

Future of Religious Orders in the United States

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Study on the Future of
Religious Orders in the
United States Conducted by
Father David Nygren, CM,
and Sister Miriam Ukeritis,
CSJ, p. 257;
*On File, p. 258;
*Datebook, p. 258.

"Fidelity to the spirit of the founder and responsiveness to critical and unmet human needs are basic to the ongoing mission of religious communities," according to a three-year study of U.S. religious orders of priests, sisters and brothers conducted by Vincentian Father David Nygren and St. Joseph of Carondelet Sister Miriam Ukeritis, both psychologists. Their study's purpose was to examine changes "occurring in the experience and the understandings of religious life." The study is based on the assumption that religious life as a whole, individual congregations and individual priests, brothers and sisters "are in the midst of a transformational process." But, it says, "without significant change, religious life in the United States will continue to decline and, more important, those who most need" the help of religious "will not be cared for." The researchers say their study reflects the opinions of more than 10,000 religious priests, sisters and brothers who participated either through "personal interviews, questionnaires, workshops and in writing to us." The written survey portion of the study was sent to a stratified random sample of 9,999 religious priests, brothers and sisters designed to make comparisons possible among orders of varying tradition and vocation. The overall response rate to the written survey was 77.4 percent. The study, released Sept.

16, covers matters concerning the overall direction of religious orders as well as numerous specific questions such as admitting homosexual persons, attitudes toward the poor, minority-group members and lay associates. The researchers describe their study as the first in-depth investigation encompassing both men's and women's orders. Nygren and Ukeritis, at Boston University when they began the study, are now at DePaul University in Chicago. The Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis funded the effort. The text of the study's executive summary follows.

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The 30 years since the Second Vatican Council have been turbulent ones for Roman Catholic religious orders in the United States. The average age of the members of many congregations has increased to approximately 67 years old, while the number of religious has decreased by approximately 45 percent for brothers and sisters and 27 percent for religious priests. Several "traditional" works have been called into question while other works and other definitions of mission have arisen. The understanding of ways of living the vows has changed substantially within many congregations. The distinction between religious life and the "laity" has also decreased considerably, with many "lay people" now de-

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veloping some type of formal association with religious congregations and many religious identifying more clearly with laity.

How can phenomena such as these, which apply in many congregations and across the traditional distinctions of religious life (e.g., contemplative, monastic, mendicant or apostolic), be best understood? How do individual religious and congregations, considered as a whole, experience and understand the changes that have taken place in religious life? What do these changes portend for the future of religious life? And, most important, what changes must yet occur if religious life is to remain a vital gift to the church into the next millennium?

"We believe strongly that the generosity so evident in the lives of religious today remains a strong model of self-sacrifice that must be articulated and spread if others are to follow Jesus in this manner."

These were the questions with which we began the Religious Life Futures Project in 1989. Our own congregations, the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet were but two of the hundreds of congregations who were seeking to transform their lives, ministries and institutions. With the support of our respective congregations and with a generous grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., we set out to design a comprehensive study of religious orders in the United States.

The purpose of the study was to examine the changes that are occurring in the experience and the understandings of religious life. To accomplish this end, we embarked upon a project that would have as its outcomes:

1. Identification of the normative beliefs about religious life and how they will likely shape the future of religious life in this country.
2. Building a national comparative data base of all male and female religious that includes current demographic data, membership information, existing and emerging structures, current member attitudes on multiple dimensions and projections for the future.
3. Enabling the leadership of religious orders to identify in the current paradigms of planning that enable transformation, consolidation, merging or extinction.
4. Labeling the changes that must yet occur if religious life is to remain a vital social and theological gift to the church into the next millennium.

In sharing this summary of the results we hope to indicate how the lives of 121,000 religious are reflected in the opinions of the more than 10,000 religious priests, sisters and brothers who were willing to give of their time to

share their ideas and beliefs with us through personal interviews, questionnaires, workshops and in writing to us. We worked from several assumptions.

First, that only religious can describe their experience of faith as religious.

Second, as social researchers we hoped to gather data that would serve them in their own self-direction.

Third, we believe that without significant change, religious life in the United States will continue to decline and, more important, those who most need their help will not be cared for.

Finally, we believe strongly that the generosity so evident in the lives of religious today remains a strong model of self-sacrifice that must be articulated and spread if others are to follow Jesus in this manner.

The study sought the broadest possible input from leadership, membership and those with unique perspectives to offer to a comprehensive study such as this. Those perspectives include in-depth study of persons identified by their peers as possessing vision about the future of religious life and those seen to possess uniquely caring attributes. This summary combines the results of all facets in order to tell you what, after all these scientific undertakings, we believe will make a difference to individual religious, the future of congregational life and the ministry of religious orders in the United States.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. Transformation

Among Christians, the concept of transformation is perhaps most familiar in the area of spirituality in Paul's call to "be transformed into Christ." The dramatic change undergone by religious orders and organizations has led to the development of the concept in the social sciences of organizational or corporate transformation. While this term *transformation* has been used in a variety of ways, in the organizational realm it refers basically to qualitative discontinuous shifts in organizational members' shared understandings of the organization, accompanied by changes in the organization's mission, strategy, and formal and informal structures. In contrast to carrying out comparatively simple incremental changes, organizations undergoing transformation come to understand themselves and their mission very differently than they originally had.

Studies of transformation have tended to focus on one particular "level" at which the change occurs: either the industry (or social institution) considered as a whole or a particular organization. In addition, a few studies have explored some of the experiences of individuals whose organizations are experiencing major change. In contrast, we investigated issues related to change in religious life on all three levels:

—The social institution (one entity, "religious life"): Referring to religious life as a social institution acknowledges the existence of those broad-based beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are

The study conducted by Vincentian Father David Nygren and Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet Miriam Ukeritis has been known to date as the Religious Life Futures Project. However, in the future it will be referred to as the Future of Religious Orders in the United States.

Nygren is director of the Center for Applied Social Research and assistant professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago. He is an organizational psychologist.

Ukeritis is director of the Institute for Leadership of Religious Organizations at DePaul and a research associate in its Center for Applied Social Research. She is a clinical psychologist.

Nygren and Ukeritis conducted the majority of their research at Boston University before going to DePaul in 1991. Their study began in 1988.

An overview of the executive summary was presented in the researchers' Foreword. The text of the Foreword appears here:

"In preparing this executive summary, we attempted to provide in as concise and understandable a form as possible the conceptual background, methodological considerations, research findings and major implications of the Religious Life Futures Project. We also recognized the range of interests and various needs of the many persons like yourself who have expressed great interest in reading the results.

"With that in mind, the following description of the contents of the various sections was prepared to assist you in selecting the point at which you would prefer to begin your reading.

"Section I presents the purpose of this research project.

"A reading of Section II will provide you with the theoretical perspective. This includes some background information on the concept of transformation as it is used in studying groups and organizations such as religious congregations. It also provides some information on the levels of change (social institution, congregational and individual) considered in this project.

← considered in this project.

"In Section III you will find a description of each of the six research units. This section includes a description of the methodology for each of these units, as well as summary findings. Results are presented in terms of the levels of analysis described above.

"In Section IV, 'Conclusions: Shaping the Future,' you will find the summary conclusions of the entire project. If you are interested in bottom lines, you may want to start your reading with this section. Some of you may wonder why we did not present this chapter first. In our efforts to begin with a summary of findings in sharing our results with some groups, we found ourselves repeatedly faced with the question, Where/how did you reach these conclusions? Hence, in generating the sequence in this executive summary, we began at the beginning and worked through to the conclusions.

"Subsequent publication of the results of this study will refer to those findings as the *Future of Religious Orders in the United States (FORUS)*."

In an interview with Catholic News Service in conjunction with the release of the *Future of Religious Orders in the United States* findings, Ukeritis said the two elements identified as crucial to dynamic religious communities — fidelity to purpose and responsiveness to unmet human needs — might be obvious in many ways. "But it was striking to us because it also came up when we weren't looking for it," she said.

Ukeritis said that when she recently gave a talk to the National Assembly of Religious Brothers, "I used as an example the Alexian Brothers. They're a small group. They were founded to assist victims of the plague in the Middle Ages. And recently they claimed as one of their focal points working with persons with AIDS."

Ukeritis cited the order as an example of a community reclaiming its founding

common across all religious orders. This investigation revealed that while congregations may differ in their expression of religious life by virtue of gender or tradition (e.g., apostolic, monastic or contemplative) all groups share certain elements.

—The congregation (including the 816 groups who participated in the national survey): Shifting understandings of how a group interprets a shared past, selects value priorities, allocates resources and assesses mission opportunities mark the experience of transformation. This investigation sought to identify those shifts, particularly as related to different congregations. The metaphors and rituals in which members often express their beliefs and which draw them together with a shared sense of belonging may also shift. These too were included in the study.

—The individual (including some 126,000 sisters, brothers and priests): The study also investigated the implications of transformation for the individual members of religious congregations.

This approach enables a more complete understanding of how intercongregational, congregational and individual experiences can effect each other as well as the means through which the various types of change occur.

Model for Transformational Change

Transformation usually begins with a crisis that indicates that the organization's current shared understandings are no longer adequate. Several types of crisis may occur: Performance may be poor, leadership transitions occur, some powerful subgroups' interests may no longer be served, management practices may no longer be successful or, most typically, there may be a major environmental shift that confronts the already existing interpretive schemes. The easiest response for the organization to take is to defend itself against the challenge and perhaps not to respond at all. For transformation to begin, the experience of crisis must be strong enough to "unfreeze" organizational members' present understandings of the organization by presenting a significant challenge to their validity.

After unfreezing takes place or in conjunction with it, various individuals and organizational subgroups begin developing alternative understandings. These developing understandings lead to new types of action and most likely to changes in the structures of the organization. Moreover, the new types of actions that take place are likely to occur outside the organization's initial boundaries (e.g., AT & T's work moved from telephones to include as well computers and other forms of communications). Consequently, the types of structural changes that occur are likely to include the breakdown of formerly established boundaries.

There is likely to be considerable conflict among the original and developing interpretive schemes and the subgroups espousing them. Groups who hold one particular "new" perspective, for example, are likely to find themselves in conflict with individuals or groups who espouse the original perspective or a different new one. The conflict may take various forms: One perspective may clearly dominate those holding dif-

ferent perspectives and may be separated from other views; or leaders of the organization may acknowledge the potential value of, and thus encourage, interaction between several different perspectives.

Leaders can have a strong impact on the outcome of the conflict between perspectives. If they support only one perspective, they are likely to decrease the potential creativity of the transformational process and the sense of involvement of organizational members whose perspectives are not taken into account. If they "separate out" the different perspectives, they are likely to perpetuate splits between the groups. If they enable conflicting perspectives to interact with each other, they will increase the chances of paradoxical outcomes of transformation, of new and creative shared understandings that emerge from the interaction of the competing perspectives.

The process of transformation is not affect-free. Rather, it is often paralyzing and disorienting, and experienced as a sequence of deaths and rebirths. Initially, various organizational members' primary feelings are likely to include shock, defensiveness, loss and anger. Throughout the development of new interpretive schemes, organizational members will experience both ambiguity and confusion, both when it is unclear that any satisfactory new understanding is developing and when there are multiple potential perspectives.

The conflict among subgroups will create additional tension. When (and if) a new synthesis is reached that is experienced as acceptable, there is likely to be a sense of "rightness" and satisfaction, at least by members whose perspectives have been incorporated.

Summary Application of Model

This study is based on the assumption that religious life, congregations and religious priests, brothers and sisters are in the midst of a transformational process and that the new understandings of religious life held by significant numbers of members have not yet been fully developed. We also assume that the environmental change that had the greatest impact on the promotion of the transformation process was the new understandings of the church proclaimed during Vatican II and shortly afterward in directives to religious congregations to begin the analysis and revision of their basic principles and practices.

Presently, diverse, sometimes contradictory understandings of religious life have been developed in different subgroups of religious. In addition, environmental forces that strongly support the development of particular understandings are present (e.g., in the hierarchical church, in various segments of the laity). How can the process to this point be best understood? What will happen next in the transformational process? To what extent can leaders influence the transformation process?

B. Levels of Change

Social Institution

Some of the change that has taken place in

religious life has occurred similarly in many congregations. For example, Schneiders' (1986) work describes a shared shift — across many congregations — in the understanding of many of the components of religious life such as the vows and community. In addition, books suggesting that religious are meant to be “prophetic” or “countercultural” (e.g., Woodward, 1987; Foley, 1988) are written to religious as a group, not to particular congregations. Thus, the first level this study will consider is religious life as a shared entity across congregations.

Shifts in understanding are frequently intertwined with shifts in structures, both formal and informal, and these structural shifts not only include new types of relationships and divisions among subgroups, but also the breakdown of formerly established organizational boundaries. At the level of the universal church, Molinari and Gumpel (1987) ask, “Is the consecrated way of life a structure in the church or a structure of the church?” (p. 19). The latter construct implies a singular structure of divine origin, namely a hierarchical one, while the former implies the existence of multiple structures in the church. At the core of the distinction is the degree to which the hierarchic structure governs the pneumatic components, that is, those typically associated with the charismatic dimensions of the church.

“The model articulated above suggests that the typical process of change includes an initial experience of crisis, accompanied by several strong feelings such as sadness, anger and defensiveness, followed by the development of differing understandings on the part of various organizational subgroups.”

Depending on the response to the singular vs. multiple structures question, structural diversity and change will occur in very different ways. Many religious believe that their traditions represent the pneumatic or charismatic dimensions of the church, particularly as represented in their founders or foundresses, and that they are better structured and controlled without the influence of the hierarchic structure.

In addition to the changes occurring within religious life in relation to the church, intercongregational structures have also been developing. We examined in a limited way the changes in intercongregational relationships such as merger that are associated with shifts in understanding or direction. What in particular has happened to the boundaries separating religious from the diocesan clergy and from the laity?

Individual Congregations

Although some changes in understanding have been occurring in religious life as a “social institution,” across congregations, others have

been occurring differentially within congregations. Moreover, many of the changes that have occurred “across the board” have been experienced by members of individual congregations as occurring within their own congregation more than as a phenomenon characteristic of religious life as a whole. Thus, this study was concerned not only with overall changes in religious life, but also the types of changes occurring within specific congregations.

For example, Bartunek (1984) described how the understanding of the educational mission in one women's congregation shifted from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. At the beginning of the change process education was viewed essentially as synonymous with activities that took place in schools the congregation administered. However, by the late 1970s the educational mission was seen primarily as “seeking justice with the heart of an educator,” which might or might not take place in formal educational settings, let alone schools the congregation administered.

Beres and Musser (1987) have described how during that same time period another congregation broadened its mission from particular areas of service to a general philosophy of service, with priorities shifting from an emphasis on the works of the congregation to an emphasis on the congregation's members as primary vehicles for fulfilling the mission.

Within religious congregations, Nygren (1988) found that both male and female religious are altering their structures and categories of membership to adapt to their emerging self-understanding. In a survey of 740 leaders of religious congregations, he found that 70 percent of the female leaders indicate that they are adapting their membership to include full or partial membership by laity. Among female congregations, 18 percent of the total surveyed expect to amalgamate with another congregation, province or monastery to adapt to internal changes. Correspondingly, 25 percent of the male leaders anticipate altering membership categories, and 12 percent of those surveyed expect to amalgamate with another entity to adapt to change. These anticipated or accomplished changes impact both the existing members and the organization's self-definition.

In one congregation studied by Bartunek (1984), members' shifts in understanding were intertwined with the development of several cross-province groups and commissions. They were also intertwined with the breakdown of formerly established external boundaries. Many congregational members started working with and as part of groups that had been clearly outside the originally established boundaries of the congregation. These structural changes eventually resulted in a merger of the U.S. provinces of the congregation.

How broadly applicable are the types of changes described above? What are the types of changes in structure that are occurring? What effects do these changes have on the development of new understandings?

Next, what are the processes through which new understandings have been occurring? The

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purpose and applying it to an unmet human need today. After her talk an Alexian Brother in the audience came up to her. “He said, ‘I hadn't thought about it before, but we had not had men entering our community for a long time — but this summer we had two first professions (of vows), we received five people into the novitiate and we had six (other) candidates.’”

“There's an impulse to generosity among people,” Ukeritis commented. “As communities clarify what they're about, especially in addressing unmet needs, people will find a way to channel that impulse.”

Put another way, she said, many people are looking for something they would be “willing to put their life on the line for,” but many religious orders today “are ambivalent about saying, ‘We want you to put your life on the line.’”

Another immediate implication of the study for religious orders, Ukeritis said, is that the analysis of differences between typical and outstanding leaders suggests ways to improve the leadership of religious orders through programs of leadership training for new superiors.

For a past text of current interest in Origins, see the address by Adrian Dominican Sister Donna Markham in last week's edition, pp. 247ff (Sept. 17, 1992). She addressed questions related to individualism and religious life, one of the points addressed in the research appearing on these pages.

Markham encouraged religious order leaders to challenge “those who are being tempted toward assimilation by the prevailing norms of individualism and materialism.”

She said that the life of a community of hope disturbs and disrupts “the social drift toward autonomy and self-sufficiency. It disturbs those of us who aspire to live it, and it unsettles the environment in which it is situated.”

Said Markham: “We know well from our own experience that the obsessive pursuit of private agendas, often driven by politics, has resulted in

personal, ecclesial and national crises of meaning and belonging. Repeatedly our poets, spiritual writers, ecologists, sociologists and even business analysts reflect to us the dangers and numbing effects of individualism, separatism and the disregard for unity and the good in common.

"Entwined in these commentaries of our day is the longing for connection, meaning and belonging. Community is the deliberate, human, metaphoric expression of such profound yearning for intimacy and purpose. I am convinced it is our final hope for establishing reconciling communication in a pained world. And it is our hope for building the future of a religious life immersed in an era scarred by dynamics of exclusion, competition and confrontation. Communities of hope become the organic bridges networking islands of the spirit where compassion, friendship and commitment to the mission of the Gospel still flourish."

model articulated above suggests that the typical process of change includes an initial experience of crisis, accompanied by several strong feelings such as sadness, anger and defensiveness, followed by the development of differing understandings on the part of various organizational subgroups. There are also feelings and reactions associated with this stage: ambiguity and confusion about the possible understandings as well as conflict between groups. The introduction of the new Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, for instance, introduces legitimacy to a divergent opinion among religious leadership. When a new synthesis is reached, a sense of "rightness" occurs. If it fails to occur, more destructive dynamics may characterize the group's functioning.

In addition, from which elements of the environment do members of a particular congregation receive messages or constraints regarding appropriate (or publicly appropriate) self-understanding? In particular, how do the hierarchical church and the laity have an impact? How do intercongregational groups and networks affect the development of understandings within the congregations that belong to these groups?

Next, how has leadership been affecting the experienced changes in religious life? The role of leadership has been analyzed in detail to understand how leaders contribute to development or decline of organizations.

Individual Members

It is clear that the changes that have occurred have not left individual members untouched. For example, Ebaugh (1977) showed several years ago that the changes had strong effects on the reasons members of women's religious congregations left the congregation. Others have indicated that one of the typical effects of a transformational process is an increase in the stress level of individual members of an organization in which the transformation is occurring. This increased level of stress is due to the ambiguity that accompanies the change and to the conflict between subgroups that takes place during it.

However, there should be more to the experience of individual religious than simply difficult feelings. For example, Bartunek and Ringuest (1987) found that members of a particular congregation whose work took them across the congregation's original boundaries during the early 1970s, and who remained in their congregation, eventually came to perceive themselves as more influential in the congregation than did members who continued to carry out traditional works.

Thus, we are concerned not only with the change taking place on the congregational and intercongregational level, but also with the way various members of religious orders and particular subgroups are experiencing the change. In addition, the differences between the experience of men and women religious may be relevant. We address two questions regarding this experience.

What has the experience of change been

like for individual members of congregations? The model we have presented proposes that individual members of congregations should experience a wide range of feelings during the change process. The departure of such a large percentage of the population of religious has also had an impact on those who remain. Those who continue to live the vocation to religious life surely have a unique perspective on their role and are rooted in a spirituality that sustains them. With this frame of transformation, then, we set out to design a comprehensive assessment that would give us some measure of how change is occurring and affecting religious life at the level of the social institution, congregations and within individual religious.

III. RESEARCH UNITS

The design of the Religious Life Futures Project contained six independent studies. They are described below.

The national survey was a comprehensive questionnaire asking 9,999 religious sisters, brothers and priests to express their beliefs and opinions about spirituality, motivation, services they provide, issues considered to be threats or positive influences on the future of religious life and a variety of areas related to religious life in general and in their orders in particular.

The leadership studies were based on the recognition that leadership is a key factor in sustaining the life of any group. Investigations of leaders' views, of members' perceptions of their leaders and of the competencies required for outstanding leadership were pursued in this research unit.

"Investigations of leaders' views, of members' perceptions of their leaders and of the competencies required for outstanding leadership were pursued.... Caring-people and visioning-group units were constructed based on the awareness that various subgroups of members could offer distinct perspectives.... Individual interviews ... were pursued with persons identified as particularly knowledgeable about religious life."

Caring-people and visioning-group units were constructed based on the awareness that various subgroups of members could offer distinct perspectives. The caring people were identified by virtue of their exemplary caring for others and participants in the visioning-group unit consisted of people nominated in virtue of their hopeful, positive and compelling vision concerning the future of religious life.

Individual interviews, using a standard protocol, were pursued with persons identified as

particularly knowledgeable about religious life. These interviews probed for interviewees' understandings of the nature and purpose of religious life and the challenges facing women and men religious at this point in history as well as those qualities required for leadership in the future.

Theological/historical monograph was commissioned to be written by Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, Ph.D, with a historical postscript by John Padberg, SJ, Ph.D. They will add perspective to the wealth of information collected, analyzed and evaluated.

A. The National Survey

The purpose of the national survey was to obtain information regarding members' attitudes and practices regarding religious life. Questions ranged from general demographics to patterns and attitudes about living arrangements and job satisfaction. It also sought information regarding attitudes toward vows, various aspects of religious life and spiritual growth to future plans.

Early in 1990, each major superior in the United States was contacted by letter with a request for a listing of the names and addresses of their members. Having identified more than 121,000 religious in this process, a stratified random sample design was employed to select the participants for the survey portion of the study. This random sample was stratified to ensure the statistically valid possibility of comparison by tradition (apostolic, contemplative, mendicant, monastic) as well as by vocation (sisters, brothers, religious priests). The 335-item questionnaire was mailed to the 9,999 religious priests, brothers and sisters identified in this manner in October 1990.

Using postcard and phone follow-up, an overall response rate of 77.4 percent (7,736 responses) was obtained. The data base used for reporting results consists of 6,359 usable surveys. In the data analysis, the responses were weighted to reflect population proportions of sisters, brothers and religious priests as well as those of the apostolic, mendicant, monastic and contemplative groups. Establishing groups to reflect general developmental stages (ages 19-45, 46-60, 61-73, 74-96), all data were analyzed according to age groups.

The questions throughout the survey represented a broad range of topic categories. Initial principal-components factor analyses were conducted on a select number of the items in the survey. Separate factor analyses were conducted for the other clusters of items. Analyses were run by vocation (sister, brother, priest), by tra-

dition (apostolic, mendicant, contemplative and monastic), and by age group (19-45, 46-60, 61-73 and 74-96).

Four major clusters of factors emerged on the level of the social institution. They include conceptual areas related to structures, innovations, restraints and credibility. Within each of these areas we have clustered the factors that are related. For example, within the structures area, issues related to role clarity, permanent commitment, external authority, systemic change and hierarchical alliance are considered. Definitions of the factors and summary findings follow.

"Seventy-seven percent of the contemplative and 64 percent of the monastics reported high role clarity while only 59 percent of the apostolic and mendicant members indicated they have a clear understanding of their role.... Fifty-two percent of the youngest members of religious orders reported high role clarity, compared to 71 percent of the oldest group.... The more highly educated among the population experience lower role clarity as religious."

The national survey factors related to structures include role clarity, permanent commitment, external authority, systemic change and hierarchical alliance. Because of the significance of role-clarity findings in this study, an extended discussion of this issue follows. Summary findings related to the other factors follow.

Role clarity for religious is defined as "the individual's perceived level of understanding regarding his or her purpose and function within the current structure of the church." On this measure, 55 percent of the sisters reported high role clarity, along with 65 percent of the brothers and 68 percent of the priests. More than 30 percent of the women's scores were in the low role-clarity category, indicating a lack of understanding or clarity regarding their role in the church today.

Considering the data by tradition, 77 percent of the contemplative and 64 percent of the monastics reported high role clarity while only 59 percent of the apostolic and mendicant members indi-

cated they have a clear understanding of their role. Clarity regarding role may be more easily established in the future groups. High clarity is correlated with age. Fifty-two percent of the youngest members of religious orders reported high role clarity, compared to 71 percent of the oldest group. This finding parallels research in many professions which points to greater role clarity among those who have a greater tenure in their profession.

Interestingly, the more highly educated among the population experience lower role clarity as religious. In terms of the fields of study, religious in the more applied disciplines such as business, education and health professions indicated they were less clear about their role as religious in the church when compared to religious whose training is in the more theoretical disciplines such as theology, humanities and the social sciences. The role demands of the health care providers or educators may present pressures that replace or compete with, rather than complement the current role of religious in the church.

Other research has demonstrated that ambiguity regarding role can, in general, lead to anxiety, reduced ability to meet role requirements, decreased ministerial satisfaction, lower trust and self-confidence, increased sense of futility and greater propensity to leave a religious order. The lack of role clarity that a high percentage of religious experience may contribute to a further diminishment in number of members in religious orders. There may also be some connection between statistics reflecting the equal numbers of women and men entering religious life (in contrast to the approximately 3-to-1 ratio of prior years) and the greater numbers of women who experience low role clarity. Taken together, this data signals the essential need for role clarity if religious orders in the United States are to be revitalized.

In responding to questions related to the belief that lifelong commitment was normative for religious life, all groups (considered by vocation, by tradition and by age group) registered barely moderate agreement. Based on a scale where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree," the group means ran between 3.1 and 3.5 in indicating their agreement that permanent commitment is the norm.

All respondents tended to disagree with a belief that reliance on external authority would favorably influence the future of religious life. There was a general rejection of the tendency to seek influence regarding thought, opinion or behavior from outside

sources such as the church or group authority, indicated by the fact that, on the five-point scale described above, means for all groups were between 2.5 and 3.1. (Recall that 2 represents "disagree" and 3 represents "neither agree nor disagree.")

Sisters, brothers and religious priests experienced little connection between their work for systemic change, defined as "efforts to influence the social and political structures which tend to discriminate against disadvantaged persons," and their personal and spiritual fulfillment. All means were greater than 3.0, and less than 3.4. This did not change when considered by age groups or tradition.

The cluster of items related to the positive relationship between hierarchy and religious as well as the influence of church hierarchy and magisterial authority were not typically rated highly by religious.

The national survey included items measuring participants' responses to trends in religious life that produce greater diversity in the composition of Christian community living. These include the conscious inclusion of persons who have declared their homosexual orientation, how members at large perceive the comfort level of minority-group members in their congregation and the influence of including lay associate members.

Survey participants were asked to respond to the statement, "Declaring a homosexual orientation would not exclude an individual from being admitted to my congregation." Sixty-four percent of all respondents indicated either agreement with the statement or uncertainty. Thirty-six percent disagreed.

When considered by vocation, only 16 percent of sisters agreed with the statement, and nearly 50 percent expressed uncertainty. This was significantly different from the responses of religious priests and brothers. Agreement of religious priests registered at 43 percent, with 22 percent uncertain. Thirty-five percent of the brothers agreed, with 25 percent uncertain.

Among the four traditions, 53 percent of contemplatives indicated disagreement, implying the least expectation that persons declaring a homosexual orientation would be admitted to their congregations. "Agree," "uncertain" and "disagree" percentages were more evenly split among the other traditions. Among monastics, the greatest percentage agreed. Thirty-eight percent of the members of apostolic groups (again the greatest percent) indicated uncertainty regarding admission of candidates with a known homosexual preference.

When considered by age

groups, 45 percent of the members under 45 expressed their belief that a person with a homosexual orientation would be admitted to their congregation. Forty-three percent of the oldest age group felt that homosexual persons would not be admitted, and 46 percent of the same age group expressed their uncertainty.

When asked to respond to the statement, "Members of minority groups may feel uneasy in my congregation," the sentiment among religious in general is fairly well split: 36 percent agree; 22 percent are uncertain, and 42 percent disagree. This response pattern also reflected the response pattern of sisters, brothers and religious priests. The same was true for apostolic, mendicant and monastic religious. Fifty-two percent of contemplatives disagreed with the statement, while 27 percent agreed.

"When asked to respond to the statement, 'Members of minority groups may feel uneasy in my congregation,' the sentiment among religious in general is fairly well split: 36 percent agree; 22 percent are uncertain; and 42 percent disagree."

Analysis by age groups reveals the greatest differences. Fifty-two percent of the youngest and 44 percent of the next age group (46-60) indicated their belief that members of minority groups would feel uneasy. In contrast, half of the 61 to 73 age group and 53 percent of the oldest group did not believe minority-group members would feel uneasy in their orders. At present, less than 10 percent of the members of religious orders in the United States reflects minority membership. In the near future, 50 percent of the U.S. Catholic population will be Hispanic. The reality of multiculturalism must be addressed by religious orders.

In response to the statement, "Inclusion of lay associates as members of my congregation may undermine what it means to be a member of my congregation," 65 percent of the respondents clearly disagreed. Only 16 percent agreed.

Recalling that disagreement with this statement reflects a belief that associate membership will not undermine the meaning of membership in one's congregation, the inclusion of lay associates, including women and married people, appears to have widespread acceptance among religious. In general, religious re-

ported little concern about the impact of including lay associates as members and how that decision may affect the meaning of membership in their congregations.

When asked to rate their sense of the effect of the expansion of lay roles in various church ministries as well as the potential influence of feminist thought, ordination of women and inclusion of married persons in religious communities, respondents of all groups were consistent in indicating their beliefs that these situations and possibilities would have little, if any, effect on the future of religious life.

Respondents were invited to rate aspects of contemporary American culture such as capitalism, technology and affluence in terms of their potential threat to the future of religious life on a five-point Likert scale where 1 represents "not at all" and 5 represents "extremely." Data analysis by age and tradition shows that religious view them as minimal threats. Considered by vocation, sisters indicated a greater but not high concern regarding the impact of cultural realities than did brothers and religious priests.

Factors in the "credibility" cluster related to working with the poor and anomie.

To measure a member's stated commitment to work personally with the poor, survey participants were asked to respond to the statement, "Although there is increasing talk about working with the poor, I feel little commitment to that." Mean scores for all vocations, traditions and age groups did not exceed 3.5. Sisters, members of apostolic groups and religious in the 19-45 age group yielded the highest means in their respective groupings. Thus, members of congregations express little commitment to participate in an activity which has become increasingly an espoused value for many congregations and quite explicitly by the church.

These findings suggest that the greatest commitment to work with the poor, a strongly espoused value in the church and particularly among religious, would be found in a young apostolic sister. This group currently shows the smallest tendency to increase in size.

Anomie, defined as a state in which normative standards of conduct and belief are weak or lacking, is characterized by disorientation, anxiety and isolation. The loss of conviction about the vows, lack of clarity about the role of religious, reactance to authority, lack of corporate mission and ministry, and disillusionment with leadership pose significant threats to the future of religious life. The mean scores for all groups were greater

than 3.5. These concerns increased with age

The national survey used specifically designed items related to qualities of spiritual leadership as well as Bass' leadership scale to assess members' perceptions of their leaders. For the sake of internal consistency in reporting all leadership studies together, these findings are incorporated into Section III. B., Leadership.

The national survey also measured several factors affecting community living, including involvement, influence and satisfaction with opportunities for ongoing development.

Involvement is defined as "the experience of having and the desire to be engaged in activities related to the life of one's congregation"; influence, as "the experience of having and the desire to have some impact regarding the decisions and future of one's congregation." On a scale where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree," agreement regarding involvement in congregational activities was high, with nearly the same means across vocations, ranging from 3.9 to 4.0. Levels of perceived influence were significantly lower, with means ranging from 3.2 to 3.0. Considering the factors of involvement and influence by tradition, the range was the same.

When considered by age groups, interesting patterns surfaced. The youngest group had the lowest mean for influence and highest mean for involvement. The 74-96 age group, in contrast to the 19-45 group, had the highest mean for influence and the lowest for involvement.

A consistent pattern did emerge: The perceived or desired level of influence in one's congregation is consistently lower than an individual's experience or desire to be involved in the group. This raises serious questions in considering issues related to ownership and group commitment.

Respondents' satisfaction with opportunities for ongoing development through education and formation, rated on a scale of 1 ("very dissatisfied") to 5 ("very satisfied"), averaged about 4.0. In general, the high levels of satisfaction and possibly accompanying expectation, matched with lowered levels of revenue and decreased personnel for most congregations, may present significant frustrations or difficult choices in the future.

The national survey also investigated the degree to which a congregation's policies and structures promote the effective functioning of the group. Procedural clarity, effects of the renewal process and members' willingness to support spon-

sored institutions reflect the focal points for addressing this question.

Analyzed by vocation, tradition and age group, religious indicated a moderate level of satisfaction with the clarity of their congregation's policies and procedures. Group means for vocation, tradition and age ranged from 3.5 to 3.9. Recalling that the scale ranges from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), it is fair to say that members of religious orders do not experience an overwhelming sense of clarity concerning their congregation's policies and procedures.

"These findings suggest that the greatest commitment to work with the poor ... would be found in a young apostolic sister. This group currently shows the smallest tendency to increase in size."

Thirty years ago, the Second Vatican Council directed religious orders to examine their structures and update their congregations. A return to the spirit of the founder was identified as a critical part of this renewal process. Members' assessment of their congregation's efforts, their order's success in remaining faithful to the founding charism or in maintaining the prophetic character of religious life reflect once again only a moderate level of agreement that the congregation has accomplished this end.

Across age groups, the highest rating (mean was 3.8) reflected the assessment of the 61- to 73-year-olds. Significantly, this was the group who provided most of the leadership during the past 30 years. The youngest group expressed the lowest satisfaction. There were no differences between the various traditions in their ratings of the effectiveness of renewal efforts.

In an effort to assess the commitment of members to their congregation's institutional commitments, respondents were asked to indicate their willingness to work in a sponsored institution of their congregation and their willingness to live in such an institution.

Overall, 93 percent of the religious responding to the survey answered yes regarding their willingness to work there. This represents 94 percent of the religious priests and brothers and 92 percent of the sisters who responded. A few, but still a substantial portion, indicated their willingness to live at an institution sponsored by the congregation: 88 percent of the total respondents, representing 84 percent of the sisters, 91 percent of the brothers and 92 percent of the priests, are willing to live

in such a setting.

These results present the opportunity to leaders, congregational planners and institutional decision makers to consider the availability and willingness of members of religious organizations and to direct their efforts toward a corporate mission. The focus on individual ministries that has evolved over the past several years may now be shifting or open to reconsideration by members.

Spirituality was considered in terms of the experience of a sense of oneness or harmony with God, the degree of increased spiritual intensity and the value of structured prayer to personal and spiritual fulfillment.

All religious report a moderately high level of agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 represents "not at all"; 5 represents "frequently if not always") to questions assessing a sense of oneness with God. Sisters and contemplatives score highest in terms of vocation and tradition. Not surprisingly, this sense appears to deepen with age insofar as mean scores for age groups increased as age increased.

The survey also measured changes in spirituality in terms of the degree to which respondents' reported a greater value of religious life, deeper belief in Jesus Christ and/or appreciation of the value of prayer since the time of their first profession of vows.

While sisters, contemplatives and members of the 74-96 age group reported the greatest levels of intensified spirituality, the ratings of the other groups reflected high levels.

The degree to which structured prayer experiences such as common prayer, an annual retreat, confession and devotion to Mary were reported to be a source of spiritual and personal fulfillment was also measured on a five-point scale. Considered by vocation, all respondents registered agreement beyond a level of 4.1. Consistent with their tradition, contemplatives had the highest mean for the tradition groupings in reporting structured prayer to be a very valuable contributor. The experience of structured prayer as spiritually and personally fulfilling increased with age.

The national survey measured the individual's commitment to his or her congregation as well as affiliation and the intention to remain.

All traditions, vocations and age groups reported moderately high to very high levels of congregational commitment. Not surprisingly, levels of agreement steadily increased with respondents' ages.

As was the case for commitment to the congregation, all

groups (vocation, tradition and age) were strong in their agreement with items indicative of high affiliation. Sisters, contemplatives and members of the oldest age group had the highest means for their respective groups.

Members of all groups (considered by age, cohort or tradition) expressed an agreement with items related to their intentions to remain in their congregations at or beyond the 4.2 level on the five-point "strongly disagree/strongly agree" scale. This high degree of durability may be viewed both as cause for celebration and as cause for concern.

The national survey also measured respondents' manifestation of belief through their fidelity to vows and works of mercy.

Self-ratings regarding faithfulness to their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, when analyzed by vocation, tradition and age group, ranged between 3.7 and 4.1. Because the purpose of this study was not to delve in the details of behaviors of religious women and men as they relate to observance of their vows, the research asked only for individual self-reports of fidelity to each vow. Of greater concern in this investigation were those individual aspects that were related to persons who do or do not perceive themselves as faithful.

Regarding practice of the vows, the researchers learned that religious women report chastity as most meaningful and least difficult, while men report chastity as most difficult and least meaningful. In a ranking of difficulty, obedience emerges as more difficult for women than for men.

The belief that direct action to help the sick or poor made a somewhat valuable contribution to their spiritual and personal fulfillment was registered most strongly by religious priests and sisters. Considered by tradition, members of the mendicant and apostolic groups reported that their practice of the works of mercy was somewhat valuable to their personal and spiritual fulfillment. Monastic religious experienced them as less valuable, and contemplatives, perhaps as a function of their lifestyle, experienced them as least helpful.

The social institution of religious life in the United States continues to reflect the dynamics of an organization in significant transition. The lack of role clarity for a large percentage of religious and the ambivalence regarding permanent commitment to the classic vows leaves the social institution vulnerable to innumerable other social and cultural forces.

The results would indicate that the population of religious in general is moving toward a much

more permeable system of membership, commitment, autonomy and inclusion. While on the one hand this reinforces innovation that includes diversity and broadened assumptions about religious life, the research also indicates that religious do not see how clearly they are influenced by cultural assimilation. Similarly, for many their own credibility may be threatened in the eyes of those they serve and the society in which they function because of the discrepancies between their espoused values and their practice. By their own admission, religious see indifference and a lack of passion to be a major threat to themselves as persons and in the broader scheme of religious life in relation to other social systems in the society.

Leadership is one of the critical forces that will assist in the clarification of the role identity of religious in the United States. Within congregations, particularly among women, there exists a fair degree of satisfaction with leadership. The hidden side of the satisfaction is that it may signal complacency among membership who, at the same time, find it difficult to influence the direction of the congregation.

"Most religious would see some return to normative behavior as necessary, but they are reluctant to do so if that means returning to the sectlike distinction of religious life of the past."

For many, the congregation lacks a coherent approach to collective action (particularly relative to sponsored institutions). In addition, the efforts at renewal have not met individual hopes. Community life continues to engage membership, and they feel committed deeply to congregational life, willing to be more involved than they currently are, but feel less influential with leadership and setting the direction of the congregation. The high need for affiliation noted in the survey results may, in fact, stifle the creativity necessary to move groups into the future.

One of the facets of the research that addresses optimistically the lack of role clarity for many religious is the data that suggests how important spirituality and a vital relationship with God really is for many of them. Structured prayer, however varied the forms, continues to be a value. Individuals feel genuinely called by God to religious life and see an intensified spirituality as desirable. They

are personally committed strongly to the community, derive satisfaction from belonging and most intend to remain in religious life.

It is fair to say that the data indicates a stronger ecclesiology than Christology. Individuals emphasize participation in the life of the church and community as foundational to their spirituality. Their relationship to the person of Christ is less clearly drawn, perhaps because of the design of the study itself or maybe because of shifting language schemes to describe one's spirituality. What is clear from the research is that their spirituality will define their uniqueness in the church, their belonging will satisfy their affiliative needs.

The data suggests also that if religious experience difficulty it is in the realm of impact and fidelity to vows. The tradition of personal sacrifice that has been the foundation of the vowed life has found support for such radical renunciation in the impact that it generates for the mission of the congregation and the church. There exist profound shifts in the interpretation of the vows and the willingness to live them. More fluid interpretations of poverty, obedience and chastity are widely observed. In addition, some religious describe new vows, for instance, to ecology, as descriptive of the future.

Personal understandings of religious life and the commitment required to live the life are very broad. This results in part from lack of role clarity and from the vast cultural shifts that have happened in American society in general that have had a significant influence on religious life. Most religious would see some return to normative behavior as necessary, but they are reluctant to do so if that means returning to the sectlike distinction of religious life of the past.

B. Leadership

The recognition and identification of leadership as a critical factor in the transformation of religious orders prompted the investigation of leadership from many perspectives. These included:

1. A series of regional gatherings attended by 192 leaders of religious congregations.

2. Members' at-large perceptions of their leaders through the national survey.

3. A separate "leadership-competency assessment of leaders of religious orders" with personality psychologist David McClelland, Ph.D.

One of the first issues to surface during the course of the Religious Life Futures Project was the urgency of selecting and training leaders who not only

can manage the complexity of religious life that is predicted to intensify during the next 10 years, but who also can focus the attention of their communities on a vision that will unite individual efforts inspired by the mission of their founder or foundress. The most striking weakness among current leaders is their inability to formulate a strategy to achieve a purpose or mission.

Also of concern was the increasingly widespread use of consensual processes and team leadership. The findings indicate that, while potentially effective, such approaches can often lead to mediocre management, representing the least-common denominator within an organization. Uninformed implementation of consensual methods often paralyzes the visionary leader.

At the leadership workshops the participants were asked to write, in the form of a letter to their members, their vision for the future of their congregation, the groups of people whom their congregation and its members serve, and religious life in general.

A content analysis of these writings yielded four categories of leadership:

Value-based leaders expressed a sense of direction for their congregations or themselves in terms of the conceptual and cultural aspects of religious life. They were able to give expression to their values, but were unable to identify strategies to actualize them. For example, the author of one letter expressed concern about the environment, but only vaguely proposed that the congregation become involved in recycling. A letter simply urging the eradication of "oppressive structures" without any suggested implementation illustrates another value stated without a strategy.

Visionary leaders, on the other hand, expressed a sense of direction in terms of the structural and organizational aspects of religious life. The articulation of a strategy to accomplish their vision marks the difference between visionary and value-based leaders. A letter that proposed a new form of community in which non-vowed members would participate in governance, naming specific guidelines, coupled a vision with a strategy.

Conflicted leaders were unable to address change and often expressed frustration, anger, sadness and even despair. These feelings were frequently directed toward members of the congregations. One such leader wrote, "It seems to me that some of our religious are unconcerned. They seem to have lost the original enthusiasm for their religious calling. Life has become drudgery for them, and membership in our congregation is a burden. Nothing we do or try to do seems to change this picture, and it is of great concern to me."

Incognizant leaders, those who are unconscious or unaware of major issues facing their orders, failed to address any of the concerns facing their congregations or the church. For example, one leader wrote, "There is no secular history/profane history; there is only sacred history. God is present in everything and in all. God journeys with us, with all people. God is the force, the life, the purpose behind everything and everyone." The researchers note that while God is ultimately the means and the end of religious life and leadership itself, incognizant leaders do not realize their role in enabling the action of God.

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From these workshops, the researchers concluded that there is often a gulf between the responsibilities of the office and abilities some leaders bring to this position. In many cases, leaders lack the necessary competencies or training to function effectively.

The national survey measured members' perceptions of their leaders using a measure of leaders' spiritual intensity and Bass' transformational and transactional leadership scales. Spiritual intensity in the leaders of religious orders is rated highly by both men and women when they evaluate the quality of their leadership. Both female and male religious expressed a slightly higher degree of satisfaction with individual leaders than with leadership teams. Women were generally more satisfied with their leadership than were their male counterparts, and individual leaders are rated more highly than leadership teams by members.

The survey measured the degree to which members viewed their leaders as transformational and transactional. Transformational leaders provide vision and a sense of mission while instilling pride and gaining respect and trust. Transactional leaders focus on administrative and operational details. Typically, transactional leaders orient subordinates toward achieving goals, monitoring performance and rewarding accomplishments; they take corrective action when necessary. Sometimes they abdicate re-

sponsibilities and avoid decision making.

While both women and men tend to view their leaders as transformational people who embody charisma/individual consideration as well as intellectual stimulation/inspiration. On a scale where 1 represents "almost never" and 5 represents "frequently if not always," sisters' mean ratings of their leaders on charisma and intellectual stimulation were 3.67 and 3.57, respectively. Conversely, male religious consistently rate their leaders higher on transactional qualities, contingent reward (brothers' mean was 1.78; priests' mean was 1.70) and active management by exception (brothers' mean was 2.38; priests' mean was 2.26) than do female religious (contingent reward mean was 1.62; management by exception was 2.06).

The findings showed that while spiritual intensity was the most frequently observed behavior of all outstanding leaders, charisma or individual consideration of members was the most significant predictor of satisfaction with an individual leader or leadership team.

This research unit assessed systematically the competencies required for outstanding leadership. The model of competency assessment developed by McClelland and associates at McBer & Co. was employed.

It began with the convening of a panel of experts to assist in identifying a criterion group of 24 present or former leaders of religious congregations regarded by their peers as "outstanding." Using the "behavioral event interview" method also developed by McClelland, the research team interviewed this group of 12 women and 12 men. Similar interviews were conducted with a control group of 15 "typical" leaders (11 women and four men) matched with the criterion group for age, gender, tradition, size of congregation and length of tenure. These interviews were then transcribed and coded by two separate raters for leadership competencies.

Analysis of the data revealed that outstanding and typical leaders share certain "threshold competencies," including an ability to articulate the mission of their congregations, an inclination to act efficiently, basic conceptual and analytical skills, self-confidence and avoidance of impulsive or emotional expression. These can be regarded as foundational competencies for leaders of religious orders.

Outstanding leaders, however, were found to differ from typical leaders in several significant ways. For instance, outstanding leaders expressed a desire to perform tasks well or better than they had been performed in the

past nearly three times as often as did typical leaders. They stated more than twice as often as typical leaders that they wanted to find new ways to achieve goals and to make things better for the people their order serves.

Approximately 65 percent of the outstanding leaders mentioned taking initiative to deal with anticipated problems at least five times. Only 22 percent of typical leaders referred that often to taking such actions.

The study also found that outstanding leaders were significantly more likely than typical leaders to mention using their power to influence group decisions or behavior; to build consensus and team spirit by soliciting the views of others; to attempt to see issues from different perspectives; and to draw on divine assistance in their leadership roles.

Conversely, typical leaders were more inclined than outstanding leaders to mention that they had threatened sanctions to control the behavior of subordinates; acted out of formal authority as opposed to building consensus; and involved themselves with personal problems of individual members of their congregation as opposed to the problems of the entire congregation. Typical leaders seldom refer to God in relation to their leadership activity.

The study also found differences between outstanding men and outstanding women leaders. Outstanding men appeared to have been more likely than outstanding women to have begun new projects; to have acted assertively; to have provided more opinions, particularly negative ones, to subordinates; to have developed the leadership capacity of others; and to have experienced the benefit of God's support.

The outstanding women, on the other hand, appeared more likely to have focused on consensus building; to have pointed to the spiritual significance of events; and to have positive expectations of others and religious life in general.

The leadership competency assessment revealed that outstanding male leaders are more likely to start projects dealing with problems anticipated in the coming years than are typical male leaders and female leaders in general. Neither outstanding nor typical female leaders appear to initiate such projects. While all male leaders report more behavior that threatens members with termination of an assignment or dismissal from a congregation than do female leaders, this is strikingly true of typical male leaders. Outstanding female leaders behave in this manner more frequently than their typical counterparts.

This suggests the desirability of a moderate use of sanctions.

C. Visioning Groups

Recognizing that various subgroups of members could offer distinct perspectives, the study was to include the views of persons who could provide specifically clear opinions regarding the future of religious orders. Individuals identified as future-oriented yet rooted in their order's charism were invited to participate in one of four visioning groups. This research unit was conducted through a series of weekend gatherings. The aim was to learn about personality characteristics and beliefs of the individuals and to develop strategies and agendas that could implement the visionaries' predicted images of religious life. Their prospective views would also be compared to both leaders and members of religious orders.

Subjects for the visioning groups were recruited through a nomination process that began when a letter was sent to the major superiors of 550 randomly selected congregations. The superiors were asked to consult with their councils, similar groups of advisers or members at large to nominate one member of their order to participate in a group experience. Criteria for selection asked that the nominee be a person of vision who is recognized for the ability to live the charism of his or her order in today's society and that the nominee be able to articulate a sense of hope and a belief in the future of religious life. A total of 92 religious, including 48 women and 44 men (12 brothers and 32 priests) participated in the visioning groups' gatherings.

One of the most significant findings of the visioning-group workshops emerged from an exercise conducted during the course of each gathering. Participants were organized randomly into groups of three or four people and given the task of identifying those elements critical to the future of religious life. After a period of private reflection, participants were asked to gather in their assigned groups and share the results of their reflections. Each of these groups then joined another, resulting in groups of six to eight. They continued the conversation and were then asked to construct an image or metaphor that captured visually and graphically the components they viewed as essential to a future vision of religious life. The results of their work included such images as a kaleidoscope, a prism, a jazz band, a symphony orchestra and the spiral of unitive consciousness.

After all groups in a session reported and presented their images of the future of religious life, each person was asked to consider all the models and to stand near the one he or she found most compelling in terms of a future vision. Participants were asked to base their

choice on their willingness to make a personal commitment and to devote their energy to realizing that future vision.

This request invariably caused a dilemma for participants. The experience of a preference for a model designed by another group produced in most individuals a sense of guilt or betrayal as well as abandonment concerns regarding the group with whom they had worked to produce an image. This process replicated the dilemma which many members of congregations experience in wanting to be involved in actualizing a compelling vision of the future, but desiring also to maintain existing relational bonds. While this sense of loyalty or affiliation that inhibits change is not unique to religious groups, it does represent a critical factor in groups moving toward a future. Affiliation is generally stronger than vision.

This tension is particularly important to consider in light of the national survey findings that reveal a particularly high need for affiliation among members of religious orders. This dynamic is an important challenge for religious leaders.

Revitalized religious life, rooted in Jesus Christ and the Gospel's values, will manifest that spirit in the world by challenging systems that oppress others, living in a style of visible simplicity and renewing congregations' fidelity to their founding purpose. The visioning groups view authority as power that is shared among communities of equals. This perception, however, may level the traditional notions of the vow of obedience and assert more democratic ideals into the classical traditions of religious life.

Viewing the global community as the locus of redemption, sisters, brothers and religious priests will face alterations in prayer, expanding their language for a greater inclusivity. They will choose to share in the world's suffering and shift away from the rigidity of regional and juridical thinking. Members of religious orders will express their relationship with Jesus in the context of belonging, shared symbolic life and, possibly, a shift in primary language. The dominant language of religious life has shifted from theological constructs to social and psychological paradigms. Many members no longer use sacramental or transcendental frames of reference to describe their experience of God. Multiculturalism as normative is desirable, but confronting the personal and systemic racism that marks our society and religious orders could be the single greatest challenge in the area of membership.

Religious congregations ought to provide opportunities for structural expressions of emerging forms of religious life. To do so, they will have to discern

the contemporary expression of their founder's charisma, redefine or establish boundaries for membership and behavior, and confront the discrepancies between espoused and lived values.

Structural demonstrations are efforts to isolate and highlight a particular manifestation of a charisma, not as an end in itself but as a representation of a possible direction for the congregation. At present, such efforts to regain the founding spirit are often viewed by the majority of members as marginal. The presence of those who may have the vision to conform to the group may in fact undermine revitalization.

Individuals within religious orders will shift from an internal to a global focus. They will need to acquire new interpersonal skills and an ability to cope with moving from values related to stability and security to those related to change and process that lead to a more clearly focused mission.

Facing a challenge to a culture which has supported privatism and individualism, members of religious congregations also will need to re-examine non-negotiables. Relinquishing many previously held tenets, they will respond to the call of serving absolute human need in the spirit of their founder.

New members must demonstrate the maturity to live a life of sacrifice, possess or acquire the skills for leadership positions in global and church communities, and be able to sustain intimate relationships in the context of a celibate commitment. Current members who continue to belong to religious congregations also will need these skills and qualities and must prepare to live in communities that require them.

D. Caring People

The caring-people unit studied the characteristics of persons identified by members of their congregations as "uniquely caring" or "unusually helpful, thoughtful, understanding or caring persons."

All selected subjects were mailed packets that included a cover letter, a six-picture story exercise (projective technique), the national survey questionnaire and a variety of openended and short-answer measures. Because traditional question-and-answer research does not easily permit the study of unconscious motives, openended (projective) techniques were used to study the motive structures of these persons. This approach was especially important because much research about traits and behavior typically depends on self-reports which introduce the possibility of bias in the direction of socially acceptable responses. In

other words, what might have been measured in other studies was the need for consistency of self-image, not necessarily the subject's willingness to go to the assistance of a needy person. Coding responses to openended questions enabled a profile of caring people to emerge.

The caring-people study found that, in contrast to typical religious, religious who are perceived as unusually helpful, understanding and caring feel closer to and more trusting of God, who is seen as the source of healing and care.

"The caring-people study found that ... religious who are perceived as unusually helpful, understanding and caring feel closer to and more trusting of God, who is seen as the source of healing and care."

On projective measures, caring religious score higher in trust and lower in mistrust than typical sisters, brothers and priests, and tend to portray authority as benevolent. Caring religious connect divine assistance, in contrast to individual effort, with healing experiences. They are less self-controlling and more spontaneously inclined to generosity.

Caring people state that more often they find the experience of contemplative prayer very valuable. They also demonstrate a greater interpersonal involvement in caring experiences. Caring religious describe these relationships as growing and mutual, and as containing a wider meaning or significance beyond the immediate relationship.

Finally, these religious experience more joy in caring and zest for living. This contrasts with typical religious, who describe caring for others in tension-reduction terms. That is, typical religious report their caring as a response to a need in themselves such as caring out of duty or repayment, or caring in response to special needs such as illness, rejection or trauma of others.

This research suggests that for caring religious helping is not simply a transaction between two people. There is a third force in the relationship that might most generally be called a "benevolent authority" or, more simply, God. The caring religious stays in close touch with God and wants to share this benevolent authority with others. When encountering a person in need, the goal of the caring religious is not primarily to relieve his or her suffering, but to create a three-way relationship in which Jesus and the Gospel's values are deeply involved.

Helpers of this type do not see themselves as agents in the process; at most they are partners with or assistants to the real source of helping. They do not feel ultimately responsible. For this reason and also because the helping in itself is joyous, caring religious do not as readily "burn out."

This description also explains why caring religious who are so motivated are perceived to be helpful rather than manipulative. Because they so obviously believe they can do nothing out of themselves and want to establish a mutually rewarding relationship, caring religious are not perceived as egoistically threatening the self-esteem, interpersonal power or independence of others.

To the extent that responding to absolute human need is embraced anew as the ultimate mission of religious congregations, the formation and development of this motive for religious life is clearly essential.

This part of the research effort assumes that a fundamental component of the role identity of religious is their call to care for others. It also assumes a motive of a desire for oneness with God. Perhaps the future of religious life will be defined increasingly by these attributes or actions on behalf of others that mediate the presence of God. Caring religious live an operative Christology which is simultaneously immanent and transcendent.

The caring-people study suggests that the heart of congregational life is the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. The immediacy of presence of the caring person to another is possible because of this effort to mediate God, whom they see as a benevolent authority and the source of their action.

The focus of individual formation must be increasingly spiritual. This research would indicate that those who learn to be authentically caring are inclined spontaneously to generosity, trusting and aware that God acts in and through them. This level of freedom requires viewing God as a benevolent authority in whose name one acts as mediator.

E. Individual Interviews

Using a standard protocol developed for use in the individual interviews phase of the study, the researchers probed persons identified as particularly knowledgeable about religious life for their understandings of the nature and purpose of religious life and the challenges facing women and men religious at this point in history as well as those qualities required for leadership in the future. The purpose of this portion of the study was to verify and compare general members' beliefs about the nature and purpose

of religious life and its mission, emerging forms and structures, and future directions with those surfacing in other forums.

Interviewees noted that the mission of Jesus will be the central focus, and the spirituality of congregations will be rooted in their charism. Driven by pressing social and ecclesial needs, charity and justice will be the focus of mission and ministry, and most apostolic community life will be in proximity to the poor.

While maintaining a clear church identity, the structures of religious life will be based on mission rather than canons and the unique charism of religious life will remain largely distinct from hierarchical functions. An inclusive atmosphere will be marked by multiculturalism, a clear inclusion of women and the feminine, and a genuine respect for diversity.

Perhaps the most striking discrepancy in the portrait of the future of the social institution of religious life that emerges from the visioning groups, national survey and individual interviews relates to commitment to the poor. The random sample of members reveals at most a moderate commitment to participate in an activity which has become increasingly an espoused mission for many religious orders and quite explicitly by the church.

Some of several changes in congregational living could fortify religious orders of the future. Specifically, interviewees indicate that religious community life will be marked increasingly by intentionality in terms of shared values, purpose and resources. Some congregations whose charisms are similar will merge, and the number of apostolic groups will also decrease, many with smaller numbers of members. Because its members report greater clarity of focus and mission, membership in monastic orders may increase.

The ranks of religious orders will be marked by older members, with fewer younger members and many second-career entrants. New congregations, though few, will contribute to the revitalization of religious life.

Religious congregations must examine the impact of what has often been an uncritical introduction of associational and affiliational forms of membership. This will entail a focus on the meaning of membership and in many cases the re-establishment of boundaries.

Congregations that are vital to the church will have an explicit focus, and their effectiveness will be enhanced by the members' commitment to the collective mission.

In the view of those who participated in the interviews, commitment to works of mercy is critical. Most individuals who belong to religious orders were motivated at the outset by their impulse to generosity and are sustained by their special relationship with God. By serving those with absolute human need, sisters,

brothers and religious priests will dedicate themselves to a high-cost, high-commitment life in communities that can be witness to Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

E. Historical/Theological Monograph

Because it is important also to understand the findings of the study from both historical and theological perspectives, the researchers commissioned a theological/historical monograph.

"Congregations that are vital to the church will have an explicit focus, and their effectiveness will be enhanced by the members' commitment to the collective mission."

Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, Ph.D., of Fordham University will write a theological monograph focusing on religious life since the Second Vatican Council. John Padberg, SJ, Ph.D., of St. Louis University will provide a historical postscript to her work. This work, projected for completion in 1993, will add perspective to the wealth of information collected, analyzed and evaluated in this research effort.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: SHAPING THE FUTURE

If religious life is to continue to be a vital force in the church and the world, the Future of Religious Orders in the United States study concludes that dramatic changes must occur in most religious congregations in the United States. Fidelity to the spirit of the founder and responsiveness to critical and unmet human needs are basic to the ongoing mission of religious communities. Yet, while individual examples abound, collectively religious have acted in only limited ways on behalf of absolute human needs, new forms of poverty and demands that seemingly outstrip the capacity of any group to respond.

Vatican II called religious to a return to the "spirit of the founder." While most congregations have engaged in much study and devoted great efforts to move in this direction, the absence of corporate commitment to embody the group's response to current unmet needs in light of Gospel imperatives stands in contrast to the collective vision and action, rooted in God, that marked the birth of most apostolic, monastic or contemplative congregations. Religious life as a social institution in American society is at a crossroads. To achieve a desired future, religious as a group as well as individuals must confront the forces that currently restrain them and reinforce those dynamics that will allow them to in fact be responsive to absolute human need in the context of their particular charism. A future marked by significant re-

vitalization will emerge for those congregations that are rooted in their relationship with God and, in a spirit of fidelity to their founding purpose and responsiveness to absolute human need, confront the current gap between the Gospel and the culture.

The research concludes with an equation of sorts that can be applied to all congregational traditions in varying degrees. The interaction of eight critical factors in the context of personal and collective conversion will move congregations from their current states to their desired futures. The research also concludes that for other groups the restraints on advancement are severe and may lead to decline. What follows is a brief summary of the conclusions drawn from the various facets of the study.

1. Individualism and Vocation

Since Vatican II, shifting paradigms of vocation and concomitant cultural trends have de-emphasized the distinctiveness of the religious life. The research suggests that the personal call to holiness given to all Christians in *Lumen Gentium* did in fact impact religious life and the understanding of the religious life. Religious feel somewhat ambivalent about their current state while at the same time celebrating the advances of the laity in the church since Vatican II. The age of experimentation in the church paralleled vast cultural shifts in American society toward democratization of all authority, individualism and cultural assimilation.

For their part, religious have spent at least 20 years focused largely on the internal reorganization of congregational life. This structural perspective combined with a heightened psychological awareness left many weary of the bureaucratization of vocation at a time when individualism was escalating in society and religious life as well. For many, the dynamics of change itself presented an additional burden. The Future of Religious Orders in the United States project confirms that the impulse to generosity among some religious is being eclipsed by self-preoccupation, psychological decompensation, stark individualism and a lessening of the willingness to sacrifice.

For others, the reaction is the opposite. In these congregations we observe individuals who, regardless of age, know the distinctiveness of their vocation as religious. Their profile includes a radical dependence on God, whom they see as a benevolent authority, and a capacity to enter the life of another for the sake of the other and not to meet their own personal, even though seemingly altruistic, needs. They also possess a deep desire for oneness with God and with others. They are deeply committed to their congregation where, by objective standards, the costs of their work and membership are very high.

Recent literature on the theology of religious life has espoused as normative for religious a commitment to the prefer-

ential option for the poor. Such attentiveness to the poor has been seen by some as constitutive of the religious vocation. Yet the Future of Religious Orders in the United States project reveals that a significant number of religious feel no personal commitment to this espoused value. Resolving the discrepancy between the espoused and operative values evident in the lives and work of religious will decrease the dissonance felt by many and increase the credibility of the religious vocation.

Many religious have migrated to the periphery of their congregation, often living lives that reflect significant ministerial contributions but which have little to do with their congregations or religious life. For many such persons the call by the congregation to participate in its vocation and mission would be welcomed. For others, the dynamics of individualism and "inner authority" have come to dominate over any notion of vocation that entails either obedience or even discernment of the will of God in the context of a congregational commitment. The future lies in the ability to decide between the high cost of Gospel living in a religious congregation and exclusively privatized understanding of vocation to the religious life.

2. Leadership

The research presents a profile of outstanding leaders of religious orders. They are men and women grounded deeply in faith, able to acknowledge the centrality of God in their lives. They have a high need to achieve personally and have a clear sense of the impact the congregation could have. They are characterized by objectivity and compassion.

With all of these attributes, the outstanding leaders do not have a strong need to belong to the very groups they are attempting to lead, yet they find meaning precisely in that context of faith, membership and impact. The outstanding leader has a clear vision of the future and successfully employs the means to both gain the support of the congregation for the direction and to implement the decisions of the group.

Several factors inhibit the exercise of effective leadership in religious orders. The nature of authority is widely contested, consensual decision-making processes have little form, membership is generally unwilling to relinquish authority to those given responsibility and the concept of personal "call" often eclipses any willingness to work on behalf of the congregational ends. Furthermore, those elected to leadership are in some instances those least likely to succeed because they are elected to fill the need of a group that lacks ambition or the will to move forward.

Effective leaders, on the other hand, are rooted in an awareness that they act with and on behalf of God. They treat members as though they are equally responsible for the life of the congregation

yet do not compromise the clarity of their role as leader. Effective leaders understand how to position the congregation strategically to be responsive to human needs, and they generally are granted authority by their members.

3. Authority

Authority in religious life, as in the church itself, is perhaps the most pressing question for religious to resolve. Heiffetz and Monroe (1992) describe the nature of authority to be that of providing protection, direction and order for the sake of the group. Authority in many American institutions, including religious life, has undergone deconstruction. Variable understandings of consensus, subsidiarity, discernment and leadership have diffused understandings of authority. This, coupled with the dynamics of individualism, limited understandings of obedience and the separation of one's spiritual life from the life of the Christian community, has made the exercise of authority extremely difficult.

"The interaction of eight critical factors in the context of personal and collective conversion will move congregations from their current states to their desired futures."

The abuses of authority in the past make individuals reluctant to endorse authority in any way. Religious, in particular, are clear in their lowered respect for the magisterial authority of the church and the U.S. hierarchy in general. And within their own congregations, the interpretations of authority vary widely. The favorable resolution of the issues of authority will contribute to moving religious life toward its fundamental purposes. Failure to address issues of authority will further restrain revitalization efforts.

4. Work and Corporate Identity

The period of the '60s and '70s has been referred to as the "deconstructionist age" in which structures of American life (industry, family, religion) have been disassembled. The convergence of American deconstructionism and the post-Vatican II world produced massive unraveling of the forms and structures of religious life.

During this time, the institutions sponsored or staffed by religious experienced dramatic decline. Without making a judgment as to the validity of institutions themselves and the known negative impact they seemed to have on particular religious, they did in many instances provide a locus of corporate identity. At the present time many congregations lack a sense of corporate identity. Members often remain

because of a high need to belong to the group. Lack of clarity regarding the group's mission focus offers little to attract the commitment or capture the passion of potential new members.

The orders that appear to be rebounding or stabilizing the most in the United States are several monasteries, both male and female, who have carefully reinstated monastic practices and a sense of clarity regarding their life and work. It is also significant to note that monastic communities, particularly men's groups, who have retained the classic traditions of monasticism have not had to rely as much on compensation from parochial work.

A related dynamic for religious involves becoming identified solely with one's work. This results for developmental reasons, from a lack of corporate identity, from the absence of community and spiritual support. Under the guise of "we are more than what we do," many individual religious and groups have relinquished the power of corporate witness for a variety of individual commitments in effective but unconnected ministerial positions. The emphasis on individual ministry or at times simply procuring a position, has eclipsed the symbolism of and statement previously made by corporate commitments.

5. Affiliative Decline and Role Clarity

The most compelling result of the Future of Religious Orders in the United States study indicates that a significant percentage of religious no longer understand their role and function in the church. This lack of role clarity can result in lowered self-confidence, a sense of futility, greater propensity to leave religious life and significant anxiety. The younger religious experience the least clarity, and among them, women religious experience less clarity than their male counterparts.

Whatever clarity exists among men seems to emerge from the definitiveness of orders for priests and the incumbent role requirements as well as the clarity of the lay vocation for brothers. Women religious are divided upon the concept of consecrated life as it is distinct from or equal to their female lay counterparts. For both women and men religious, Vatican II substantially reinforced the role of laity in the church but did not clarify for religious the unique contribution of their vocation.

A related dynamic is regarded as affiliative decline. The data indicates that individuals who are currently members of religious orders find a high degree of satisfaction from membership in their congregation. In many instances, what holds them to their commitment to religious life is a sense of affiliation that is stronger than their sense of purpose or mission. Communal bonding continues in spite of 30 years of membership decline.

Congregations will continue to decline if affiliative mo-

tives are stronger than a concern for the mission of the church and the extension of the charism. As the median age for religious continues to increase, yielding control of the congregation to those younger members who understand and are able to present a compelling vision of the group's mission may be critical.

6. Racism and Multiculturalism

The Future of Religious Orders in the United States delineates a profile of American religious that is 96 percent white. Despite the radical increases in the U.S. population of African-Americans, Hispanic groups, Asians and other ethnic groups, religious orders do not reflect proportional increases. The research indicates that a complex dynamic of unconscious racism makes penetration by minority populations into rather homogeneous orders very difficult. Most younger religious acknowledge that members of ethnically distinct populations find incorporation into their religious order to be quite difficult. Older members, while believing they are open to minority members, cannot adapt easily to the cultural demands that heterogeneity in a religious order requires.

Ethnically distinct groups feel their culture to be not unwelcome, but generally unrecognized. To the extent that this remains the dynamic of religious orders, minority populations will likely develop religious orders in the tradition of the classical disciplines of monasticism and apostolic life, but they may well do so independent of the existing congregations. In other words, they will establish ethnically distinct contexts in which their culture can be lived more fully.

Among minority groups themselves, the research suggests that the prevalent discontent observed in mainstream orders relative to pious practices, authority and discipline are not their concerns. Their structure of faith, ecclesiology, female and male relationships, understandings of the vows, and the relationship to the church each present a very different dynamic as a function of culture.

7. Materialism and the Gospel

The research suggests that religious orders of the future will derive their mission and their life in common from a firm relationship with the person of Jesus, grounded in communion with the Word. Religious will focus on the gap that exists between the evident culture and the Gospel community. Because of the strength of the forces of materialism in the United States, conscious efforts will be made to define themselves within the culture while retaining very distinctive values. They will be recognized by their simplicity of life, their visible presence among the most abandoned and by their joy in serving God.

The research also indicates that at the present time religious are often unaware of the degree of their

assimilation into the mainstream culture and how invisible they have become to those who would most call out to them. The costs of belonging to a religious congregation have diminished as the former rigor of the vowed life has diminished. Most religious, however, would agree that to remain distinctive in the world, this trend toward assimilation must be reversed. In a related dynamic, defining clearly the boundaries and expectations of membership will be part of that revitalization.

8. Charism and Parochial Assimilation

Religious orders have classically arisen in the midst of the church to serve emerging or unmet human needs. They have historically been quite independent of yet complementary to the hieratic order of the church. The "consecrated life," as it has been known in the past, is today being assimilated into either the lay state (for brothers and sisters) or the clerical state (for religious priests). The complementary structures of the hierarchy and the charisms of the church are being blended into a predominantly parochial view. This is due in part to the absence of a vibrant declaration by Vatican II of the clear role of religious in the church.

The decline of sponsored institutions among religious orders has also altered the independence of religious. And, the decreased numbers of diocesan clergy at a time when the parish is defined as the primary locus of ecclesiology has led to an increasing dependence and pressure upon religious orders to staff diocesan operations.

The increasingly widespread insertion of religious into diocesan and parochial positions, to the point where such commitments take precedence over involvements in the lives of their congregations, is a growing phenomenon in the United States. This trend, known as parochial assimilation, has had a dramatic effect on most religious orders and probably most significantly among women. It can easily lead to a compromise of the prophetic role of religious.

Many congregations that appear to be vital have chosen to not be assimilated into the exclusively parochial context. They tend to exact a higher cost among their members as regards belonging and are characterized by a focused mission that clearly serves the church.

Summary

These eight dynamics operate to varying degrees in religious orders who have undertaken substantial renewal. The dynamics affect the social institution of religious life in American society and the church, congregations and individuals. The resolution of the change process, however, is deeply affected by the individual and communal choices made along the way. The critical

component in the change effort is to imagine a desirable future for a congregation and reinforce that movement by consistency in choices based on values and the traditions of the order.

For the transformation of religious life to shift from a pattern of consistent numerical decline, surely the will of God must also be considered. No formula, regardless of its scientific underpinnings, can create will where little exists in congregations nor diminishment where commitment abounds. The purpose of our efforts has been to provide information that will help religious understand the choices before them and to orient them toward their possible futures.

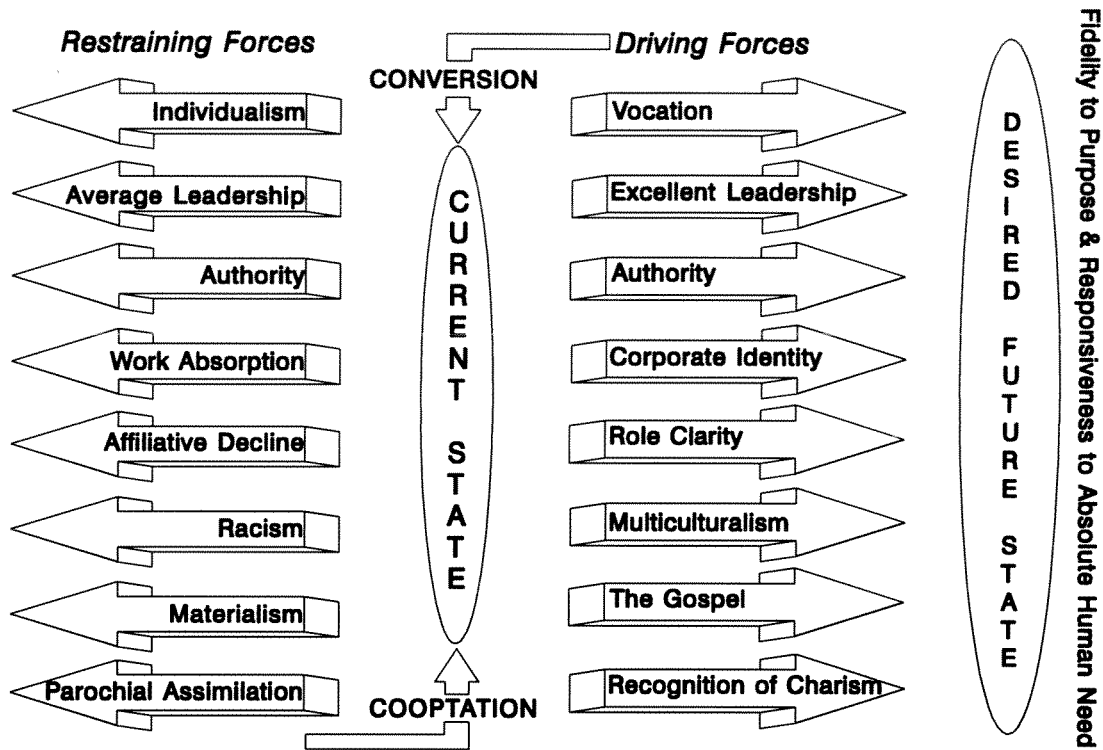
Our own conviction is that there are many reasons to be hopeful about the future of religious life. Some individual religious live their charisms with such vigor and ease that one can only conclude that God sustains them. And, on the other hand, the data offered to us in various formats attests to the conviction to move forward. Personal conversion to those forces that will support a future consistent with the dual dynamic of fidelity to purpose and responsiveness to absolute human need will nonetheless continue to be threatened by significant cultural, personal and collective resistance. Hopefully understanding more thoroughly where we are today will enable religious to chart a course that responds creatively to the Gospel challenges before us as members of the faith community with a very unique gift to offer the church.

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SHAPING THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE



The FORUS study concludes with an equation of sorts, depicted in the above figure, that can be applied to all congregational traditions in varying degrees. The interaction of eight critical factors in the context of personal and collective conversion (indicated by the arrows on the right side of the figure) will move congregations from their current states to their desired futures. Ongoing conversion permeates the action of these "driving forces."

The research also concludes that for other groups the restraints on advancement (indicated by the arrows on the far left side of the figure) are severe and may lead to decline. These "restraining forces" reflect cooptation by many of the external societal forces.