> <p>20 Reflection: God does more than we can ask or imagine BY SISTER CATHERINE BERTRAND, S.S.N.D.</p> <p>21 Transfigured by God BY SISTER COLLEEN MARY MALLON, O.P.</p> | <p>29 Study sheds light on cultural diversity BY MARY GAUTIER</p> <p>32 In gratitude for the messengers of the Master's invitation BY ARCHBISHOP CARLO MARIA VIGANÓ</p> <p>34 "The Joy of the Gospel" has messages for us BY SISTER THERESA RICKARD, O.P.</p> <p>40 Reflection: Faith multiplies in sharing BY CLARENCE GILYARD</p> |
|---|---|

COMING FEBRUARY 2015

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AT CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION



Catholic
Theological
Union

Visit www.ctu.edu/consecratedlife

*Come relax,
renew, and refresh
your ministry with
fellow pastoral
ministers from
around the world
at Catholic
Theological
Union, located
in the beautiful
Hyde Park
neighborhood of
Chicago.*

HESBURGH SABBATICAL PROGRAM

A curriculum-based, community-centered sabbatical program



For more details, visit:
www.ctu.edu/hesburgh

Or contact Rev. Msgr. Patrick Lagges,
Director of the Hesburgh Program.
773.371.5482 or hesburgh@ctu.edu.



Catholic
Theological
Union



Editor's Note

And may I say thank you

IN THIS EDITION OF HORIZON, we bring you the content of the recent convocation, one that was a truly joyful occasion, celebrating the National Religious Vocation Conference's milestone 25th anniversary and looking with hopeful hearts to the Year of Consecrated Life.

The 300+ men and women gathered at the convocation prayed, visited old friends, made some new ones, learned some practical things about the ministry, listened to addresses that got us thinking and talking, and perhaps even heard some things that made us uncomfortable. Yes, even amid the accolades and congratulations that an anniversary brings, we still found ourselves living with both the beauty and the tension that exist in the church today.

For my part, as I look back on the past 25 years and on what this new year in celebration of consecrated life brings, I simply want to say thank you. Thank you for your service and witness and grace under pressure. It has been a challenging time for all of us in vocation ministry, but just as Pope Francis has called those in consecrated life to do, you have courageously chosen to "practice the virtue of hope."

As a laywoman who loves the church but sometimes struggles with it, I thank you for showing me examples of faithful, joyful living. I thank you for your commitment to your ministry, your patience, and your prophetic witness at a time when the message is often lost amid the distractions of contemporary life.

As a mother of young adults who have been and still are discerning their life paths, thank you for contributing to the body of thought and ministry that helps them make faith-filled choices.

May this edition of HORIZON, during this Year of Consecrated Life, be an instrument for all of our readers to discuss and debate and ultimately, in the words of Pope Francis: "be a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit."



Note: this year, the HORIZON annual index is now online at nrvc.net under the publications tab, where you'll also find a full index by subject of the last 17 years of HORIZON.

May this edition of HORIZON, during this Year of Consecrated Life, be an instrument for all of our readers to discuss and debate and ultimately, in the words of Pope Francis: "be a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit."



Carol Schuck
Scheiber, editor,
cscheiber@nrvc.net



Visit NRVC.net for details on subscriptions, advertising, archives and more.

HORIZON
JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE

NRVC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C.

HORIZON EDITOR
Carol Schuck Scheiber

PROOFREADERS
Sister Mary Ann Hamer, O.S.F.; Virginia Piecuch

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD
Sister Susan Rose Francois, C.S.J.P.; Father Christopher Gibson, C.P.; Sister Virginia Herbers, A.S.C.J.; Sister Cathy Jones, R.A.; Father Adam MacDonald, S.V.D.; Andrew O'Connell; Sister Mary Rowell, C.S.J.; Brother Tom Wendorf, S.M.

PAGE DESIGNER
Patrice J. Tuohy

COVER ART
Winter Shadows, by Sheila Diemert, sheiladiemert.com
HORIZON (ISSN 1042-8461, Publication no. 744-850) is published quarterly by the National Religious Vocation Conference, 5401 S. Cornell Ave., Suite 207, Chicago, IL 60615-5698 | 773-363-5454 phone | 773-363-5530 fax | nrvcc@nrvcc.net | www.nrvcc.net
SUBSCRIPTIONS

Additional subscriptions are \$40 each for NRVC members; \$95 each for non-members of NRVC. Single copies are \$25 each. Subscribe online at www.nrvcc.net/signup_horizon. Please direct subscription inquiries to TrueQuest Communications at 800-942-2811 or contact the NRVC offices at 773-363-5454 or horizon@nrvcc.net.

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to HORIZON, 5401 S. Cornell Ave., Suite 207, Chicago, IL 60615-5698. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and Toledo, OH, ISSN 1042-8461, Publication no. 744-850.

REPRINTS, ARCHIVES, ELECTRONIC EDITIONS
Permission is granted to distribute no more than 50 copies of HORIZON articles for noncommercial use. Please use the following credit line: *Reprinted with permission from HORIZON, www.nrvcc.net*. For other types of reprints, please contact the editor at cscheiber@nrvcc.net.

HORIZON archives, including files for mobile readers, can be accessed by subscribers at www.nrvcc.net.

EDITORIAL INQUIRIES & ADVERTISING
All editorial inquiries, including article proposals, manuscript submissions, and requests for writer's guidelines should be directed to the editor: Carol Schuck Scheiber, cscheiber@nrvcc.net. For advertising rates and deadlines, see www.nrvcc.net or contact the editor.

© 2015, National Religious Vocation Conference



HORIZON is an award-winning journal for vocation ministers and those who support a robust future for religious life. It is published quarterly by the National Religious Vocation Conference.



National Religious Vocation Conference Board for 2014-2015

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sister Josita Colbert, S.N.D.deN.
REGION 4

Sister Gayle Lwanga Crumbley, R.G.S.
REGION 4

Sister Anna Maria Espinosa, I.W.B.S.
REGION 10

Sister Michele Vincent Fisher, C.S.F.N.
REGION 3

Brother Ronald Hingle, S.C.
REGION 5

Sister Maria Iannuccillo, S.S.N.D.
REGION 1

Mr. Mark McGuthrie, M.C.A.
REGION 11

Father Don Miller, O.F.M.
REGION 6

Sister Priscilla Moreno, R.S.M.
REGION 9

Sister Anita Quigley, S.H.C.J.
REGION 3

Brother Tom Wendorf, S.M.
REGION 9

Father Vince Wirtner, C.P.P.S.
REGION 6

2015 vocation workshops & retreat

Following are eight workshops and a retreat that NRVC is sponsoring for the professional development and renewal of vocation ministers.

The NRVC 2015 Summer Institute workshops at DePaul University in Chicago include:

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT II
by Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., July 17-18

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT I
by Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., July 20-22

ORIENTATION PROGRAM
by Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C. and Sister Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M., July 24-28

THE ASSESSMENT OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN ISSUES FOR CANDIDATES TO RELIGIOUS LIFE
by Father Gerard McGlone, S.J., July 29-31

The NRVC 2015 Fall Institute at the Marillac Center in Leavenworth, Kansas offers:

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT I
by Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., October 13-15

ETHICS IN VOCATION MINISTRY
by Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., October 16-17

ORIENTATION PROGRAM
by Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C. and Sister Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M., October 18-22

YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE
by Sister Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J., Dr. Ted Dunn, Brother Sean Sammon, F.M.S., October 23-25

The following retreat will take place at the Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson, Arizona:



PHOTO: ALAN LIGHT

Chicago in all its summertime glory will be the site of the NRVC Summer Institute workshops, July 17-31.

ADVENT DAYS OF RENEWAL AND REFLECTION
by Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, S.S.N.D., December 14-17. This will be a collaborative program with the Religious Formation Conference.

“Sisters Week” March 8-14

In preparation for the second annual National Catholic Sisters Week (March 8-14, 2015) a new website, nationalcatholicsistersweek.org, is now up and has several resources available.

A downloadable “toolkit” for organizing an event is available online. Those spearheading the week are encouraging religious communities to organize their own local and regional events and activities. They ask women religious to post their activities on the NCSW website in the “events” tab (under “create an event”). The site offers prayer, liturgy, and activity resources for religious communities and affiliated colleges, schools, and parishes.

Center to study consecrated life

In concert with the celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life, Catholic Theological Union in Chicago is pleased to announce that The Center for the Study of Consecrated Life will launch in February 2015, with an opening event on February 12. The goal of the center is to engage in research and dialogue on contemporary

issues in consecrated life today. It wants to encourage new scholarship across disciplines; provide processes for reflective dialogue and creative imagining; assist in the discovery of new calls to ministry; and explore the internationality of consecrated life. Sister Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J., has been appointed director of the center. In accepting the appointment as director, Cimperman said, "Religious communities are a vital presence in today's global Catholic Church. With



Sister Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J. is director of the newly established Center for the Study of Religious Life at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

new forms of consecrated life also emerging, there is a compelling need for a center where the theology, spirituality, and history of religious and consecrated life can be studied, and where collaboration, dialogue, and creativity will yield valuable resources for these communities worldwide. This is a very exciting time in religious life and consecrated life in general."

Learn more about the Center for the Study of Consecrated Life at ctu.edu/consecratedlife or contact consecratedlife@ctu.edu for more information.



Year of Consecrated Life events

The Year of Consecrated Life has been officially underway since the 2015 liturgical year

began. It will last until February 2, 2016, the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. During these 14 months of prayer, celebration, awareness-raising, and meetings, several events will take place at the level of the national and international church. They include the following; learn more at vatican.va.

February, 2015—Meeting in Rome, convened by the National Religious Vocation Conference, of vocation

conferences from most English speaking countries.

APRIL 8-15, 2015—Formation ministers meeting in Rome, to deepen the understanding of the criteria which lead to a spirituality of communion.

SUMMER 2015—Day of Mission and Service with Religious. In the U.S. events will include joining religious in their ministries or special service projects.

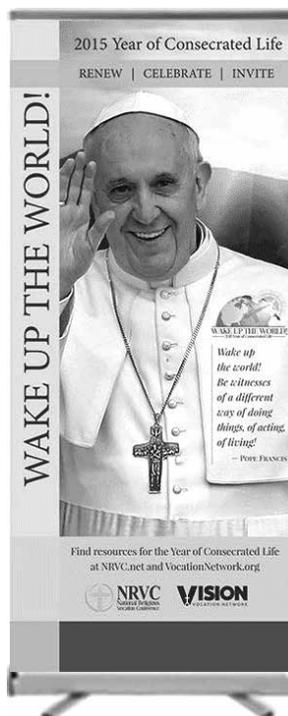
SEPTEMBER 13, 2015—Day of Prayer with Religious. Events will include vespers, rosary or holy hours in convents, monasteries, religious houses, parishes and churches.

SEPTEMBER 23-26, 2015—Special events in Rome for young people in consecrated life.

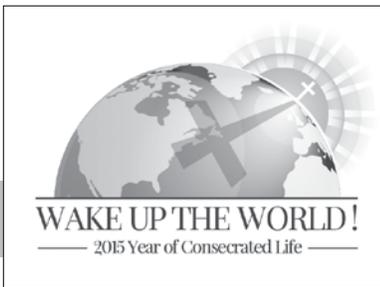
SEPTEMBER 26—Events commemorating saints and martyrs of consecrated life.

JANUARY 24, 2016 - FEBRUARY 2, 2016—World Week of Consecrated Life in Unity. This will include a theological symposium on consecrated life and specific meetings on monastic life, secular institutes, and the Order of Consecrated Virgins.

Fact sheet, prayer cards, parish kits, lessons, etc., available for special year



Numerous professionally produced resources are being offered online at no cost to those taking part in the Year of Consecrated Life. Thanks to a grant from the Hilton Foundation, the National Religious Vocation Conference and VISION Vocation Guide have produced dozens of resources for planning events and activities. Find them at nrvc.net or vocationnetwork.org. They include a new fact sheet about religious life, homilies, bulletin inserts, reflections, a banner, a song with music, lesson plans, prayers, and more. ■



Year of Consecrated Life

Highlights of the pope's letter to religious

Pope Francis ushered in the Year of Consecrated Life with a special Mass and an apostolic letter. The following excerpts reflect his main messages to men and women religious.



ART BY JOHN STUART, STUSHIEART.COM

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS in consecrated life, I am writing to you as the successor of Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the task of confirming his brothers and sisters in faith (cf. Lk. 22:32). But I am also writing to you as a brother who, like yourselves, is consecrated to God. . . .

I. Aims of the Year of Consecrated Life

1. The first of these aims is to look to the past with gratitude. All our institutes are heir to a history rich in charisms. At their origins we see the hand of God who, in his Spirit, calls certain individuals to follow Christ more closely, to translate the gospel into a particular way of life, to read the signs of the times with the eyes of faith and to respond creatively to the needs of the church. This initial experience then matured and developed, engaging new members in new geographic and cultural contexts,

and giving rise to new ways of exercising the charism, new initiatives and expressions of apostolic charity. Like the seed which becomes a tree, each institute grew and stretched out its branches.

During this year, it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our unity as a family and our common sense of belonging. More than an exercise in archaeology or the cultivation of mere nostalgia, it calls for following in the footsteps of past generations in order to grasp the high ideals, and the vision and values which inspired them, beginning with the founders and foundresses and the first communities. In this way we come to see how the charism has been lived over the years, the creativity it has sparked, the difficulties it encountered, and the concrete ways those difficulties were surmounted. We may also encounter cases of inconsistency, the result of human weakness and even at times a neglect of some essential aspects of the charism. Yet everything proves instructive and, taken as a whole, acts as a summons to conversion. To tell our story is to praise God and to thank him for all his gifts.

In a particular way we give thanks to God for these 50 years which followed the Second Vatican Council. The council represented a “breath” of the Holy Spirit upon the whole church. In consequence, consecrated life undertook a fruitful journey of renewal which, for all its lights and shadows, has been a time of grace, marked by the presence of the Spirit.

2. This year also calls us to live the present with passion. Grateful remembrance of the past leads us, as

we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today, to implement ever more fully the essential aspects of our consecrated life.

From the beginnings of monasticism to the “new communities” of our own time, every form of consecrated life has been born of the Spirit’s call to follow Jesus as the gospel teaches (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2). For the various founders and foundresses, the gospel was the absolute rule, whereas every other rule was meant merely to be an expression of the gospel and a means of living the gospel to the full. For them, the ideal was Christ; they sought to be interiorly united to him and thus to be able to say with Saint Paul: “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Their vows were intended as a concrete expression of this passionate love.

The question we have to ask ourselves during this year is if and how we too are open to being challenged by the gospel; whether the gospel is truly the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make. The gospel is demanding: it demands to be lived radically and sincerely. It is not enough to read it (even though the reading and study of Scripture is essential), nor is it enough to meditate on it (which we do joyfully each day). Jesus asks us to practice it, to put his words into effect in our lives.

Once again, we have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if he is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.

Our founders and foundresses shared in Jesus’ own compassion when he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus, who compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so our founders and foundresses sought in different ways to be the service of all those to whom the Spirit sent them.

The Year of Consecrated Life challenges us to examine our fidelity to the mission entrusted to us. Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit asked of our founders and foundresses? Are they suitable for carrying out today, in society and the church, those same ministries and works? Do we

have the same passion for our people, are we close to them to the point of sharing in their joys and sorrows, thus truly understanding their needs and helping to respond to them?

Recalling our origins sheds light on yet another aspect of consecrated life. Our founders and foundresses were attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living.

Living the present with passion means becoming “experts in communion,” “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design” (Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, “Religious and Human Promotion” 1980). In a polarized society, where different cultures experience difficulty in living alongside one another, where the powerless encounter oppression, where inequality abounds, we are called to offer a concrete model of community which, by acknowledging the dignity of each person and sharing our respective gifts, makes it possible to live as brothers and sisters.

So, be men and women of communion! Have the courage to be present in the midst of conflict and tension, as a credible sign of the presence of the Spirit who inspires in human hearts a passion for all to be one (cf. Jn. 17:21).

3. To embrace the future with hope should be the third aim of this year. We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members, particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance.... But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: “Be not afraid... for I am with you” (Jer. 1:8).

This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim. 1:2), the One for whom “nothing is impossible” (Lk. 1:37). This is the hope which does not disap-

The question we have to ask ourselves during this year is if and how we too are open to being challenged by the gospel; whether the gospel is truly the “manual” for our daily living and the decisions we are called to make.

point; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.

So do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert. Together with Benedict XVI, I urge you not to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end or meaninglessness of the consecrated life in the church in our day; rather, clothe yourselves in Jesus Christ and put on the armor of light—as Saint Paul urged (cf. Rom. 13:11-14)—keeping awake and watchful” (Homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2013).

I would especially like to say a word to those of you who are young. You are the present, since you are already taking active part in the lives of your institutes, offering all the freshness and generosity of your “yes.” At the same time you are the future, for soon you will be called to take on roles of leadership in the life, formation, service and mission of your communities. This year should see you actively engaged in dialogue with the previous generation. In fraternal communion you will be enriched by their experiences and wisdom, while at the same time inspiring them, by your own energy and enthusiasm, to recapture their original idealism. In this way the entire community can join in finding new ways of living the gospel and responding more effectively to the need for witness and proclamation.

I am also happy to know that you will have the opportunity during this year to meet with other young religious from different institutes. May such encounters become a regular means of fostering communion, mutual support, and unity.

II. Expectations for the Year of Consecrated Life

What in particular do I expect from this year of grace for consecrated life?

1. That the old saying will always be true: “Where there are religious, there is joy.” We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that the authentic fraternity found in our communities increases our joy; and that our total self-giving in service to the church, to families and young



PHOTO BY AMBRIA HANNEU/CATHOLIC SUN.
Kicking off the Year of Consecrated Life, the Diocese of Phoenix held a welcoming Mass and reception for religious. Bishop Thomas Olmsted greets a participant.

people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfillment.

None of us should be dour, discontented, and dissatisfied, for “a gloomy disciple is a disciple of gloom.” Like everyone else, we have our troubles, our dark nights of the soul, our disappointments and infirmities, our experience of slowing down as we grow older. But in all these things we should be able to discover “perfect joy.” For it is here that we learn to recognize the face of Christ, who became like us in all things, and to rejoice in the knowledge that we are being conformed to him who, out of love of us, did not refuse the sufferings of the cross.

In a society which exalts the cult of efficiency, fitness, and success, one which ignores the poor and dismisses “losers,” we can witness by our lives to the truth of the words of Scripture: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

We can apply to the consecrated life the words of Benedict XVI which I cited in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “It is not by proselytizing that the church grows, but by attraction” (No. 14). The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy! Similarly, the apostolic effectiveness of consecrated life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the gospel.

2. I am counting on you “to wake up the world,” since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: “Radical evangelical liv-

ing is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.” This is the priority that is needed right now: “to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth . . . a religious must never abandon prophecy” (29 November 2013).

Prophets receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. Is. 21:11-12). Prophets know God, and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters. They are able to discern and denounce the evil of sin and injustice. Because they are free, they are beholden to no one but God, and they have no interest other than God. Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side. . . .

3. Men and women religious, like all other consecrated persons, have been called, as I mentioned, “experts in communion.” So I am hoping that the “spirituality of communion”, so emphasized by Saint John Paul II, will become a reality and that you will be in the forefront of responding to “the great challenge facing us” in this new millennium: “to make the church the home and the school of communion. (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*). I am sure that in this year you will make every effort to make the ideal of fraternity pursued by your founders and foundresses expand everywhere, like concentric circles.

Communion is lived first and foremost within the respective communities of each institute. To this end, I would ask you to think about my frequent comments about criticism, gossip, envy, jealousy, hostility as ways of acting which have no place in our houses. This being the case, the path of charity open before us is almost infinite, since it entails mutual acceptance and concern, practicing a communion of goods both material and spiritual, fraternal correction and respect for those who are weak . . . it is the “mystique of living together” which makes our life “a sacred pilgrimage” (*Evangelii Gaudium*). We need to ask ourselves about the way we relate to persons from different cultures, as our communities become increasingly international. How can we enable each member to say freely what he or she thinks, to be accepted with his or her particular gifts, and to become fully co-responsible?

I also hope for a growth in communion between the members of different institutes. Might this year be an occasion for us to step out more courageously from the confines of our respective institutes and to work togeth-

er, at the local and global levels, on projects involving formation, evangelization, and social action? This would make for a more effective prophetic witness. . . .

4. I also expect from you what I have asked all the members of the church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. “Go into all the world”; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. Mk. 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world’s goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine. . . .

You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love. I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the gospel, and to teach others how to pray. Consequently, I would hope that structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed for works which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs.

5. I expect that each form of consecrated life will question what it is that God and people today are asking of them. Monasteries and groups which are primarily contemplative could meet or otherwise engage in an exchange of experiences on the life of prayer, on ways of deepening communion with the entire church, on supporting persecuted Christians, and welcoming and assisting those seeking a deeper spiritual life or requiring moral or material support. . . .

The creativity of the Spirit has generated ways of life and activities so diverse that they cannot be easily categorized or fit into ready-made templates. So I cannot address each and every charismatic configuration. Yet during this year no one can feel excused from seriously examining his or her presence in the church’s life and from responding to the new demands constantly being made on us, to the cry of the poor.

Only by such concern for the needs of the world, and by docility to the promptings of the Spirit, will this Year of Consecrated Life become an authentic *kairos*, a time rich in God’s grace, a time of transformation. ■

Find “The Apostolic letter of his holiness Pope Francis to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life” in its entirety at vatican.va.

Religious have gone out into deep, dangerous waters for centuries. What does it mean to do so today?



PHOTO: DANICALOP93

BY BROTHER PAUL
BEDNARCZYK, C.S.C.



Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C. has been executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference since 2002. His prior ministries

include 12 years of secondary education in Maryland and Rome, where he was a teacher, campus minister, and administrator, and nine years as vocation director for the Congregation of Holy Cross, Eastern Province of Brothers. Brother Paul was also a member of his Provincial Council, where he served one term as director of formation. He has written on religious life and is regularly invited to speak on the topic of vocation ministry. This reflection was given during a liturgy at the NRVC Convocation 2014.

Head into the deep

IN THE STORY OF JESUS'S CALL OF SIMON in the Gospel of Luke, some astonishing images and dynamics contribute to a great visual drama. (See the scripture passage on page 10.) Swelling crowds of people inch closer and closer to Jesus to hear him preach. Whether to help himself speak more effectively or to ensure his own safety, Jesus creatively responds to a possibly threatening situation by asking a tired fisherman who has worked all night to take him out in his boat so that he can preach at a safe distance from the shore. If that is not enough, when he is finished, this son of a carpenter tells an experienced fisherman to push further out to the sea and to drop his nets for a catch.

Simon politely reminds Jesus that he has worked all night (which means "I'm tired") and has caught nothing ("You don't know what you are talking about"). But Simon does as the Master tells him and bravely navigates his boat into deeper waters and drops his nets. To his utter amazement, not only did he catch fish, he caught such quantities of fish that his nets were to the point of bursting and his boat sinking. So much so that those in the other boat had to come to help him haul in his catch. Peter,

LUKE 5:1-11

The call of Simon the fisherman

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret.

He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."

Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets."

When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing.

They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

deeply shaken by what he just witnessed, humbly kneels before Jesus and begs him to leave him because of his sinfulness. Jesus, recognizing Peter's genuine fear, simply tries to calm him down with both assurance and a promise: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." As a result of this miraculous experience, Peter, along with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, are transformed and they leave everything and follow the one whom Peter now calls Lord.

It couldn't be better—this is the classic "call" story, perfect for National Vocation Awareness Week. Although my temptation was to reflect on vocation—hearing, recognizing, and responding to God's call—I decided to do something different and to look at three themes in this gospel story—the miraculous, reassurance, and promise. They are especially appropriate as we anticipate

this coming year dedicated to the consecrated life.

Jesus told Peter to put out into the deep, and it was there the miracle occurred—no matter what he may have thought of Jesus' request, Peter took the risk to go out further into the sea, and it was here that he experienced God's amazing and wonderful abundance. This transformed Peter, James, and John so much so, they risked again, dropped everything, and followed the Lord.

History shows that women and men religious have gone out into the deep for centuries. Over 200 years ago missionaries came from Europe to this New World without anything but their faith and determination and began to build schools, hospitals, and orphanages. We celebrate the true miracle of their legacy in this country in the massive parochial school and Catholic health care systems we have today. We see this tradition continue as religious sisters, brothers, and priests, who often at great risk, minister to the undocumented on the border, tutor in inner city schools, provide assistance to refugees, and care for those with Ebola in West Africa. I was not surprised to read in a recent Caritas International report that the only people who are currently bringing food to those infected by Ebola are priests and religious. The first health care workers to die from Ebola were also religious. In these deep waters women and men religious witness every day to the miracles of healing, reconciliation, peace-building, and advancement, and they, like the disciples, are amazed at the wonder and transforming miracle of God's power.

This year the church commemorates the 50th anniversary of *Lumen Gentium*, and next year we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the two Vatican II documents that had the most profound impact on religious life. With the promulgation of these documents, religious embarked on an amazing and enriching journey of renewal and transformation. With all that we have endured, the miracle is that we are still here, and yes, it is good that we are here for we have much to be proud of and much to celebrate. The upcoming Year of Consecrated Life, however, is not just about celebrating our past accomplishments. More importantly, it is about the present and where we are to go in the future.

Pope Francis has consistently invited men and women religious to put out to the deep waters like Peter, to descend their mountains like the disciples, and to leave their sacristies and convents, and to go to the periphery. "Being at the periphery," he says "helps us to see and understand better, to analyze reality more correctly, to shun centralism and ideological approaches." In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Holy Father writes: "I prefer

a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures.”

What do the pope’s words mean for our religious communities? What does it mean for us as vocation directors to go out to the deep, to the fringes, to the periphery? Pope Francis prophetically calls us to a deeper conversion, to get out of our comfort zones, and to go places that may cause unease or make us apprehensive. Going to the periphery for us is not just about working with the poor and needy. It also means reaching out to those in the church who may not share our theological views, those who may live religious life differently or pray differently from us, and those who may not be in sync with our own ideological preferences. Likewise, as vocation ministers, going to the periphery may mean telling the good news about religious life not just to those who are already discerning a vocation, but to those who may be on the fringes of the church, those who may challenge us in our lifestyles, those who may question their faith and church teaching, and those who are preoccupied with their own self-absorption. By listening to all of them, spending time with them, and not judging them, we begin to see our lives, our reality, with new eyes. We begin to see ourselves through their eyes. Although those on the periphery need the witness of evangelical holiness, of men and women who are open enough to see the loving face of God in all, we also need those on the periphery to open our eyes, to see beyond our comfortable securities and orderly rules, and to broaden ourselves. Peter went out to the deep, discovered a miracle, and was transformed. Why can’t we?

Admittedly, what Jesus asked of Peter and what Pope Francis asks of us is not easy. Like Peter, we are at times tired and overworked. Similar to Peter, too, we also question the sense of it all. Given all the effort, is it really worth it? What are we going to accomplish anyway? We know what’s best—after all, Jesus is a carpenter’s son. What does he know about fishing? Although we rationalize, if we were really honest, we would admit that we are simply fearful.

What is it about the periphery that instills fear and apprehension? To be frank, venturing into deeper waters is dangerous and entails risk. The waters are often chaotic, and we doubt whether we can sustain life in them. Are we afraid of how this chaos may disturb our lives, our own thinking, our own ways of doing things by look-

ing at our current reality from the outside and through the eyes of those on the periphery? Are we afraid that we may make a mistake, or heaven forbid, learn that we may have been wrong? Are we afraid of shaking things up so much, that we may cause others to mistrust us, misunderstand us, or not like us?

This is why Jesus’ reassurance is so comforting. “Be not afraid,” he tells Peter. Later in the gospel Jesus says the same thing to the disciples on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration—“Have no fear.” These words became the mantra of St. John Paul II, and these are the same words that are now frequently said by Pope Francis.

As men and women religious who, by our vows, have forsaken all for the love of Jesus Christ and the church, we are meant to be free so that we can be about the reign of God, yet we have self-imposed fears that inhibit us. When you think about it, what really is it that we have to lose? Nothing, but fears are part of our humanity. That is why we need to hear God’s reassurance before we take the risk. We need to be reminded that we cannot go about the business of the gospel on our own. This is God’s work, not ours. We are and will always be dependent upon God’s beneficent good graces. When we forget this, we become prone to ideology, not gospel.

Because of our human weakness, Jesus also promises to strengthen us for the mission ahead. “I will make you fishers of men and women.” With that promise, combined with Jesus’ reassurance and the experience of God’s wonder, the disciples dropped all, followed, and were transformed. They are no longer just fishermen—they become companions to Jesus in ministry striving to build the Reign of God. We too are those companions.

At some point in our vocation ministry I believe all of us have similarly experienced God’s wonders and miracles. It is the conversion we witness in a student we directed on a Busy Person’s Retreat. It’s seeing the growing confidence and greater self-awareness of our candidates in formation. And it is the joy of witnessing their perpetual profession of vows and having the quiet satisfaction of knowing that we were companions on their journey.

Such miracles of God’s wonder easily bring us to our knees, and like Peter, we humbly want to say, “Leave me Lord, for I am sinful and weak.” But we shouldn’t fear God’s abundance. Rather, fortified with his reassurance and promise, we need to courageously step into the deep waters, to go to the periphery, and to be open to the potential transformation and transfiguration that await us in the future miracles that we may not even be able to conceive or imagine. And so my brothers and sisters, rise and be not afraid. ■



We need a fresh perspective on religious life and a new way of thinking about the present and future.

Most of these particular young people are not possible vocation candidates for Kremsmünster Abbey, but the abbey offers faith development programs to a wide swath of young people because there is a need. The contact with youth is good for members of the abbey. And the programs help build up the wider church.

BY FATHER BERNHARD
ECKERSTORFER, O.S.B.



Father Bernhard Eckerstorfer, O.S.B. was born in 1971 in Linz, Austria. He studied theology and geography in Salzburg, Vienna, and in the

United States he earned a master's in theological studies at Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon where his thesis was on Benedictine missionaries on Vancouver Island. For his doctoral dissertation on American theology, he was at Duke and Yale. In 2000 he entered Kremsmünster Abbey where today he is director of vocations, novice master, and spokesperson for his abbey. This article is the written version of the talk he gave at the 2014 NRVC convocation.

11 reasons to keep building our future

"See, I am doing something new!" (Is. 43:19)

MY OWN FAITH JOURNEY that led me into the monastery was shaped a great deal by theologians, priests, and religious in this country. Therefore I stand here in front of you with gratitude and affection for a country where, in my 20s, I found vital religious traditions and outstanding persons in the Catholic Church and beyond. If I can contribute something useful to your ministries through this address, then I will be delighted.

To begin my reflections, I first want to identify common ways of thought that, to my mind, lead us down a blind alley. My first question is: does the past have to be normative for the future?

Trapped in the past?

In the Austrian church we frequently judge our present situation by referring to the past: "If we had as many members as we used to, then"

“If we could again staff our school, then...” The implicit assumption is that the future will be mastered if it is like the past. Nobody says this so bluntly, but to my mind this is the underlying belief. This is natural of course. If you are 70 or 80 years old, and so are the bulk of your community members, then of course, it’s natural to think that the future will be bright if it recaptures the abundance you once knew.

This is the logic of the “again,” and with this kind of logic, we do not discover new ways that lead forward. For example in my abbey young confreres might suggest something, and the argument against it is, “We have done this since the year 777, why change it now?” Or, “We have been around for 1,200 years, and we should change our ways because a few young people think so?”

Sometimes our communities appear to have vows that are not obedience, celibacy and poverty, but rather the commonly held assertions: “It has always been like this. If everyone could alter our life, where would this lead?!” These are things I have heard from members of my community. Young people find this a challenge, both within and outside our communities.

Here is another small example. Right now we have a 24-year-old novice. He once picked up the 1965 directory of my community, flipped through it, and said (rightly): “Most of us were already here at that time!” For someone his age, 1965 was the Ice Age; it was the time of dinosaurs. Even our books on the abbey’s history are not recent; they are decades old. This is just one reason we need the perspective of young people, to see what our communities look like, how they are perceived from the outside.

1. Numbers never say it all

Connected to this focus on the past, wherever we look within religious life in Austria we find a loss in numbers. It seems that the church and religious orders are losing ground. We stare at these losses.

The key word in our discussions is “still.” How many are there still in your abbey? How many still are teaching in the abbey school? We frustrate ourselves constantly because we compare ourselves to a past that cannot be compared to the present. We concentrate on numbers. Why? I think in our lack of orientation and security, we want to hold fast to something. Also, the dominance of natural sciences in the West means that what counts are things that we can measure. Even if what we’re saying with our numbers is that things have gotten worse and will get worse, it gives us some security to be able to say that, to document it.

In addition, the economy plays a vital role in our world, and in economics, success is measured by increases. We adapt this type of thinking quite easily in religious life, but it isn’t necessarily a good idea. Is success really a matter of increase in our life?

2. My abbey is a living example

Now I’d like to take a look at my abbey. It looks quite romantic and peaceful in this photo, but it’s actually quite a busy place. We have a school and an observatory, and it’s quite vast, with many buildings that have been added over time, dating back to our founding in the 8th century.

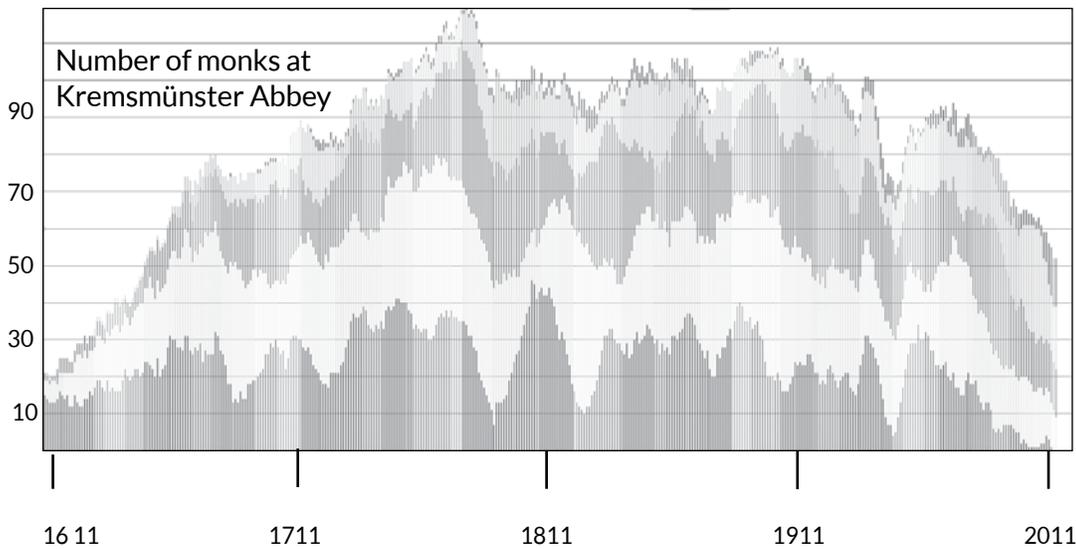
Now here is another picture of my abbey using numbers (see the graph on page 14). This graph shows the changes in the number of monks. If we look at just the



Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria.

last 300 years, we see that we have never been so few in number over the last 250 years as we are now! And it will go down further. The age distribution is hard to see, but it is indicated by the different shades, oldest the top and youngest at the bottom. Our average age is 60. A third are between 75 and 85. The conclusion, then, is we will die out. There are hardly any monks between 20 and 30. I’m actually the third youngest monk in my monastery at the age of 43; we have one monk in his 20s and one in his 30s.

Looking at the whole graph, we see the last 400 years and detect a different picture. Suddenly we detect that our present situation is not such a disaster but rather that we have had this before: 350 years ago we had the same number of monks as today, and before that, we had even less. We were only 20 men 400 years ago. So it’s a matter of what you look at. This is a history that you might not have here in the United States.



not show that we are conditioned to see more acutely the negative rather than the positive during our times of transition?

What makes this experiment especially interesting is this. The first group takes into account almost exclusively quantitative arguments (less church attendance, fewer vocations), whereas the second group points out mostly qualitative traits

Now let's go further back. I might point out that there are not clear records for every year, but we can still say that during the first 800 years there were, on average, perhaps 20 to 30 monks. During the Reformation, at one point, we only numbered seven!

This means that the times when we numbered around 100 were the exception (that is, from the 1730s to the 1970s)—but the memory of that exception is deeply rooted in a community that is aged and saw these swelling numbers in their younger years. Every year a few pupils from the boarding school settled into the novitiate after graduation. For most of our members today, this kind of large and growing community was normal.

There were two historically unique periods—unique for the large numbers of members: during the 19th century and again in the 1950s. During these two periods, Austria experienced tremendous upsurges in Catholicism. It is only now that my monastery is going back to what is more statistically “normal” over the long period of our 1,200 year history. Clearly, new times call for new standards.

3. New times need new standards

Let me tell you about a small experiment that I have conducted with a parish council and then also with a group of religious. First I divided the parish or the religious into two groups. One group I asked to identify signs of a deep crisis in the parish or religious order. I asked the other group to report signs that the parish or religious order is lively and vibrant. In my experience, the first group, dedicated to a disastrous reading of church crisis, has twice as many entries as the second group. Does this

(high relevance of the church in periods of personal crisis, spiritual competence of religious). Once again we see how dangerous it is only to look on numbers and compare our time with a past situation.

A merely quantitative investigation of how the church and our communities develop does not capture vigorous forms of religious practice that emerge ever new. Such a narrow perspective sees success and flourishing communities only in terms of large numbers of members. This type of analysis is not able to capture promising paths into the future—a future that certainly will be different from the past. Such a perspective is blind to new developments in religious life. We have to take pains not to adopt it for ourselves. Otherwise we limit our view to a game of increase and decrease.

The Catholic milieu of the 1950s, when it was part of being Austrian to be Catholic, cannot be compared with the increasingly pluralist world of the 21st century where religion has become a matter of choice. Comparison can be a vice. The Desert Fathers tell us: “Do not compare yourself with others and you will find peace” (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, No. 788). We always read this at a personal level—that we should not compare ourselves to a confrere. But I think we also should not compare our time with the past. To my mind, the magic of numbers and the comparison with the past paralyzes the church and religious orders in Austria to a great deal.

We try to implement reforms, to address our community crisis with reforms, and of course many times it doesn't work. Some things have run their course, and we have to be ready to let go. We need a new mindset. We need to be ready to let go ... that does not mean we have capitulated. It is difficult to be open to change within a

culture where long traditions reign and change is often seen as something we do better without.

Yet we need to make room for other things. I want to call attention to the perspective of young people. They do not see a loss if things change and if former numbers are not reached. Young people rather want change and see in it a promise for the future. They do not have the fixed idea that the community they are interested in ought to return to what it was like in the past, and they do not so easily buy into the unrealistic wish that the future is only mastered if the community numbers increase to what they were in the 18th century or after World War II. It's important to free ourselves of false expectations and be open to the future

"I will lead them into the desert" (Hos. 2,16)

4. Vocation crisis as spiritual growth?

We all agree that we can and should do our best to increase vocations and prepare ourselves and our communities for the future. But I think it is a temptation to expect this only from our own efforts. Authentic Christian renewal does not start with programs but with a new awareness of God's loving care.

We have to give room to lamentations in our communities because sometimes things are really tough. We have to say goodbye to things that were important for decades. I don't want to deny the difficulty. In my breviary, next to Psalm 74, I wrote "crisis of our monastery." The passage is this: "Our God, why have you completely rejected us?" Verse 9, "There are no more miracles and no more prophets. Who knows how long it will be like this?" The psalms are full of this sense of being lost.

Then we have the example of Hosea. The Lord said: "So I will allure her. I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart." (Hos. 2:16) The place of love is the desert, where God wants to renew his covenant. "She shall respond there as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt." (Hos. 2:17) Apparently Israel has forgotten God precisely in the land where milk and honey flow, at the worldly feasts, in the sedate life of the bourgeoisie (cf. Hos. 2:15). In the desert, God and his people are together again, returned to their first love that will lead them into the future. Thus renewal starts as an interior conversion. It is God's initiative and not our reasoning that leads us to renewal.

The noted German theologian Gisbert Greshake describes the modern church as having been led into the desert. She has to appreciate herself anew as the pilgrim people of God; the church is called out of the secure



Painting of the Transfiguration over the high altar in the Kremsmünster Abbey

lands where she has been well established. The church, claims Greshake, must return to its formative phase when Israel and the Great Church emerged out of a desert experience. In our time—as in past periods—God wants to start anew to form his people. Our guides must be those people who have fruitfully dealt with the desert. We have to find the oasis in which faith blossoms under current conditions.

If we understand our current situation as one of being in the desert, then we understand why Israel started murmuring and why we shouldn't do it. We can understand why St. Benedict is so hard on murmurers, because one monk can prevent the others from moving forward, from hearing God speak to the community. If we murmur we leave reality where it is and remain on the surface. We point out what is not going well, complain about it—without seeing deeper and realizing that there might be a call for conversion.

Maybe things that are very difficult for us and hurt us can help us to reconcentrate on God. Maybe without

our current crisis we would not need God anymore. This is why Pope Francis is very hard on religious orders and asks again and again if we are really missionaries and if God is at the center of our wealth and might? This is the desert experience. I know it's very difficult—I certainly don't deny that—but I think we need this perspective to understand our time. Perhaps this brings us closer to a broken world, a world that lacks orientation. If our religious houses did not have problems with disorientation, how could we be part of this world? Recently the 95-year-old Helmut Schmidt, former German chancellor, said in an interview, "All of European institutions are in deep crisis." And the church should not be in crisis? And the monasteries and convents? We are part of this world. Perhaps this crisis brings us closer to a people in deep crisis. That is the theological meaning of poverty, not just not having money or being deprived of something.

And then we have the *kenosis*, the outpouring described in Philippians 2. I have experienced *kenosis* in my own community. I recall being the community spokesperson at a time that we were dealing with all of these issues at the same time: the sexual abuse scandal, a lack of vocations, mental tiredness, and spiritual fruitlessness. We had people not even showing up to prayer. I did a retreat at this time, and there was a very wise director there who guided me, and he said, this is *kenosis*. Look at Christ. Did you not know you have to follow him? You need to go to recreation even when you'd really rather read in your room, even when you know the jokes of your confreres will not be that good, when you know you don't prefer their company. This is *kenosis*, enter it! See it with the eyes of God. See it as the fallen Christ. Empty yourself. This is the experience of our communities, and it is our experience personally. We have to teach this to the young people entrusted to us.

5. Failure is different with Gospel vision

Now let us turn to St. Benedict. On the one hand, we know he is the very successful founder of monasteries. But his biography can also be read as a series of failures. In Rome he discontinued his studies. In Vicovaro he was asked to become abbot, but he apparently was too strict. So they murmured—and then they poisoned him. He said to them: why did you do this to me, brothers? That is why he is depicted in paintings holding a chalice with a snake coming out. So he left again and returned to a solitary life at Subiaco, *habitavit secum*; "under the eyes of God." He started becoming more and more well-known, but a priest nearby did not like it. He was jealous

of Benedict. So Benedict left. Again.

At Montecassino Benedict writes, "The abbot must understand that he has undertaken care of the sick, not tyranny over the healthy." So we see that desert experiences of failure can become a blessing.

Knowing that we have these imperfections, we need to ask ourselves, Do we depict our communities as being only for the perfect? Are they only for saints? Do we introduce young people to a realistic view of religious life? Are we preparing them for the crises, for the need to recommit after perhaps 10 or 15 years? Do religious who undergo severe challenges see their crises as a call for a new beginning or only as an invitation to reverse their decision to make vows?

Do we talk about the demons? They are a very deep part of our spirituality. Is there Christian life without combat and fighting? All of this is part of our tradition, although it certainly is not part of "Christianity Lite." The road to religious life is not just ice cream and brownies.

6. We can be transfigured

And so we turn to the Transfiguration. What precedes this moment in the synoptic Gospels is Jesus speaking about his suffering and death.

In the Kremsmünster Abbey, above the altar in our church hangs a painting of the Transfiguration. It is painted and positioned so that everybody who comes to our church gazes on Christ. When young people come, this is what they see. In the painting itself everybody is focused on Christ: Moses, Elijah, the angels, and three disciples. This means that we too should gaze on Christ to bring people to the center of Christ. This is what the young people see, and this is what they are searching and longing for, too: a relationship with Christ. And so we can ask ourselves, are we centered on Christ, or do we look elsewhere for fulfillment?

This is a question that Pope Francis is asking us. A religious life that is narcissistic does not attract others, does not reach out to them, but it is only concerned about one's own well being. Our lives need to be about more than superficial talking, making bad jokes ... they need to be about zeal, vision, and mission. Let's be critical about ourselves and the appearance we and our fellow sisters and brothers make. Let's re-center our gaze upon Christ. This is our VISION.

As you can see in the painting, the left angel is pointing with his right hand to Christ and with his left hand, he is pointing to Christ transfigured for us in the eucharist. The angel is pointing to the tabernacle.

Christ wants to live in every one of us; he wants to “take his place” in our world, he wants to abide with us, in us. The right angel is touching his heart with his right hand, telling us that faith is a matter of the heart, what counts ultimately is love! With the left hand the angel points to Christ, who is love transfigured.

“It is good to be here” is what the disciples tell Jesus during the Transfiguration story, but the next command is: Go forth! Move into the future, which is MISSION. We cannot rest where we are. “Rise, and have no fear.”

We need confidence that what we stand for has a future. However, the problem is often that consecrated men and women do not believe religious life has a future. This is not new. The ancient abbey of Mondsee that founded our monastery in the eighth century was suppressed in 1791 by Joseph II. What is usually not said is that the monks did not think they had any future, and they asked the emperor to suppress them! There are letters and diaries in our archives telling us that some monks in my abbey did not think they had a future. The thinking went like this: “Benedictine life is dated; it does not make sense in our enlightened world, and celibacy doesn’t make sense; it is stupid.” This was 250 years ago.

And now this is happening again. To my mind, from the perspective as an Austrian monk living in the highly secularized world of Western Europe, the danger to religious life does not come from outside (e.g. new atheism), but from within. It comes from within when we hear a confrere say, “I cannot support a young person to enter in our abbey.”

During my own discernment process, a well known diocesan priest shocked me when he told me, “I really think that in our time you are better off not to join a seminary or a religious order. Today you can serve the church better if you get married, this way of life in the priesthood doesn’t have a future.”

7. God’s promise leads us on

Let me turn now to this idea of God leading his people forth to a new land. Genesis 12 starts with this God saying to Abram: “Go forth from your country.” This was not easy for Sarah and him. They faced the prospect of dwelling in tents and accepting a lower standard of living. But I think this might be our story, too—to go forth from the secure lands of the past, of your community, of what you got used to. “Go forth from your country ... to the land which I will show you.” Next: “And I will make you a great nation.” And then, “Now Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran.” Seventy-five

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENTS you can trust

You need a candidate assessment you can trust.

Our experienced professionals understand the challenges and requirements of religious life.

A three-person team leads our two-day integrated psychological and spiritual assessments. You get expertise you can count on, and oral and written feedback you can use.

Please visit us online or call to learn more.

Locations in Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri.



SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE
Candidate Assessment Program

Emily Cash, Psy.D., Director | emilyc@sli.org | 502.632.2471
sli.org/consultation/candidate-assessments

years of age and he had to start anew.

Then in verse seven we learn, “To your descendants I will give this land.” The promised land is for those who are entrusted to us—this is our longing. The young people will inherit the religious life of the future. We can even have the generosity to say, it is great that this other community has young people. Perhaps we will not continue, but religious life will continue. It is not about us; it’s about the church. God has not promised that religious communities as they are, as they used to be, will have eternal life. He only said that the church, the Body of Christ, the pilgrim people of God, will live into the future.

Thus we can read these promises of abundant descendants in the Old Testament not with regard to numbers as we saw them in the 1950s, but with regard to abundant blessings and countless descendants in a spiritual way that cannot be measured merely by worldly standards.

8. New times demand new approaches

Now I want to tell you what I try to do as vocation direc-

Redemptorist Renewal Center

"Celebrating 50 years of Retreat Ministry 1964-2014"

7101 W. Picture Rocks Rd, Tucson, AZ 85743 USA

Phone: 520.744.3400 ~ 866.737.5751

Email: office@desertrenewal.org

www.desertrenewal.org

Contemplative Study and Sabbatical Program

Envision your sabbatical filled with silence so that you can rest and renew. The atmosphere of the Sonoran Desert is one of spirituality that is anchored in a contemplative attitude and approach towards life.

2015

August 9-September 11

October 4-December 11

2016

March 6-May 13

August 7-September 9

October 2-December 9

Hesychia School of Spiritual Direction

Program focuses on the ancient art of Christian spiritual direction in a multi-faith context. Through contemplative study, Peer learning, and practicum exercises you will be prepared to direct and guide your spiritual community.

February 15-27 and April 12-24, 2015

tor in my abbey and how we see this leading to a future that God gives us. I do not at all say that I have the recipe for a successful vocation ministry. I am searching myself, and there are certainly more effective and more vivid examples in Austria and Europe than what I present. I simply want to tell, from my limited experience, what I have found helpful and what this tells us about our work and religious life in the future.

Every first Saturday of the month the Kremsmünster Abbey has a half-day program called "Benedict Meeting Place" (*Treffpunkt Benedikt*) for young adults, typically well-educated young people, both single and married, who are in parishes that don't have programs that suit them. Some of them don't even attend church, but they come to us. Religious houses play an important role in meeting this need. We are always surprised at how many people come, usually more than 100 from around the region attend the Benedict Meeting Place.

We start with Benedictine vespers, often with a band and modern music. Then we have a one-hour lecture, usually with a Benedictine spin. Then there is adoration. Eucharistic adoration is important because youth are always having to say things and read things, and they really like just being in the presence of God. We offer confession, and often have processions, too. We celebrate Mass together. Then of course there must be something to eat. Sports, too, are an important part of this program. Sometimes, maybe every three years, we will lead them through the monastery. My confreres can be shocked by the presence of all these young men and beautiful women, but this only happens sometimes, and it is important to the young people to see where and how we live.

Since my community has property in the mountains (for the timber that supports us) we also offer a week-long summer retreat program in the mountains. In addition, we invite young men to come and live with us in the monastery over a weekend.

9. We need to be with young people

My community has learned a few things from these experiences. First, we understand that religious communities need to be in contact with young people. The youth need to be part of our world, especially if we don't have many young members. Second, we know that we need time to develop this kind of programming. My predecessor had a parish in addition to being novice master and vocation director, but I do not. You need time to be able to start these kinds of programs.

We need a youthful spirit. We have to invite young

people into our communities—whether they enter or not, we need the spirit of youth to be part of our communities. I know of a community that fully expects to close down in the next several years. They invite young people to come into their community and share in their life. No one will enter, but they do it anyway because their lives have meaning for the young people. The sisters go to their weddings because the young people are part of them. I find this beautiful.

Inviting youth into our communities is also important for the few young people who do enter our communities. They see that other young men and women value religious life. They need “siblings” even if the siblings live outside the monastery walls.

10. We should be experts in discernment

In my country religious houses are more or less the only places where young people can find Christian guidance in decision making. Religious communities, along with Catholic university centers and a few parish priests, are the only place where they can find this. For this reason religious should become experts in decision making, in discernment. They should be open to whatever vocation a young person is leaning toward and not push them to enter their order. To offer this kind of guidance, religious houses might sponsor retreats and the like to encourage and support the discernment process.

This was important in my life. A sister of the Society of Faithful Companions of Jesus at Duke University helped me a lot. This was before I entered the monastery, and mostly I talked with her about my girlfriend back in Austria and the difficulty of our separation.

We have to accompany young people on their human and spiritual journeys and leave it up to them and God to make something with their lives. Perhaps we are returning to the time where—as in early monasticism—one spiritual father took much time and attention to guide a single young man to become a good monk.

11. Our networks enrich the church

Lay people are associating themselves with religious communities in a natural way, and they then become a new network for us. For example because of *Treffpunkt Benedikt* (Benedictine Meeting Place), young people show up for celebrations at the abbey; they celebrate their marriages in the abbey church. Some even tell us, “Kremsmünster Abbey has become my spiritual home.”

Of the three novices who have left during my time as

novice master since 2007, all of them still are associated with us in one way or another. They entered religious life, at the age of 19, two from our school—too early I think. One is in charge of the music in the *Treffpunkt Benedikt* program, and he sometimes spends weekends with us even though he will marry this summer. The second one sings every Sunday at our main Mass at our abbey church; and the third one is helping me to compile a new book about the abbey. They come back all the time, and recently one of the confreres said to me, “This is wonderful that they remain connected to us. Earlier in my life, it would have been impossible for someone who left formation to come back again.” What is happening is that we have new networks with young people. Several marriages have come out of our activities among young people. And this is also building up the church; maybe their children will be our new members someday. Maybe the laypeople will take on our ministries and build them up. We must enter into this work freely, without knowing exactly what the fruits for the church will be.

Do not get me wrong: I don’t think lay people will simply replace consecrated men or women. The church will always have people called to this particular form of discipleship. But is it not a sign of our times that lay people feel drawn to these spiritualities that formerly were associated only with consecrated people? Our spirituality is much broader, such that many people from all walks of life want to be associated with us. It would be disastrous if we only looked at new members and overlooked the fact that our spirituality is alive in the hearts of men and women who deliberately do not take vows but consider themselves part of the Franciscan, Dominican, or Benedictine tradition, to name just a few.

To conclude, I would like to let the Prophet Isaiah speak because God’s word always speaks to us in our own particular situations. From Isaiah 43:1-2, 18-19.

But now, thus says the Lord,
who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name: you are mine.

When you pass through waters, I will be with you;
through rivers, you shall not be swept away.
When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned,
nor will flames consume you....

Remember not the events of the past,
the things of long ago consider not;

See, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? ■

Reflection: God does more than we can ask or imagine

BY SISTER CATHERINE BERTRAND, S.S.N.D.

EPHESIANS 3: 17-20

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God. Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

I ADMIT that the reading I selected is not necessarily one of the standard vocation readings, but it seemed most appropriate. It's great at naming the "skill-set" needed by anyone who takes the person and words of Jesus seriously, including those who are looking at or living a consecrated way of life.

That being said, it is the last line that puts an exclamation mark on all that goes before it... recognizing that God's power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Is that not what "vocation" is all about—realizing and embracing the fact that we are intimately related to a God who can indeed do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine? Clearly God's choices are not just about us, and they don't depend on us. Those who are in the business of vocations can attest to that more than most. God's presence and power is so beyond us and yet so deeply rooted within us that it can do more than we can ask or imagine.

Maryknoll Missionary Janice McLaughlin has shared that her favorite name for God is Chipindikure, which means "the One who turns things upside down." It comes from the Zimbabwean word which means "to be uprooted." According to Janice this names well the fact that God's presence is often evident in the unwanted and unplanned changes that happen to us throughout our lives.

She goes on to say that "in today's utterly chaotic, confused, frenzied world, a God who specializes in unpredictability is no doubt an idea, and a reality, whose time has come." And most of us in vocation ministry can testify about a multitude of ways that this is truly the case as we reflect on our own experience of God and as we listen to those we accompany. God turns us upside down. And it may happen again and again.

Think of the last time that you were physically turned upside down. For many of us, that may take some doing, as it is often deemed more appropriate for children than adults. But try to recall the feeling of standing on your head—hanging from a railing or jungle gym, or walking on your hands... the blood rushing to your head, your hair hanging free, trying to keep your balance in a way that defies gravity. But most importantly remember how everything took on a new look, and you saw things in a whole new way? Your perspective definitely changed.

Figuratively we are also turned upside down—every time we are faced with change or choices, we are forced to see things in a whole new way. We are turned upside down when we are uprooted in ways

that move us to leave the familiar behind, to let go of all that prevents the new from coming. It doesn't come easily and as one author wrote, "Anything I've ever had to let go of had claw marks on it." And again and again we encounter the God of surprises, the God who turns things upside down, whose power working in us, and in those around us, desires to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

We are approaching a year of celebrating consecrated life. The theme that has been chosen is, "Wake up the world." In that light, what is the message that we most want to share with each other and with the world? Is this not another opportunity to allow ourselves to be turned upside down and perhaps take some folks with us for the turning? What is the old that we need to let go of, and what is the new that is waiting to be brought to birth? What is the perspective and response most needed today? What is the world asking of us who have been chosen, and have responded in living consecrated life? What needs to wake up in this church and world of ours? What needs to wake up in us who are the church, for the sake of the world? What is ours to do to help bring about this awakening? Do we trust that God's power working in us can still do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine?

I close with part of a selection from the Sufi poet Hafiz:

Tired of Speaking Sweetly

Love wants to reach out and shake us up,
break all our teacup talk of God.
Love sometimes gets tired of speaking sweetly
and wants to rip to shreds
all your erroneous notions of truth
that make you fight within yourself, dear one,
and with others,
causing the world to weep
on too many fine days.
God wants to shake us up,
The Beloved sometimes wants
to do us a great favor:
hold us upside down and shake all the nonsense out.
But when we hear that the Beloved is in such a "playful
mood" most everyone I know quickly packs their bags and
hightails it out of town.

But for those who stick around, may St. Paul's words and actions resound in the ears of our heart, open us to the possibility of God's power working in us to indeed do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. ■

Sister Catherine Bertrand, S.S.N.D. is a professional facilitator and was executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference from 1992 until 2002.





Photo: O10LAB ON FLICKR.COM

Our “yes” to consecrated life participates in God’s divine energies that continue to both animate the universe and to make all things new.

Transfigured by God

THE TRANSFIGURATION THEME you have chosen is quite in line with my own thoughts and feelings of recent months. A fellow theologian expressed it well a few months ago as she addressed a room full of esteemed colleagues: “Transfigurations are moments when you do not know if you should run for your life or hope that you can stay there forever!” Truly, part of me would stay *here* forever, delighting in the good company that you all are, women and men who love consecrated life and who are actively sharing with the world the beauty, the wonder, and the power of lives poured out through the evangelical counsels. “You hold the hopes of our congregations, institutes, and dioceses, and you hold the questions and

BY SISTER COLLEEN MARY MALLON, O.P.



Sister Colleen Mary Mallon, O.P. is an associate professor of systematic and philosophical theology at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri. She belongs to the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. This article is the text of her talk at the November, 2014 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference.

LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU

Be silent. Be still. Alone. Empty before your God.

Say nothing. Ask nothing. Be silent. Be still.

Let your God look upon you. That is all.
God knows. God understands.
God loves you with an enormous love,
And only wants to look upon you with that love.

Quiet. Still. Be. Let your God—love you.

—Edwina Gateley

wonderings of the women and men who seek you out to test the movement of the Spirit in their lives. You truly are “keepers of flame,” in the words of the Religious of the Sacred Heart and to be in your good company is a great privilege.

I know a little of the work entrusted to you. I had the privilege of being a vocation minister for one short year before beginning doctoral studies. I remember telling people that I really was not worried about getting the degree. If it didn’t work out, I would happily go back to vocation ministry. I loved every minute of it.

Thus, I invite you to enter with me into a theological reflection on our convocation theme, “It is good for us to be here. Rise up do not be afraid.” My hope is that together we can enter into a contemplative space where we might welcome and attend to the action of the Spirit who has brought us together today, to this convocation, for God’s purposes.

It is good for us to be here... here in Chicago.
It is good for us to be here... here in this church.
It is good for us to be here... here in this universe.

Today, as we affirm that it is good for us to be here, I want to invite us to take the long view—the really long view and recall and reclaim the story of how any of this came to be, why there is something instead of nothing. And I want to let that reflection inform and hopefully deepen both our appreciation for the lives entrusted to us, and the difference that our particular lives might make, dare we say, to the universe.

Can we ever spend enough time in contemplative wonder, pondering the gift of being, the gift of existence, the gift of creation? If you have ever had the chance to do a “cosmic walk,” you get a small but powerful sense

of the story of the new cosmology and just how remarkable it is that we are here at all. Scientists tell us that our story began approximately 13.7 billion years ago with the birth of the universe when, in the initial seconds, the fundamental forces (gravity, electromagnetism, and the forces of the atom) as well as the fundamental particles (protons, neutrons and electrons) came to be. However it would take 400,000 years before those atomic particles could come together (bond) to form the first atoms of hydrogen and helium. (Full disclosure: I am a former high school chemistry teacher!) Eventually as the universe continued to expand, gases condensed, heated up and triggered the nuclear reactions that would bring stars into existence. Further nuclear reactions would result in the appearance of heavier elements and most importantly for us, the arrival of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen, the building blocks of life and therefore, as Denis Edwards reminds us in his book *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Acts*, the emergence of consciousness on earth.

My point is this: to reflect on the statement “It is good to be here” should elicit a certain evolutionary wonder that there is even a “you” and a “me” in this moment in the history of creation. If you have read Bill Bryson’s *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, you may recall his introduction where he sagely reminds the reader that getting to today has been no small journey:

Consider the fact that for 3.8 million years, a period of time older than the Earth’s mountains and rivers and oceans, every one of your forebears on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to live long enough to do so. Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life’s quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result, eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly—in you.

Indeed, it is good for us to be here. In fact, congratulations! Apparently it has been no small journey; it has taken quite a bit of cosmic orchestration to bring each and every person present in this room to this moment.

Our theological reflection, in the light of the new cosmology, invites us to consider a paradigm shift as we ponder anew what it means to be a creature, to be a part of the universe story, and specifically to be that part

of created reality that can think, reflect, pray, and consciously make free choices about being in right relationship with self, others, and our God. And let's take that one step further; we, gathered here, are creatures who have responded to a call; we have accepted an invitation that has placed us in a set of profoundly significant human and ecclesial relationships.

One of the ways that we speak of these sets of relationships is to speak of "consecration." First and foremost is our baptismal consecration, by which we are claimed for and by Christ for all the promises of the resurrection. Others of us have entered into consecrated relationships through priestly ordination and/or vowed commitment to the evangelical counsels. If indeed, it is good for us to be here, then we will want to explore how the transfiguring power of the Spirit is at work in us through our consecration. And I want to make a bold claim. That is this: what

What God has done, is doing and has promised to do in terms of God's commitment to the world, by God's design, will not happen without us.

God has done, is doing and has promised to do in terms of God's commitment to the world, by God's design, will not happen without us. Our "yes" participates in the very divine energies that continue to both animate the universe and to make

all things new. Our consecration means something and I want to dare to say that it means something to the universe. So, with the help of the wonderful work of Denis Edwards, our recently departed Jesuit brother, Father Bill Stoeger, S.J. and a few others, I would like to reflect with you on the significance of our consecrated life as an expression of Divine action, that is, God at work in the world.

Our Christian faith tells us that our being here is no mistake. We are here in this place and at this time for a purpose. When we consider the bigger story of how we got here in the first place, the significance of our presence on the planet is even more potent. God has been at work in the universe, through all the laws at work in creation, including chaos and chance, and we are here. What has God been up to? Who is this Creating God, and how might we discover again, as if for the first time, the sustaining love that is holding each and every one of us in being at this very moment? I suggest that if we read the new cosmology with the eyes of faith, we might rediscover just "what wondrous love is this."



God, creator of the galaxies and every hair on our heads, is incarnated in Jesus, who is the fulfillment of creation's capacity to be in loving unity with God. Pictured here is a galaxy photographed by NASA.

Gift of divine self-bestowal

Faith opens a way of seeing the unfolding of the evolutionary universe as part of what Denis Edwards calls, "the larger story, the story of divine self-bestowal." I like Edward's language here, of "divine self-bestowal." Let's take a moment and consider this idea: the story of creation is really a part of the larger story of God's self gift. Maybe another way to express this is to speak of this larger story as the story of a "giveaway" God. God "pours out" the divine life into that which is not God and creation comes to be. Divine self-bestowal is why there is something instead of nothing: all that is receives being as God pours God-self out into that which is not God. And this is not some kind of "one shot deal" where God creates and goes away. Elizabeth Johnson reminds us in her new work, *Ask the Beasts* (page 123), that our tradition speaks of three moments of creation: *creatio originalis*, *creatio continuo* and *creatio nova*. That is, the original creation, ongoing creation of this present moment and, finally, new creation as that fullness-to-come when all shall be all in God. In all of the movements of creation, God is intimately involved; all that has received existence participates in the created order and functions according to the internal integrity that belongs to it as created reality. God is the life sustaining power over, in and through



**The Stuart Center for Mission,
Educational Leadership & Technology**
*works with nonprofits & educational institutions
to foster a more just world
characterized by balance and right relationship
by providing these services:*

- ◆ Meeting, conference & office space
- ◆ Web design & CiviCRM
- ◆ Graphic design
- ◆ Strategic planning processes
- ◆ Leadership training for all populations
- ◆ Program development & evaluation
- ◆ Youth outreach programs
- ◆ Workshops & seminars

Learn more at: **www.stuartcenter.org**
821 Varnum Street, NE
Washington DC, 20017
202-635-7987

which creation unfolds. So the truth is that God is closer to creation than creation is to itself. Creation comes to be, and in that moment so does the divine intention to be in loving relationship with all that is “not God.” At the heart of this loving relationship God is continually bestowing God’s own living-ness as the source, the goal and the animating power that accounts for creation. God is not creation; God is in loving, being-sustaining relationship with creation.

Given what we have said so far, what more do we need to explore in order to support my contention that our own relationship with God, expressed in our consecrated commitment, might actually matter to the universe? Let’s go a little deeper into the implications of creation and then turn our attention to the other sacred mysteries of our faith, their relation to this “giveaway God” and our participation in these mysteries.

God bestows on all that is the enabling powers that will allow creation to complete its sojourn into Divine Love. Whether we speak of acorns, amoebas, or alliga-

tors, each creature’s existence unfolds according to natural laws that bring particular life potentials to their full realization. “Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly,” right? So, creation unfolds according to the processes and potentials that respect creaturely integrity. But there is more, (and for this, I am deeply grateful for Denis Edwards’ theological project). Not only does God sustain all life in its existence, God animates creaturely capacities such that they transcend limits in the emergence of the “new.”

This is a very significant concept, because it speaks to God-given capacities within the natural order that are utterly natural and at the same time utterly dependent on the innermost animation of God’s own self-bestowing love. In other words, God’s creative love accompanies creation such that the ongoing gift of God’s self-bestowing love enables what Edwards calls “creaturely self-transcendence and emergence.” Edwards, building on the work of Karl Rahner, makes the amazing claim that God has made the universe capable of transcendence, of participating in the Divine self-gift in its own God-given natural capacity to bring forth “the new.”

Thus we can name those moments when the animating principle of divine self-gift enables evolutionary creation to follow the logic of its own laws: that is, self-transcendence in the emergence of that which is new. We see this most profoundly when life emerged from beyond a previous lifeless constellation of complex molecules; or when creaturely life transcended itself in the appearance of free, self-conscious, dare we say, covenant-capable human beings. Again, in Edwards’ words, “The Creator not only enables things to exist and act, but also enables them to become something radically new”

So, here’s a “what if?” question. What if the incarnation was not primarily a rescue mission? What if, by God’s design, in the fullness of time, one creature transcends all the limits that sin and hatred accrued, burdening human consciousness and blinding our vision of true humanity? What if “God so loved the world” that, as a part of one act of divine self-bestowal, God enters freely and fully into the conditions of our creaturehood and reveals our true destiny? What if in the incarnation of Jesus, the Christ, we encounter both creation’s capacity to transcend itself *and* God’s definitive commitment to be united in love with creation for all eternity?

In an evolutionary Christology, we can speak of the appearance of the Christ as a both/and. The material universe yields in “the fullness of time” one unique human being who fulfills all creation’s capacity to be open in love to its Creator. And at the same time, the entry of the Word made Flesh is the culminating act of God’s self-

bestowing. In Jesus, we truly receive God for us all.

If this is so, we must then see the resurrection as “the inner meaning of creation” because in the resurrection, we realize the full implications of God *in carne*, one of us, a creature of flesh and blood, of time and space, born of a woman and made from the same stardust as we, this Jesus lives forever in the Presence of God as creation fulfilled.

The resurrection of the crucified means that the Word of God is forever flesh, forever a creature, forever part of a universe of creatures. In creation, incarnation, and its culmination in resurrection, God commits God’s self to this world, to this universe and its creatures, and does this eternally. In the risen Jesus, part of this biological community of Earth, this evolutionary history, and this material universe is already forever with God, as the sign and the promise of the future of all things in God.

As the central meaning of creation, the resurrection is the divine promise that all “will be transfigured in Christ,” as Edwards puts it.

An amazing love story

It is an amazing love story; aren’t you glad you are here?! If the resurrection is the fullness of the creation story, the central meaning of God’s self-gift, then, those of us baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus are truly called to “Arise! Do not be afraid”! Arise, because even now, God is actively at work transfiguring the universe! The God whose self-bestowing love is right now enabling acorns to become oak trees, caterpillars to become butterflies and constellations of cosmic gases to become solar systems—this same creating love is transfiguring humanity, animating, vivifying, supporting from within, so that we might all realize our ultimate destiny as God’s own beloved family, the Body of Christ.

I know that in a world torn by so much suffering, pain, and sin it is difficult to see the transfiguring power of the Spirit at work: ISIS; Ferguson, Missouri; the Ebola virus. It is not easy to be a creature in this world. However, this condition of vulnerability and want that marks all of us is not the final word concerning both our potentials and our destinies. Born out of the creating love of a giveaway God, our existence finds its completion in relationship with this God, the God who gives us both being and the capacity to transcend into new being. God remains present to us and to all creation and continues to vivify the transformational and the new among us. The wonderful mystery is that we can cooperate, we can realize something of the openness of Christ to the



God urges us always toward self transcendence, be it through an experience of nature, through prayer, through service to others. Jesus’s death and resurrection are the culmination of self-giving: “the sign and promise of the future of all things in God.”

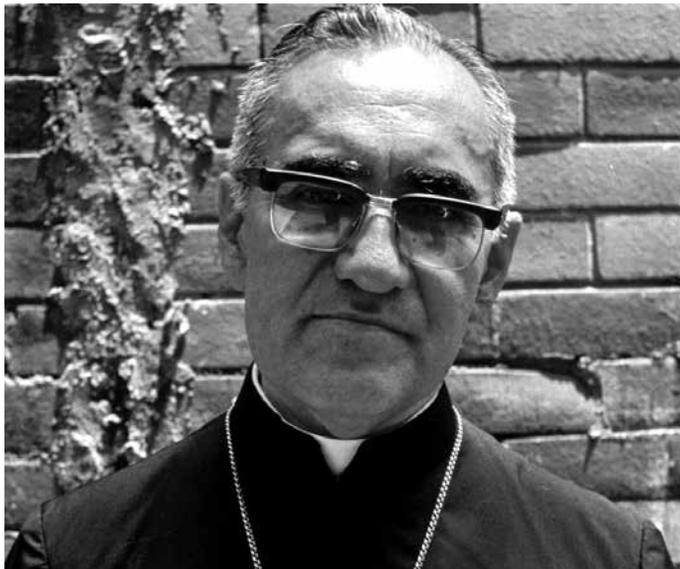
in-breaking of God’s reign. We can cooperate with this emergent creation and support its final consummation in Divine Love. And this is why I believe that our consecration makes a difference to the world, to the universe. In the light of everything we have been saying, we—like Peter, James and John—are called to awaken to the amazing potentials that are ours to live for the life of the world and the well-being of the universe. Jesus, transfigured before them, embodies a glimpse of the future radiance that rightly is the destiny of all who give themselves in love to this “giveaway God.”

We also know from the story of the transfiguration that those who follow a giveaway God will be invited into the divine pattern of self-gift. The Spirit of God is the life power that opens us to the potentials we hardly know we have. The Spirit of God is also that healing power that is constantly urging us beyond the brokenness we experience and brokenness we create. God, having shown us the greatest of love and the amazing destiny that is ours as God’s creatures, invites us to do exactly what God does, give it all away. God invites us to de-center ourselves, to recognize as Pope Benedict XVI stated, “the greatest Copernican revolution is that which relieves me from being the center of the universe.”

Our commitments are performative; they make us and remake us, as we live into them. Our covenant “yes” to God is an embodied, historical “yes,” an affirmation, that the love of God is active in the world. Reflecting on the community of the baptized, theologian Joseph Komonchak speaks of the mystery of the church as being simultaneously God’s gift and our task. While the

community called church is first and foremost an act of the Spirit, it is also true that there is no experience of the church without our living, concrete, historical expression of faith, hope and love. Our love, enacted within the realities of this world, expresses our relationship with God; and our baptismal consecration, consciously lived, acts upon us, inviting us in ways large and small to give way to the animating presence of God in our daily lives.

For those of us who profess the evangelical counsels, our love of God is ordered by this rare and beautiful expression of our baptismal consecration. We are committed to aligning our hearts' desires with the Christ's so that others encounter in us something of his contemplative freedom to be with and for all people, his radical obedience to the way God loves and his humble simplicity in relation to the abundant gifts of creation. No mat-



Archbishop Oscar Romero

ter how we manifest our baptismal consecration we must understand that it is not an empty or shallow promise, and it is not one-sided. God takes us quite seriously. Our covenants with the Divine matter. God's love is daily acting on us. Each day the power of the resurrection comes toward us in situations great and small, seeking us out, waiting our recognition and cooperation with amazing grace. Truly, with James Alison, we can say that we are "undergoing God".

How about you? How do you see this transfiguring power in your life? Have there been times when your consecration acted upon you, calling you to be more than you thought you could be? What story would you tell about the transformation that your covenant with God has made in you? What symbols, songs, poems, or

scripture do you turn to when you are in the midst of the de-centering, self-bestowing surrender into our God?

It helps to consider examples. I would like to share thoughts on two lives that I believe manifested the transfiguring power of God and expressed something new for the church and the world. As we consider these two lives, both men, both bishops since the Second Vatican Council, and both martyred for their commitment to resist evil, I encourage you to place them within the larger story of our self-bestowing God. How might their "yes" to the transfiguring love of God inspire us and deepen our desire to attend to the quickening energy of self-gift that God desires from each one of us?

Two who were transfigured by God

Archbishop Oscar Romero is no stranger to us. His is a story whose paschal pattern revealed to the universal church both the reality of social sin and the radical hope that faith in the resurrection unleashes in the world. In the 1990s, a Maryknoll friend and I were speaking of the sacrifices her community had endured during the civil wars in Central and South America. I asked her, mystified, "How do your sisters have the courage to stay?" Without blinking, Joann said, "Colleen, they really believe in the resurrection."

I wonder if this is what happened to Archbishop Romero when he spoke of his own change of heart during the Salvadoran conflicts? While many speak of Romero's "conversion," he preferred to speak of the change as "an evolution in pastoral fortitude." The Dominican scripture scholar Sister Barbara Reid, O.P. comments in her essay, "Romero the Preacher," that on the night that Father Rutillo Grande was murdered, Romero experienced a "shift" in "his perception of where truth was to be found." The pastoral fortitude that animated the ministerial soul of Romero from that day forward might very well be called an emergent expression of Divine Love in a world of death-dealing, humanity-denying poverty. Romero would not identify this newness strictly with himself, but he would recognize that the Spirit was, in fact, doing something new in the heart of his homeland. His preaching on the nature and mission of the church points to where this realization was taking him in his own ecclesial understanding. In his *Second Pastoral Letter* he stated,

The Church can be Church only so long as she goes on being the Body of Christ. Her mission will be authentic only so long as it is the mission of Jesus in the



Bishop Pierre Claverie, a Dominican

new situations, the new circumstances, of history

It is the Church's duty in history to lend her voice to Christ so that he may speak, her feet so that he may walk today's world, her hands to build the kingdom, and to enable all its members to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ (Col. 1:24).

What if Romero said "no"? What if he had refused the action of the Holy Spirit who was clearly animating something new in his mind and his heart?

It is sobering to consider, isn't it? We don't have the time to review all that we as church have benefited from his remarkable witness, but we can say that without his preaching we would miss the vital *realidad* of his gospel witness. If our baptismal consecration is not witnessing to the Real Presence of Christ in our history, then we have failed to be church because the sole purpose of the church is to be the sacrament of the Risen Christ in the world.

Dominican Pierre Claverie, bishop of Oran, Algeria understood this notion of church, and he too offered the ultimate gift of life when he was martyred on August 1, 1996, shortly after the execution of the monks of Tibhirine. Pierre Claverie, as a small child growing up in Algiers, was part of a French immigrant family, *piéd noirs*, as they were known at the time. He speaks of his childhood as living "in a bubble in which the Other was ignored, in which the Other was seen as part of the landscape or of the decor that we had set out in our collective existence." As a French Catholic, he never engaged or interacted with the dominant Arab Muslim world that surrounded him in Algeria until he asked to return to his adopted country after it had won independence in

the 1960s. He describes this time as a period of "rebirth." "Discovering the Other, living with the Other, listening to the Other, letting oneself be shaped by the Other, does not mean losing one's identity or rejecting one's values; it means conceiving of a 'humanity in the plural' without exclusion."

As priest and bishop, Claverie served the people of Algeria, Christian and Muslim alike. He was known to have a remarkable gift for friendship and for creating networks of strong, positive relationships with a variety of people. This capacity served him and the church well during the 30 years he would live in Algeria. As Claverie witnessed the devolution of Algerian society from a peaceful Muslim country to a state controlled by ideological Islam, his local church endured the loss of those institutional markers of Christian life at the hands of a society more and more threatened by the presence of Christians. Ordained to the episcopacy in the midst of these difficult changes, Claverie consoled and counseled his people to remain closely aligned to the gospel of Jesus. He even spoke of their difficult and threatened social position as an opportunity, a grace to live the gospel at a new and much needed depth:

In Algeria, it is our good fortune to be pretty well stripped of our riches, our pretensions, and our self-sufficiency to be able to listen, to learn, to share from the little we have. We should not be perpetually preoccupied with defending ourselves. What do we have to protect? Our fortunes? Our buildings? Our influence? Our reputation? Our social standing? All that would be derisory compared to the gospel of the Beatitudes . . . Let us thank God when he returns his church to simple humanity . . . Let us rejoice at everything that can make us able to welcome and become more available, more concerned to give than defend ourselves . . . More than protecting ourselves, we must defend what we consider to be essential; to life, to belief, to human dignity and humanity's future. God's love drives us toward this.

What is the new that this bishop of Algeria saw and gave his life for? As someone who once enjoyed all the advantages of colonial dominance, only to have that privileged social position reduced to suspect alien, Claverie understood that the truth of God cannot be served by fundamentalism, be it Christian or Muslim. Recognizing how fundamentalisms distort the Other's humanity and belovedness before God, Claverie worked throughout the region preaching and tirelessly promoting occasions for dialogue. "Dialogue is a work to which

we must return without pause: it alone lets us disarm the fanaticism, both our own and that of the other,” he said. His persistence in resisting the evil of demonizing Islam while also resisting the evil that was distorting Muslim faith, earned him the respect of moderate citizens throughout Algeria. Claverie understood that in a post-colonial world, the wounds of Western dominance, and Christianity by implication, run deep in our world. Through the forced poverty of living as a suspect alien, he became convinced that we all stand before God as one humanity, what he called “humanity in the plural.”

I have acquired the conviction that humanity is found only in the plural, and that as soon as we presume... to claim that we possess the truth or to speak in the name of humanity, we fall into totalitarianism and exclusion. No one possesses the truth; everyone is seeking it—there certainly are objective truths, but they exceed our grasp and can be attained only through a long journey during which we piece this together by gleaning from the different cultures and instances of humanity what others have sought and obtained in their own journey toward the truth.

By never abandoning his own faith in the God revealed in Jesus, Claverie, in the historical situation of religious diversity, discloses something radically new: a way of being church that is wholly gospel-centered even as it is stripped of the usual institutional structures. Living in a Muslim society, supporting and attending to the special needs of the poor in their neighborhoods, entering into dialogue with the leaders, religious, political, and philosophical about what makes a good society—these were ways that Algerian Christians, through the wise guidance of their shepherd, sought to be church.

I contend that both Romero and Claverie are Christians whose baptismal consecration “worked on them.” More to the point, they allowed their consecration to have its effect on them. They did not seek the situations in which they found themselves; they would not consider themselves “extraordinary” human beings. In telling their stories, however, I hope that you see what God’s self-bestowing love has done in and through their lives. Given the gift of being, these ordinary men responded to extraordinary situations by allowing God’s animating power to direct them. Despite fear, worries, and remarkable burdens, they allowed their consecration, their commitment to God, to have its way with them. They entered fully into the mysteries of Christian faith, creation, incarnation, resurrection and found there, all that they needed to become their most authentic selves.

Proclaiming the Good News

The church is the community of believers who exist solely to be a sacrament of the world’s encounter with the Risen One. However poorly we do this, our mission remains. The proclamation of the good news is precisely that our human fulfillment lies in being in open and loving right relationship with our Creator. And while the coming Reign of our God is totally and completely God’s doing, we privileged creatures are that part of the universe that can freely cooperate with God’s desires to bring all creation into complete unity of love. Our ancestors in the Christian faith saw this as the consequence of the resurrection. The risen Christ is the not only the future of humanity but of the entire created universe. And even now, God is transfiguring the universe and coming toward us all as our ultimate future. Our baptism allows us to meet this love with a Christ-like openness that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, might be just that next transcending moment when something new, something powerful, something compelling, something transfiguring and therefore paschal makes its saving appearance for the life of the world, for the well-being of the universe.

Are you ready to participate in the newness of life that God desires for all creation? If we are taking our consecration seriously, we will recognize the opportunity to be transfigured by the Spirit such that something new just might appear in creation and history—the love that only you and only I can live in this universe and at this time. Do not think that this gift of love that you are is any small thing or of little consequence. Your love, lived consciously in union with Christ and in friendship with the Holy Spirit, participates in the energies that are bringing this world to its completion in Divine love. Friends, there is no other way. We are it. If the world is to know that God is and God loves, it will be because we allowed our being to be a small manifestation of God’s self-gift in the world.

I’d like to close with words from the song “All That is Hidden” by Bernadette Farrell that has been shaping my own imagination of the dynamic relationship we share in with our God. It offers an image that I return to in prayer repeatedly to touch on the revelatory love that I want to give myself to, that is, what I hope I will allow to “happen” to me in my own journey into the consecrating power of the evangelical counsels.

If you would rise with me, rise to your destiny;
do not refuse the death which brings you life.
For as the grain in the earth, must die for rebirth;
so I have planted your life deep within mine. ■

PHOTOS: SISTER DEBORAH BORNEMAN, S.S.C.M.



As religious communities become more racially and ethnically diverse, so too do vocation directors. Pictured here are vocation directors who attended the 2014 NRVC Summer Institute. Top left is Sister Nicole Trahan, F.M.I., Brother Cesar Augusto Rojas Carvajal, R.M.S.; Sister Edie Crews, C.S.A.; and Sister Mary Yun, O.P.

Study sheds light on cultural diversity

In fall 2014, the National Religious Vocation Conference released the findings of its study on cultural diversity in U.S. religious life. A full report, executive summary, two-page handout, and video summary can be found at nrvc.net. Following are highlights from the presentation about the study given by Mary Gautier at the 2014 NRVC convocation.

THIS REPORT ON INCORPORATING cultural diversity in religious life presents findings from a 2014 study of U.S.-based religious institutes on ways they recruit and integrate multicultural candidates into their communities. The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

BY MARY GAUTIER



Mary Gautier, Ph.D. is a senior research associate at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

She holds a doctorate in sociology and has spoken and published on the topic of Catholic demographics, including the demographics of religious life. Her most recent book is *New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity*, which she co-authored with Sister Mary Johnson, S.N.D.deN. and Sister Patricia Wittberg, S.C.

(CARA) at Georgetown University to learn from religious institutes about their policies, procedures, and experiences with the formation and integration of candidates from cultures different from the dominant one of the institute. Some of the most important findings follow.

Racial and ethnic composition of religious institutes

What the numbers show is a gradual shift in religious communities away from largely white European-descent

Who was surveyed and why

The intent of this study was to learn from leaders of religious communities about the policies and procedures communities use, and the experiences they have had with the formation and integration of culturally diverse candidates.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate mailed surveys to the superiors of 835 religious institutes in the U.S.

A total of 350 completed the survey, a 42 percent response rate. The units that responded represent 31,807 perpetually professed, roughly half of all men and women religious in the country.

members toward membership that is beginning to reflect the more mixed ethnic reality of the U.S. church. Membership *as a whole* is still mostly Caucasian. Nine in 10 religious institutes report that the dominant racial/ethnic culture of the institute is white. On average, nine in 10 full members are Caucasian/White/Anglo. Six percent are Hispanic/Latino(a), 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander,

and 1 percent are African American/Black/African. Institutes of men are slightly more racially/ethnically diverse than are institutes of women.

However, those who have entered religious institutes in the past 10 years are more diverse, reflecting the increasing diversity in the U.S. Catholic population as a whole. Among those entering in the past 10 years, 57 percent are Caucasian/White/Anglo, 17 percent are Hispanic/Latino, 16 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 percent are African American/Black/African, and 2 percent are Native American or another race/ethnicity.

International vocations also affect the current de-

mographics. More than six in 10 institutes report having at least one entrant in the past 10 years born outside the U.S. Institutes of men are particularly likely to have had someone from outside the U.S. enter in the past 10 years.

Those in formation today reflect these changes. Eight in 10 institutes of men and about two-thirds of institutes of women have at least one person in initial formation. Among those in initial formation, three in five are Caucasian/White/Anglo, about one in six is Asian/Pacific Islander, just over one in 10 is Hispanic/Latino, one in 20 is African American/Black/African, and about 4 percent are Native American or some other race/ethnicity.

Almost six in 10 institutes have at least one person currently in initial formation born outside the United States. Institutes of men are somewhat more likely than institutes of women to report having someone from outside the United States in initial formation.

Recruitment of diverse candidates

Leaders appear to be more open about this diversity than membership as a whole. About two-thirds of responding superiors indicate that their vocation directors/vocation committees, institute leaders, and formation personnel are “very” open to recruiting candidates from cultures different from the dominant ethnic/racial cohort of their institutes. Fewer than half (around three in 10) report that their members, in general, are “very” open to such recruitment.

The visual cues a community sends may be important. Seven in 10 leaders report that their institute’s website displays a diversity of cultures. About six in 10 leaders indicate the same for print materials. Showing diversity online and in print was, in fact, associated with actually *having* more diverse membership. While more study would be needed to know what this statistical association means, perhaps when prospective members see images of people who look like them in discernment or ministry, they are able to picture themselves in those roles.

In terms of international members, more than nine in 10 institutes accept candidates born outside the United States. Many communities have no formal policies on this matter, though. Just over half have policies and procedures in place for accepting such candidates. Institutes of men are more likely than institutes of women to have such policies and procedures. International institutes are more likely than those that are entirely U.S.-based to have policies and procedures regarding accepting candidates with limited English skills and to provide an acculturation program for new members from outside the U.S.

In response to an open-ended question about how they reach out to potential candidates from other cultures, institute leaders frequently mention these practices: appointing vocation directors of diverse backgrounds, reaching out to diverse candidates in the minority and/or immigrant communities where the members live and work, being welcoming to diverse candidates when hosting open houses, or participating in ethnic celebrations.

Integrating diversity in formation

When asked to describe what their institute has done well to accommodate new members of different cultures, institutes are especially likely to mention establishing houses of formation in other countries or cultures, having bilingual formation staff, and having multicultural formation communities.

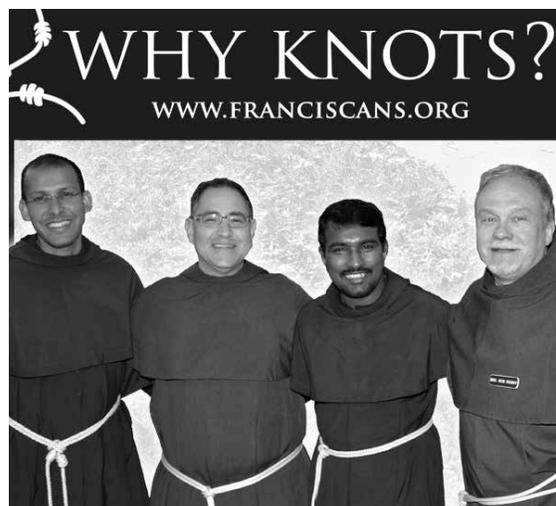
Asked how often their institutes engage in practices to welcome those in initial formation from diverse cultures, more than half of institutes report at least “occasionally” openly discussing cultural differences, sharing a community meal with food from another culture, celebrating the feast day of the patron saint of another country, educating community members about another culture, and celebrating holidays of different cultures.

Units that are part of an international institute or society are more likely than those that are U.S.-based to use multiple languages in prayer, to celebrate the holidays of different cultures, and to provide a mentor from the same culture for those in initial formation. Similarly, units that are part of a missionary institute or society are more likely than those that are not to use multiple languages in prayer, celebrate with ethnic dance or song, educate members about another culture, and celebrate holidays of different cultures.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges for integrating new members into institutes concerns not culture but rather the small number of entrants. Communities have difficulty maintaining formation staffs when they have infrequent entrants into their communities. Furthermore, some leaders indicate that having so few peers for newcomers can make those in initial formation feel isolated.

Integrating into community life

In response to an open-ended question about challenges to integrating new members into institutes, institutes are most likely to mention the age gap between the established and newer members, language and communica-



Promotional material that shows racial diversity, such as this image from a website for the Conventual Franciscans, is associated with greater diversity in an institute.

tion challenges, difficulties with the Immigration and Naturalization Services’ regulations, and a lack of understanding of each other’s cultural background.

To develop or encourage cultural awareness in their institutes, about half to two-thirds of respondents have engaged in the following practices in the past year: used music from another culture in prayer, encouraged members to learn another language, displayed art from another culture, contacted someone from another culture about a vocation to religious life, sponsored or attended a mission trip to another culture, or shared cultural traditions in holiday celebrations. Missionary institutes are more likely than those that are not missionary to engage in practices that encourage cultural awareness and integrate diversity into their unit.

To integrate diversity into their institutes in the past year, over half of superiors report encouraging minority members to share their culture in community life, and four in 10 have accommodated family visits for minority members. More than two in 10 report increasing the visibility or mentoring minority members for institute leadership. When asked what their unit has done well to accommodate new members of different cultures, responding superiors mentioned practices such as providing language tutoring or English courses to new members, encouraging new members to have contact with others from their culture outside the institute, and giving new members positions of responsibility and/or leadership within the institute.

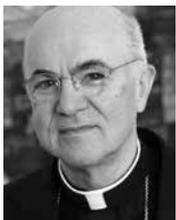
Overall, this study sheds light on important concerns as institutes carve out their futures in a church and society that has seen—and will see—dramatic change. ■

We are here at this convocation, because we are God's messengers—his servants who are to go out into the fields, the streets, the highways and byways, bringing people into his Kingdom.



St. Francis of Assisi as depicted by the artist Cimabue.

BY ARCHBISHOP CARLO
MARIA VIGANÒ



Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò has been the papal nuncio to the United States since 2011. He has long experience in Vatican diplomacy and served from 2009-

2011 as secretary general of Vatican City. The archbishop delivered this address at the 2014 NRVC convocation.

In gratitude for the messengers of the Master's invitation

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS,
Good evening. First of all, I would like to thank Brother Paul Bednarczyk, executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference, for his kind invitation. It gives me great pleasure to join you in the good work that you are about: being messengers of the Master's call.

In the Gospel reading just a few days ago, for the feast of St. Charles Borromeo, who is also my patron, I was reflecting on the master who

invited many to his great dinner, and of the many who refused to come. Why, when the servants went as messengers to invite those people, did they not come? Why did they make excuses? Why would they rather keep doing what they were doing, instead of enjoying such a great dinner? Why?

We could blame those invited. They were called, and they refused. But what about the messengers? Was it, perhaps, that the messengers were not doing their duty? In some way, did those invited not see them as messengers? Did the messengers themselves not give adequate witness to their master's greatness? Or, did they not emphasize sufficiently the importance of the dinner?

My brothers and sisters, we know that the Master is Christ, and that he is always inviting . . . always calling people to come and to enjoy the great feast of his Kingdom. We are here at this convocation because we are God's messengers—his servants who are to go out into the fields, the streets, the highways and by-ways, bringing people into his Kingdom. And some of those whom he invites will also become, like us, his consecrated servants: sisters, brothers, and priests.

Our job to be faithful messengers

We know and recognize, and deeply regret, that some of us have lost the respect of those to whom we are sent, because of our own failings—failings which have led even so far as abuse. But, while repenting of these failings, we must not be afraid to still be his messengers. And we need not worry if the Lord will call young men and women to serve him in consecrated life. He will call them. The Lord is always calling. Our job is to be good and faithful messengers of the Lord's invitation.

To help us fulfill our mission as messengers in the present American culture, we must remember that it is a culture filled with visible signs of identity. Just think of how many signs were posted for political candidates. Look at the way that young people dress, or the hairstyle, or sometimes tattoos and earrings—visible signs that say: "This is who I am." Look at the fans of a football team: certain colors and pictures declare: "This is who I belong to."

Yet, what has happened to those of us who belong to Jesus Christ? The rest of the world—sports, fashion, advertising, et cetera—has capitalized on people's attraction to visible signs. But, it seems that we, the servants and messengers of Christ, have hidden ourselves . . . have hidden Christ, so as to appear like everyone else.

To be sure, there are many ways of serving Christ. The works of mercy are paramount: to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to teach, and to counsel. All of these are essential. But in a world where even many non-Christians help those in need, what will distinguish our works as being done for Christ and his Kingdom? One of the distinguishing marks will be a visible sign of our consecration to him—which, of course, may take different forms: the cross that we bear on our very person, the clothes that we wear that mark us as consecrated.

To wear these signs is not to "go back in time" or to be "outdated." It is to be faithful to the very people we are inviting to follow Christ: people who are looking for a sign that sets the servants of Christ apart from the rest of the world.

St. Francis bore witness

This is what St. Francis understood when he chose to follow Christ more closely. Before, he had worn the garments of a rich man. But when he resolved to follow Christ, he took off these worldly clothes and put on the garments of the poor. From that day on, his very visible clothing, together with his works of mercy, was the constant sign of his consecration to Jesus. And many followed him. In fact, when he sent his followers to preach in a town, they asked him what they should say. He responded: "All you have to do is walk through the town, and they will know." The sign made the message clear.

My brothers and sisters, the Master is pleased with what you are doing here. God is happy to hear you asking the question: "How can we call others? How can we attract them to Christ?" May I suggest that we do so in one of the most effective ways possible: by giving also a visible witness to our consecration.

Thank you for saying "yes" to Christ. Thank you for being willing to be recognized as a religious. May God bless you and continue to make you good and faithful messengers of his Kingdom. ■

When St. Francis resolved to follow Christ, he took off worldly clothes and put on the garments of the poor. From that day on, his very visible clothing, together with his works of mercy, was the constant sign of his consecration to Jesus.

PHOTO: S. SPRAGUE/MARKNOLL FATHERS AND BROTHERS



Pope Francis is urging us to take up the challenge—and gladness—of being a missionary disciple.

One point the pope makes in *Evangelii Gaudium* is that what attracts others to Christ (and some of them to religious life) is true love for God and neighbor. Pictured here is Father Mike Bassano, M.M. providing support to a man with AIDS.

“The Joy of the Gospel” has messages for us

By SISTER THERESA RICKARD, O.P.



Sister Theresa Rickard, O.P. belongs to the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt, N.Y. She is president and executive director of

RENEW International. Prior to that, she was vocation director for her community and was an active member of the National Religious Vocation Conference. This article is the written form of her presentation to the November 2014 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference in Chicago.

POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION on the new evangelization, *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of Gospel”), has implications for religious life today. It challenges all pastoral workers, and particularly consecrated women and men, to be joy-filled missionary disciples. This document is a new chapter in evangelization, and in it, Pope Francis calls us to be more missionary, merciful, bold, and creative—to be bridge builders and witnesses to the love of God. The pope exhorts us to have the courage to transform not only our personal lives but also the systems and structures that have supported our religious communities, parishes, institutions, and even and most especially the Vatican or curia (32).

The pope calls this “pastoral conversion.” Some of these structures and systems are barely working; some are completely broken and are no longer in the place of service. In this article my concern is for the pastoral conversion of religious life as a “life form” and the recommitment of religious to

missionary discipleship. We can't transform religious life by going back but by moving forward and creating a new way in response to the signs of our time in fidelity to the Gospel and our particular charisms.

Pope Francis' invitation to pastoral workers to be selfless, joyful, and hope-filled has a special meaning for consecrated women and men. His exhortation includes both the pastoral and social dimensions of evangelization, calling us to share the Gospel in today's world through word and, more importantly, through the pulpit of our lives—through charitable works, just acts, and social dialogue as a contribution to peace.

Woman at the well

I will begin my reflections by exploring the story of the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). It is the story of one of the earliest women evangelists, the Samaritan woman. She is among the first Christian preachers. She has an encounter with Jesus and immediately goes forth with passion and conviction to share her living encounter with others.

The Samaritan woman lived on the margins of her society, and she encountered Jesus not in a synagogue or in another holy place, but at a well. She came to the well as part of her everyday work routine. We might wonder why she came at noon, the hottest time of the day. Could it be she was ostracized by the other townswomen? Maybe she came at noon because she was sure that no one else would be there. Have you ever done something like that? I have. She must have been surprised and at first not very happy that Jesus was there waiting for her. Much to her dismay, Jesus engaged her in conversation, and as the conversation went deeper her heart slowly softened until she allowed Jesus' compassionate presence to reveal God to her in a new and life-changing way.

Eventually she offered the empty, slightly cracked jar of her life to him and he filled her with the life-healing water of salvation. She came to know him as the Christ—her life was changed, and she went forth empowered to preach the joy of the gospel to the rest of the town. She moved from the well to the town, and the townspeople moved from welcoming her witness story to personally experiencing an encounter with Jesus, and they proclaimed: "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that Jesus is truly the savior of the world" (John 4:42).

Like the woman at the well, we are called to be evan-

gelizers who preach the gospel with joy—with every part of our being. At its heart the mission of evangelization is inviting another to an encounter with Christ and to embark on the life-long journey of missionary discipleship. The goal of evangelization is not simply to get more people in the pews or more vocations to priesthood and religious life. First and foremost the purpose of evangelization is to make disciples, joy-filled disciples, what Pope Francis names *missionary disciples*. Missionary disciples are women and men fully committed to the Gospel—loving God and loving their neighbor. Is this not the

heart of vocation ministry—calling and forming and sending forth disciples to transform the world through our congregation's or order's particular charism?

What if Jesus stayed in his comfort zone and chose not to venture to the well because it was too hot or because he was too tired or busy? What if Jesus went along with the societal norms of his time and judged that woman unworthy, or worse yet, not worth it? In Jesus' time men did not

talk with women in public, and they especially did not engage women in theological discussion. To make matters worse, she was a Samaritan, unorthodox—she did not have all the doctrine quite right. What if he listened to his well-meaning disciples who were scandalized by his conversation with this woman and reprimanded him as he continued his conversation with her?

The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus impelled her to take the most important step in her life—to choose to leave her water jar behind. The water jar literally represented life and death. Yet she discovered something more critical to life than even the element of water—eternal life in the company of a God who is all merciful and all loving. Our work as agents of the new evangelization, baptized Christians, missionary disciples, consecrated women and men, and vocation ministers, is to bring others with joy to take that next step.

Pope Francis gave us a modern-day example of our call to be evangelists that for me parallels the story of Jesus and the woman at the well: the example Francis set by washing the feet of those young people at the prison in Rome on his first Holy Thursday as pope. Instead of the traditional 12 priests, he washed, dried, and kissed the feet of 12 young inmates, outcasts who live on the margins of society. He went even farther, daring to wash two young women's feet and the feet of a Muslim. He

We can't transform religious life by going back but by moving forward and creating a new way in response to the signs of our time in fidelity to the Gospel and our particular charisms.



Missionary disciples side with those in need. After Hurricane Katrina, the Sisters of the Holy Family of New Orleans had to decide whether to leave New Orleans or remain and rebuild. They chose to rebuild. Sister Clare of Assisi, S.S.F. (president) and Sister Jennie Jones, S.S.F. (principal) of St. Mary's Academy are here with members of the school's award-winning marching band several years after the destructive storm. The rebuilding continues.

did not have to say anything—he just did it! His simple, loving action reverberated around the world. Speaking to the young offenders, Francis said that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion in a gesture of love and service. “This is a symbol, it is a sign. Washing your feet means I am at your service. Help one another. This is what Jesus teaches us,” the pope said.

I can only wonder what this encounter with Christ through the pope's gesture of foot-washing meant to these young people. And what will this encounter with the welcoming and merciful Christ mean for their lives in the future? Yes, evangelization matters. The pope's example at that prison was not only a living out of the indiscriminate love of Christ but a call to everyone who witnessed it to do the same. The pope was renewing the challenge we hear first from Jesus, succinctly expressed in the song *The Lord Jesus* by the monks of the Weston Priory:

The Lord Jesus after eating with his friends,
washed their feet and said to them:
“Do you know what I, your Lord, have done to you?
I have given you example, that so you also must do.”

As the pope reminds us in *Evangelii Gaudium* evangelization is the joy-filled work of touching peoples' minds and hearts and lives with the saving, healing, liberating good news of Jesus Christ who came not to be

served but to serve. Evangelization is bringing the joy of the gospel to the heart of our world by making God's reign of justice and peace a reality in all members of the community of life. The unlimited love of Jesus bends before us, washes us clean, and urges us to go forth and be foot washers especially to the least among us. Jesus sends us out with the joy of the Gospel to attract other foot washers and accompany them on their journey of becoming missionary disciples.

Art of accompaniment

The pope writes about the need to initiate everyone—priests, religious, and laity—into the “art of accompaniment” (169). He writes “this art of accompaniment teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (Exodus 3:5).” The ministry of accompaniment is a primary work of vocation ministers, actively listening with an open and patient heart to a person seeking a vocation. The pope writes:

Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization. Paul's relationship with Timothy and Titus provides an example of this accompaniment and formation which takes place in the midst of apostolic activity. Entrusting them with the mission of remaining in each city to “put in order what remains to be done” (Tim. 1:5; cf. 1 Tim 1:3-5), Paul also gives them rules for their personal lives and their pastoral activity. This is clearly distinct from every kind of intrusive accompaniment or isolated self-realization. Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples (173).

In September, in my role as president of RENEW International, I attended an international meeting at the Vatican on *Evangelii Gaudium*. The purpose of the conference was to translate this document into practical implementation in each of our local places and cultural contexts. I was delighted that Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, opened the meeting with a witness entitled, “Listening to the Poor.” I believe it was critical to begin a conference on the Pope's exhortation on the new evangelization with a moving call to be a church that is poor and is for the poor. Jean Vanier said: “By washing the feet of the poor we carry out the work of evangelization.” He went on to speak about the need to incarnate the love of Christ not only by our works but also by our words through sharing with others the cause of our joy and the source of our service.

This is a particular challenge for us as religious. We are committed to serving people who are poor and working for justice, but we do not always share the cause of our joy—our relationship with Christ that flows out in gospel service. Francis writes: “Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members (186).”

What will attract others to Christ (and some of them to religious life) is our commitment to being missionary disciples: passionately in love with God and our neighbor, especially the poor; our zeal for peace and justice; our daily commitment to prayer, community, and simple living. It is through consecrated women and men living the Gospel with joy, dedicating our lives to deep prayer, loving communion, and passionate service that people will discover vocations to religious life. Evangelization, the pope reminds us, does not happen by coercion but by attraction. This is also true of vocation promotion. In *Evangelii Gaudium* the pope writes, “Wherever there is life, fervor, and a desire to bring Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise (107).”

By choosing the title and theme, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis has done in this document what he has been doing since he was elected: challenging all of us with the question of whether we believe what we say we believe. And although the popular image of Pope Francis may focus on his simplicity, his good nature, his casual demeanor and emphasis on mercy, the pope uses clear and blunt language when he writes or speaks about matters that are at the heart of his message.

A blunt message

He is so blunt and so clear at times that he makes some of us uncomfortable. Maybe some are worried about propriety, or the dignity of the papal office. Some of us would rather not face what he is saying, much less apply it to ourselves. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he writes about the pervasive attitude toward the poor:

To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own (54).

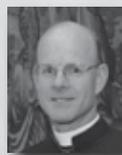
The pope refers to the profound problems of poverty,

Practical Models for CELIBACY FORMATION

December 6-9, 2015 | St. Meinrad, IN

Presenters include

Archbishop Joseph Tobin, C.Ss.R.
and other experts in human formation



Msgr. Stephen
Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.



Emily Cash, Psy.D.



Br. John Mark
Falkenhain, OSB, Ph.D.

SLconnect.org/conferences/formation



SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE

refugees of economic and political injustice, mindless consumerism, the idolatry of money, human trafficking, slavery, abortion, war, genocide, and the destruction of the environment. And he still writes about the *joy* of the Gospel.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* the pope speaks plainly about the church’s own ailments including scarce vocations to priesthood and religious life, seminaries accepting vocations with any motivation, the scandal of sexual abuse, clericalism, priests not committed to joyful and fraternal life, pastoral workers (including consecrated women and men) with an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, polarization within the church, and the loss of engagement with many adults and especially young people. And what should make us a bit uncomfortable is his poignant and plain talk about the temptations that face pastoral workers today, including consecrated women and men. The pope addresses the lack of vocations:

Many places are experiencing a dearth of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. This is often due to a lack of contagious fervor in communities which results in a cooling of enthusiasm and attractiveness. Wherever there is life, fervor, and a desire to bring

Christ to others, genuine vocations will arise (107).

In the section “Yes to the Challenge of Missionary Spirituality,” the pope writes:

Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which does not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though

they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor (78).

Our way of doing things needs to be reimagined, reinvigorated, and transformed by the Holy Spirit working in and among us for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for self-preservation.

The pope continues by exhorting us to say no to selfishness and spiritual sloth, no to sterile pessimism, and no to spiritual worldliness and warring among ourselves. He addresses the polarization in the church as a scandal that is an obstacle to evangelization: “In

some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, doctrine and for the Church’s prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel will have a real impact on God’s faithful people...” (95).

In others, he writes, “This spiritual worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social and political gain, or their pride in their ability to manage practical affairs, or an obsession with self-help and self-realization” (95).

He continues to challenge us:

It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts (100).

And he still writes about the *joy* of the Gospel.

The heart of evangelization, the pope reminds us over and over again, is first and foremost to make missionary disciples. We can’t make missionary disciples

unless we *are* missionary disciples, on fire with the love of God and a passion for God’s people. I believe we will have more people in the pews, more lay leaders, more lay ecclesial ministers, and more vocations to religious life and priesthood if we fully renew and recommit ourselves to be missionary disciples.

Pope Francis writes:

I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times, and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world, rather than for her self-preservation (27).

I believe this dream of a missionary option can be applied to religious life today, and this call to transformation is a serious challenge to us and to our congregations, provinces, and institutes. Our way of doing things—times and schedules, language and structures—needs to be reimagined, reinvigorated, and transformed by the Holy Spirit working in and among us for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for self-preservation. Our focus, time, and conversation cannot be on diminishment or fear or an inordinate worry about who will care for us in the future, but by both individually and communally saying yes to the challenge of a missionary spirituality. We need to put energy, resources, and creativity into creating an enduring future for religious life, beginning with how we live it more authentically today. We need to “hospice” the current state of our communities while we “co-evolve” and “co-create” the new (the two loops theory of change, berkana.org).

The call of joy

The disciples of Christ who will create the “new” are called to be joyful, missionary, merciful, bridge builders, bold and creative, and witnesses to Christ’s unconditional love. The whole exhortation is filled with the call to be joyful. One of my favorite sayings of Pope Francis is “Don’t be a sourpuss!” In the same vein he writes: “an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral (10)!” For us to “co-create and “co-evolve” a new way to live religious life we need consecrated women and men who are joyful and committed to being missionary disciples, who are not afraid of uncertainty or insecurity, willing to put our collective energy together and work toward a pastoral transformation of religious life. The new way has to be centered in mission with a focus on serving people who are the most

poor, vulnerable, and marginalized, and living a vibrant community life of prayer. All the while we bear witness to God's grace and mercy, respecting the dignity and rights of all members of the community of life.

Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm for being missionary disciples committed to Jesus the Christ and his poor. Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm for being members of the church, the body of Christ. Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm for the great privilege of living out our missionary discipleship as religious

sisters, brothers, and priests. I conclude with the words of Pope Francis:

“And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient, or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of the Christ” (6). ■

TELL YOUR STORIES!

Telling our stories is a powerful way to attract people to Christ. We don't tend to move people through apologetics or finger pointing, but rather through stories of Jesus' presence in our lives. Here's an example of how a story about faith alive in our lives can move us.

On my way to the airport one day, I was telling the driver that I was going to give a retreat to priests on “faith in everyday life.” The driver was a faith-filled Catholic, and she said to me, “You know, last year my daughter was diagnosed with fourth stage colon cancer.” Her daughter was in her 30s, she had two little ones, and she was a devout Catholic. Her fervent prayer was that she would see her daughters grow up. She just wanted to live long enough to get her girls on the right path, and she had everyone she knew praying for her.

The day of the surgery came, and she was in the little pre-op room waiting for it to begin. The surgeon came in and explained the operation and the aftermath.

She looked at him and she said, “Doctor can I ask you something?” He said, “Sure.” And she said, “Do you pray before you do surgery?” And he didn't say anything to her. So she said, “I just want you to know that there are a lot of people praying for you.”

The doctor said, “Wait a moment.” He walked over to the supplies and took a square of gauze. He wrote this message on it: “I know well the plans I have in mind for you. Plans for your welfare and not for woe so as to give you a future full of hope.—Jeremiah 29:11.”

He handed the gauze pad to that young mother, and she clung to that message as she went into surgery.

God continues to give that woman a future full of hope. She continues to battle cancer, but she's in remission right now, thank God.



There's more. Last year around this time, I found that I was a little hoarse, no big deal. I went to the doctor and it turned out I had a lesion, which is cancerous, on my right vocal chord. So here I was a preacher, someone who likes to talk—it's my whole life—and I have cancer on my vocal chords!

Not long after I found myself in the hospital waiting for surgery. I had everybody praying for me, and my Dominican sisters were all there, joking around with me. But I was scared. Then before I knew it, I was in a room with the person with the anesthesia mask. I was terrified.

What came to my mind at that moment? That story of the gauze and that Scripture passage—as clear as a bell. “Terry, for I know well the plans I have in mind for you. Plans for your welfare and not for woe so as to give you a future full of hope.”

That testimony moved me through that surgery with great gratitude and trust, and I knew that all would be well.

—Sister Theresa Rickard, O.P.

Reflection: Faith multiplies in sharing

BY CLARENCE GILYARD

COLOSSIANS 1: 3-6

We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the gospel, that has come to you. Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also among you, from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth.

IN PRAYING AND SEARCHING to understand this part of a sacred Scripture, I, a convert of 15 years, find myself in solidarity with St. Paul. I thank you, God.

I am grateful to our good God that I am being formed to thank our creator in prayer, in praise, and to ultimately, creatively instruct this way of life to my community, the Gilyards, where it must be lived in worship. I am ever mindful of my

calling as a husband, father, brother, and son to help my family to live the hope stored up for us in heaven.

And as I am mindful of this special assembly present—this cohort within the body of Christ—sisters and brothers, I sigh. I wax nostalgic. I gain a lump in my throat. And I am not just a little jealous. You heard and you con-

tinue to hear, you understand and you choose God's grace in all its truth.

You are in this world, yet not of this world. It is said that if you aspire to some skill or quality or way of life, then find an example and imitate that person. Mother Church knows what her children need, and this child needs a lot. Yet in this setting, on this Sabbath, I will not be too greedy.

I know of your faith in Jesus Christ and of the love you have for the saints. I've been here with you. I, too, want that experience of Jesus' divine heart beating, Jesus' sacred heart beating out of a human breast for care of another, for love of others. I want that for me, and mine, the Gilyards, my diocese.

Converts are like the sixth man on a winning basketball team. We come off the bench at particular times to fulfill roles and perform tasks in union with the starters (you blessed cradle Catholics). Converts are charged to give, to serve a caffeinated jolt in the game of life, when Mother Church's blood sugar may seem a little low.

Jesus' work through his church, the sacraments, through

us, is very new to me—still after 15 years! So springtime morning fresh! So dazzlingly new-fallen snow pure! It is!

And my response to your convocation is a brilliant, infused reminder to you that today, along with St. Paul, I experience that the gospel has come to you.

I was lovingly slapped upside the head into Mother Church by the Jesuits at Christmas Mass at St. Rita's Catholic Community, in Dallas, Texas, during the Pontificate of St. John Paul II. St. John Paul II taught me that Jesus is the man I need to spend time with and get to know. Then I will be effective in my household and community, in his name.

We live and work in challenging times. As Fr. Eckerstorfer taught yesterday, Christendom has a new geography. The challenge in this country is to be aggressive in seeking out the rich, Catholic community—that supporting, sustaining Catholic family culture. You have provided that for me.

During my formation, the Gardner family taught me the rosary. The Jesuits taught me that I am in a constant state of grace. The Trappists sent me my first spiritual advisor, Father John. The Dominican Sisters, who revealed that you can teach the game of basketball in a habit, never stop striving for holiness. The community of St. John taught me about contemplative prayer. Father Groeschel of the Franciscans taught me how the Lord loves the poor. The Viatorians taught me the perseverance and discipline of opening up space for God's friendship every day. Brother Paul and the Holy Cross Brothers and Sisters have shown me that in my very uniqueness I have been handpicked to serve God by serving you alongside you. My new friendship with Sister Debbie of the Sisters of St. Cyril and Methodius is providential as she quietly teaches me to live God's kingdom come.

I live in the diocese of Las Vegas, a poor diocese in many ways, which seems crazy but is true. We have 550,000 Catholics and 38 parishes. I would be surprised if there are 30 religious on the ground at any time. St. Paul did not know the Colossians. He wrote the letter, yet in his ministry he was only able to pass by. There are thmanyose whom you do not even know—fertile, young and old children of God—who need your intercession. We need your deep, committed intercession to influence, give example to, and to form as you are doing for me.

In solidarity with St. Paul, I give thanks for you and appeal to your communities to embrace aggressively your work with the National Religious Vocation Conference. With all that is in you, know that you transform lives. Look at me and mine. ■

Clarence Gilyard is an actor, director, and author best known for his starring TV roles in *Matlock* and *Texas Ranger*. He teaches theater classes at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. He gave this reflection during prayer while serving as celebrity guest-host of the 2014 NRVC convocation.



I want what you have. I thank God you've shared it with me.



PrepareTheWord.com

WHOLE PARISH EVANGELIZATION

Prepare the Word, an award-winning preaching and teaching resource for all parish ministers, offers a wide array of insights into scripture, Catholic culture, and church teachings.

FOR PREACHERS

- Thought-provoking weekday reflections and Sunday exegetical essays by Alice Camille
- Preaching the News Thursday update that ties the week's news to the Sunday readings
- *Pastoral Trends* by Catholic sociologist Brian Froehle
- Sunday summaries, fact of the week, and weekly quote
- Sample homilies, story starters, prayers, and essays for all occasions

Subscribe now
online:

PrepareTheWord.com

Or call:

800-942-2811

FOR PASTORS/CATECHISTS/YOUTH MINISTERS/BULLETIN EDITORS

- *Take Five for Faith*: Daily reflections available in advance for bulletin insertion, faith sharing, class discussion, and retreats
- *Questions Catholics Ask*: Thoughtful responses to common questions on church teachings and Catholic practice
- *Sign and Sacrament*: Material for sacramental preparation



Subscribe now and gain immediate access to all of the great preaching and teaching material PrepareTheWord.com offers new each week for only \$84.95 the first year; \$79.95 on renewal. Get the fresh perspective you need as you prepare your next sermon, lesson plan, or topic for discussion.

www.PrepareTheWord.com

PREPARE THE WORD is published by TrueQuest Communications • 800-942-2811



5401 SOUTH CORNELL AVENUE, SUITE 207
 CHICAGO, IL 60615-5698
 WWW.NRVC.NET | NRVC@NRVC.NET | 773-363-5454

NONPROFIT
 ORGANIZATION
 U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
 TOLEDO, OH
 PERMIT NO. 242



Holy Name Passionist Retreat & Conference Center



Meeting the Jesus I Never Knew



Becoming Companions
 at the Foot of the Cross

**Disconnected? Make an Annual Retreat & Reconnect with God.
 New Retreat Theme for 2014-2015:**

Meeting the Jesus I Never Knew: Becoming Companions at the Foot of the Cross
 "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow
 citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God." Ephesians 2:19

Facility Features:

- Secluded 10 Acre Bunker Hill Village Property with Award-Winning Gardens
- 74 Rooms with Private Bath, plus 6 Rooms with 3 Shared Baths
- 2 Large Multi-Function Conference Rooms
- On-Site Kitchen with Full-Meal Service

Facility available for Parish Meetings and/or Retreats

Call today for your next parish meeting or retreat.

Where Miracles Happen!

430 Bunker Hill Road, Houston, TX 77024
 713 464.0211 tel • 713 464.0671 fax
 passionist.org/holyname