



Inviting young people

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Editor's Note

Dive in

GO AHEAD, dive in.

That's our message to vocation directors and all who support them. Invite the young to come to the life-giving waters of religious community. Dive in to the challenges of inviting the next generation. Vocation directors have told me many times that it's not an easy ministry, but the reward of accompanying people on core, lifetime decisions is immense. It is worth getting in deep and sloshing around in unknown waters.

Our writers in this edition all help point the way toward inviting young people. Father Donald Goergen looks with great sensitivity at overcoming the generation gaps that exist when young people are invited into religious life today (p. 6). Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ shares insights on how she and her community have successfully introduced spiritual reflection to over 1,000 young people through service (p. 12). Sister Virginia Herbers, ASCJ and Gino DiMattia share practical ideas for working with the families of young people (p. 25) and for helping parishioners to further a culture of vocations (p. 30). And in our "Feed Your Spirit" and "Book Notes" sections, our writers share wisdom and intellectual insights that nourish vocation directors and supporters, so they will not merely tread water but dive down deep into this ministry of invitation and welcome.

We producers of HORIZON took a plunge of our own as you've already seen. Thanks to a generous grant from the Hilton Foundation, we invested in a new logo and a new design that we hope you find both enticing and easy to read. We want to continue our tradition of award-winning excellence (read about our latest awards on p. 3). Warm thanks in particular go to Patrice Tuohy of Truequest Communications—who is also executive editor of our sister publication, VISION—for her design expertise and her tremendous support for HORIZON over many years.

Sometimes we stick a toe in first. Sometimes we wade in. Sometimes we just plunge in, come what may. Whatever your style is, we who produce HORIZON are glad you've come to the water. May this edition bless you on your way. ■



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The reward of accompanying people on core, lifetime decisions is immense. It is worth getting in deep and sloshing around in unknown waters.



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Fall workshops & Advent retreat

The National Religious Vocation Conference is offering the following workshops this fall at Techny Towers Retreat Center near Chicago. The Advent Retreat will take place at the Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson, AZ. For details and online registration, see www.nrvcc.net.

ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR NEW VOCATION DIRECTORS

by Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC and Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCM, October 24-28

VOCATION MINISTRY AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION WITH YOUTH AND EMERGING ADULTS: TRENDS, ISSUES, AND BEST PRACTICES

Sister Lynn Levo, CSJ, Dr. Robert J. McCarty and Mr. Ted Miles, October 29-31

BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT I

by Father Raymond P. Carey, Ph.D., November 1-3

REST STOPS FOR THE SOUL: TRANSFORMATION FOR VOCATION MINISTERS (*Redemptorist Renewal Center*)

by Father Joseph Nassal, CPPS, December 10-13

“Keys” process helps communities address membership

During the spring and summer several more religious communities used the “Keys to the Future” process to gather their members, animate them around vocations, and propose community changes that can foster new membership. The “Keys” process is a ready-made, adaptable, day-long process created so individual religious communities can examine and understand the realities both within and beyond themselves that are affecting new membership. It is designed to help communities move to positive, concrete action.

Of the 38 communities that had reported on the process by early summer, a strong majority found the



Mercy Sisters Emily Morgan and Lisa Atkins plan concrete, courageous steps for their local communities to attract new members.

“Keys” process helpful. For many it offered a way to motivate members to take ownership of vocations. It also helped communities identify how they need to change in order to successfully invite a new generation to join them. The “Keys to the Future” process was developed by the National Religious Vocation Conference with a grant from the GHR Foundation. Learn more about obtaining and using the process at www.nrvcc.net or call (773) 363-5454.

HORIZON, VISION receive 7 honors

The Catholic Press Association granted two awards to HORIZON and five to VISION vocation magazine on June 21. The awards included first place for best review and second place for best essay for HORIZON. VISION earned first and third place for best essay (religious order magazine) a second place award for best general publisher website, and honorable mentions for best photo story and best interview.

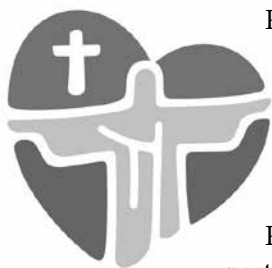
Vocation ministry website user-friendly

As of August 2013, the website of the National Religious Vocation conference is sporting a new look and improved functions. The updated website features:

- Improved design and searchability
- E-store for purchasing vocation resources
- Improved access to HORIZON articles and past editions
- Easy-to-find information about all NRVC projects.

The web improvements were made possible by a grant from the Hilton Foundation.

Religious take part in World Youth Day



Religious communities from around the world were present at World Youth Day July 23-28 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, both as pilgrims and as part of vocation outreach efforts. HORIZON's publisher, National

Religious Vocation Conference, took part in the Vocation Veranda in the English speaking pavilion, along with representatives from VISION Vocation Network and several other Catholic ministries.

Men religious to hold "Moving Forward" meetings

Following the positive feedback on the Women Religious Moving Forward in Hope series, a similar series of gatherings for men religious has been scheduled for December 2013 and January 2014 in St. Meinrad, IN and Houston, TX.

The gatherings will allow 70 men—major superiors and vocation directors—to learn more about church teachings on religious life and about contemporary demographics and cultural trends affecting new membership. Every participant will receive a tool for assessing the vocation culture within his own institute.

The keynote speakers will be: Father Thomas Gaunt, SJ, executive director of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Washington, DC; Father Francis Morrissey, OMI, former dean of canon law at the University of St. Paul, Ottawa; and Brother Sean Sammon, FMS, scholar in

residence, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY, former superior general, psychologist and author on religious life. The facilitator will be Brother Paul Michalenko, ST.

Participants will be chosen from among those who apply. Further details are available at http://www.nrv.net/men_religious_moving_forward_in_hope. The cost of this series is being paid for by an anonymous donor.



HORIZON articles provide the context for vocation ministers to gather, exchange ideas and support one another.

HORIZON reading groups forming

Vocation ministers in England and Ireland have begun HORIZON reading circles. Members are mainly vocation ministers who draw ideas and support from reading and discussing the articles in HORIZON.

"HORIZON arrives through my letter box every quarter, and it is a welcome reminder that I am not on my own in this ministry. It's encouraging to read about what is working well for other vocations directors," said Andrew O'Connell, communications director for the Presentation Brothers of Ireland, who helped begin the circles.



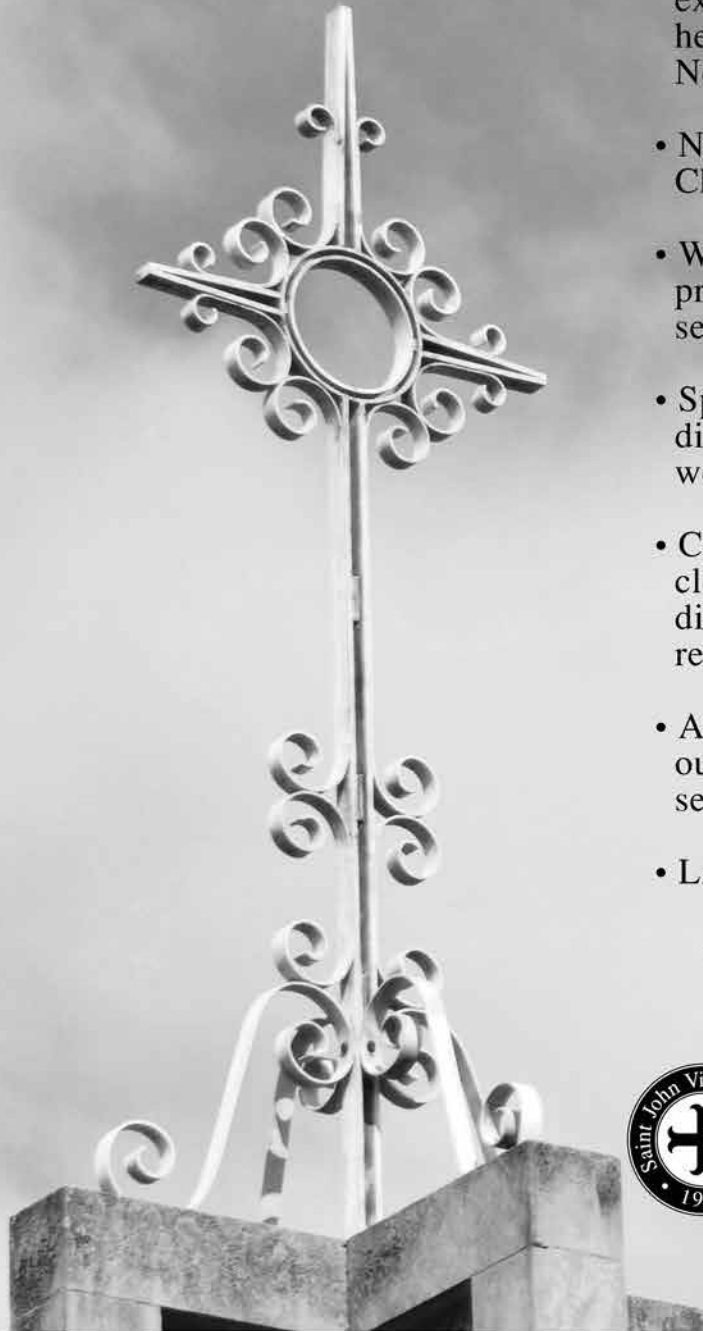
European vocation ministers gather in Rome

The European Vocations Services, a federation of national vocation organizations, held its annual conference in Rome July 1-4. Following the conference, many participants took part in a worldwide pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Peter for seminarians, novices and those in vocation discernment.



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Young people just coming in invite their elders to distinct experiences and new approaches. Likewise, senior generations extend their own invitations.

BY FATHER DONALD GOERGEN, OP



Father Donald Goergen, OP is a Dominican priest, preacher, teacher and author of many articles and books, his most recent being

on the Holy Spirit, as well as lectures with Now You Know Media. He has lectured and given retreats around the world. He currently teaches at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO where he is also prior of the Dominican friars' formation community. He was previously Provincial for the Central Province of Dominican Friars.

What newer and older members offer each other

I MADE MY FIRST PROFESSION in 1971, at the age of 28 after a turbulent and exciting period of transformation in the late 1960s. The 60s breathed life. Catholicism had come of age in America. The Second Vatican Council had opened the doors of the church. The Spirit seemed to be taking us, not where we would rather not go but where many of us wanted to go. The Spirit was alive. We felt His pulse. In the end it became a lot about us. We were pleased that we were able to read the mind of the Spirit so well and that the Spirit was so docile to our concerns. Pope John XXIII was, remains, and always will be a pillar of life and light.

Then the Spirit struck again. The election of a non-Italian pope seemed to confirm our every dream. The Spirit was on our side – or so we thought. Had we miscalculated something? Surely not. Yet vocations dropped. But that too was simply a sign that the future lay with the laity. The Spirit was showing us the direction—the road not yet taken. And yet the new pope did not conform to our aspirations, was not made in our image, must surely not be on the side of the Spirit. And yet he lived on and on. The church was being recast before our eyes. It was not the pre-Vatican II church, nor the immediate post-Vatican II dream. We were left bereft, angry, betrayed. The Spirit was now taking us where we had no intention of going.

Vocations in some circles have tended to be on the rise. We ought not be naively optimistic. There are formidable forces in the secular world that make it difficult for the young to hear the call of the Lord. Yet many, and more, are hearing it, although most often not the kind of men and women whom we would have chosen. Where on earth were they coming from? And do we want them? Are they being sent by God?

Surprised by the new breed

Let me make clear, from my own experience at least, that these newer members are not by any means all of one stripe. It would be a mistake to generalize. Yet many, most, are too conservative! That is the complaint that was being heard. They would not carry on the vision of Vatican II. They now seemed to have two popes on their side—one had been at the Second Vatican Council; the other was a peritus there. (We're still waiting to see what happens with Pope Francis.) But sides were shaping up: the old and the young, the liberal and the conservative. An unfortunate, almost Berlin-like wall was being constructed so that it would be difficult for either to learn from the other, especially since the other had little to offer anyway, from whatever side of the divide one's perspective was.

Then—after having been provincial for nine years, and not long thereafter establishing and living in a more contemplative Dominican house for another nine years—I was invited and elected the prior of our formation community, where the young men lived during their initial formation for approximately six years following their novitiate. These were students for the priesthood, as well as cooperator brother candidates, and there were a growing number of them. I felt ambivalent. I moved. I have now lived for five years with some of the most remarkable men I have ever met. Again, let's not generalize. They are a mix. What have I learned, and how has it changed me?

But first, why on earth did I say yes to the call? True, it is in our souls as religious to say yes when asked, as long as the request does not seem to do violence to ourselves. We are ultimately, in the end, docile, vowed to obedience, which makes few demands on us, and so, yes. But I was also enticed, ambivalent but enticed, because I had had an opportunity a couple years previous to commute and teach a class to some of these new vocations—and those students were a delight. I needed to let myself get to know them, and as the semester progressed I discovered that I liked them! They were a delight, intel-

ligent, edifying, in love with the church, not angry with it, desirous to know the tradition, not to abolish it. One of them, with whom I later became a friend, wrote a most remarkable, soul-revealing, spiritually deep paper. The paper had given me an insight into his interior life, and deep indeed it was. Obviously these young men did not fit the stereotypes within which I and others had categorized them, although to some degree they did. It's just that I was to learn that not everything about their world-view was bad. These men wanted to live the Gospel as well as proclaim it. They actually believed what the church taught and were not embarrassed by it. But how was I to integrate this new knowledge? How was I to build bridges once I began to live among them?

During my first year of our life with this new breed of students, as well as what now was the old breed of primarily "progressive" senior members, an older, visiting friar asked me how I found the students. What were they like? Without much thought, I spontaneously said, without in any way being derogatory, "They come from another planet." Later that image, along with several others, helped me to shed light on the beauty of having been called to live in two worlds simultaneously and, not without some angst, to enjoy the richness of the opportunity.

I was later able to develop the metaphor more fully. Perhaps it still needs to be developed more astutely. But many of my generation of Catholics come from Neptune. Many of the new vocations are coming from Saturn. If women are from Venus and men are from Mars, we are dealing with two other planetary systems. Neptune has a fluid, oceanic, mystical, compassionate, less institutionally friendly and unpredictable quality while Saturnians place greater value on being grounded, with a sense of order, structure and commitment, another kind of depth that has its boundaries, accepts constraints and accentuates identity and traditions. To a Neptunian, the Saturnian can appear rigid when he or she is just being solid and holding his or her ground; while to the Saturnian, the Neptunian can appear to be all over the place with little concern for objective truth and values. So what does one do when one finds oneself on another planet?

Getting to know younger members

Many have often wondered whether there was intelligent life on another planet. I have now discovered there is. We wondered whether that life would be friendly or hostile. I have now discovered that it is not only friendly but also delightful. That doesn't make interplanetary communi-

cation easy, however. Becoming bilingual is never easy. We talk a lot about the importance of being multi-cultural. Becoming interplanetary is an even greater challenge, but equally if not even more enriching. How does one begin to communicate with these unconventional aliens? First by loving them, respecting them, accepting them, truly getting to know them. Are they not human too?

If I only look at how different they are (and this works both ways), how strange, how differently they think and value things, if I become defensive, ill at ease, suspicious, it is difficult to cross over the bridge and see what they have to offer and to give. But just as another language opens doors, and another culture can enrich our own without forcing us to abandon our own or value it less, and just as I always still have my primary language and culture in which I am most at home, so likewise with the planet from which I come. By being open to the other, and hospitable, there is much to gain. Going to war is unnecessary.

Above I asked the question: Are they not human too? It is a symbolic question for Dominicans. The first European friars from the Order of Preachers in Spain arrived in this 'new' world in 1510. They preached a sermon, forged by the community, delivered by Antonio de Montesinos, in defense of the indigenous in Hispaniola who were being enslaved by their forced work on the *encomiendas*, and they asked this same question. Are they not human too? It is a perennial question about the other. Are they not human too? What does their life mean? With what gifts has the Spirit endowed them? What might I learn from a world radically different from my own?

Same values, different manifestation

I have found that the newer vocations value the same things that I value but manifest those values differently. They genuinely want to live the Gospel authentically and fully. They are committed to social justice as a dimension of the Gospel, although not perhaps in some of the more virulent ways in which we have protested injustice, although that too depends on the cause. They desire to live the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in an exemplary way, and I think in a more exemplary way than my own generation. Sexuality is still a struggle, but the desire for intimacy and friendship is still there, and they place a high value on integrity of life, having seen how

abandoning that integrity in the life of the church has led to deep pain and scandal. They accept the teaching of the church and can become defensive and uncritical when that teaching seems to be taken lightly or seems too quickly questioned.

The papacy of Pope John Paul II has been the more formative religious experience in their lives, in contrast to the papacy of Pope John XXIII. They are unwilling to throw out the baby with the bath water, having seen that done too easily, but can too quickly cling to old wineskins that a previous generation has found wanting. Yet they have seen the abuses, or extremes, to which my

generation has gone without always being able to detect the heart of the matter that led us there. Shared conversation across planetary or generational lines would be of mutual benefit, but it is not easy to manage.

I once heard a lecture given by Karl Rahner when he was traveling in the United States after the Council. In response to a question, he replied, "Maybe some people in the church are given the charism to be an accelerator and others the charism to be a brake." A good and wise Dominican

friar often liked to say, "It's hard to see the whole picture when you're inside the frame."

Any generation can think that they have all the answers when each has only some of the insights. It's simply St. Paul's take on the church: "For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Corinthians 12:14). We can all affirm that appreciation of diversity when it comes to ethnic or racial or cultural or gender diversity or varied gifts given or ministries to be undertaken. The eye cannot say to the ear: What good are you? You can't see anything. But when it comes to a diversity of world-views, of ways of perceiving things, of contrasting ecclesiologies, that's another story. Does that diversity too come from God? Could the Spirit actually be at work among those who think so differently than I do? Do I assume to see the whole picture and determine who fits? Can the Spirit really be guiding both the accelerator and the brake?

Can the older generation be open?

We almost all tend to become "conservative" as we age, a word that lacks much meaning, often suggesting a mind closed to change. The generation before me in religious life we considered conservative. They could not perceive

I have found that the newer vocations value the same things that I value but manifest those values differently. They genuinely want to live the Gospel authentically and fully.



During a workshop of the Capuchin Franciscans, Province of St. Joseph, Friar Richard Hart (left) listens to postulant Truong Tien Dinh.

the good in the new wineskins from which we came, and so much of which they stood for we overthrew. But now my generation has become that generation, not wanting to see the changes we made change. We have become the old guard and the new generation actually the progressives who see a new age dawning – which too will change as someday they cope with the world they create partially collapsing. I think of St. Augustine, lying on his death bed in Hippo, as the Vandals marched through and destroyed the city, not knowing whether his library, too, and all he had done would be condemned to oblivion. An older generation always asks the question: What of my life's efforts may have some permanence to it?

I have indicated that we have much to learn from one another. The newer generation in this case may be the new wineskins, and what role can we old wineskins now play? Yet age has always been associated with wisdom – the wisdom of experience, learning not taught so readily in books but by example and in conversation. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi likes to talk not about age-ing but sage-ing. The elder in most societies has been a position to be envied, sought after, the wise person. It gives new meaning to the word “elder-ly,” or like an elder. I think of Robert Browning's poem, “Rabbi ben Ezra,” in which he writes:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith “A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor
be afraid!”

When one contemplates the diminishments of old age, or just what it means to be beyond the prime of life, it may be difficult to affirm what Browning suggests. Yet there is something about this last season of life that contains the fruit of wisdom.

The fig tree in Scripture is an ambivalent image. It gets cursed. It doesn't bear fruit. Yet in the Gospel of Luke (13:6-9) it is given another chance. At one time it may well have borne fruit but has not done so now for at least three years. Yet the vinedresser does not give up hope: “Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure.” The vinedresser holds out the hope that there is fruit even in old age. And likewise the psalmist:

The righteous flourish like the palm tree,
And grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the Lord,
They flourish in the courts of God.
They still bring forth fruit in old age,
They are ever full of sap and green....
(Psalm 92: 12-14)

What was barren can still give birth. There is an energy and enthusiasm in the young. One needs to know when to turn over the reins to them. But there is a sobriety and wisdom as well that only experience of life can provide. "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matthew 13:51-52). So new members need to find their ways to glean from those who have lived the life and run the race, what it is that we have to offer. The

If we present ourselves as "knowing it all," whether we are young or old, energetic or experienced, Neptunian or Saturnian, few bridges will be built that welcome our crossing them. So it is not so much what we have to offer but how we offer it.

challenge is not so much in whether someone from another world-view has something to offer, but how to offer it, how to seek and find it. If we present ourselves as "knowing it all," whether we are young or old, energetic or experienced, Neptunian or Saturnian, few bridges will be built that welcome

our crossing them. So it is not so much what we have to offer but how we offer it. Do we respect the other? Can we listen attentively? People can detect that they are being dismissed without being told in so many words.

What we can teach each other

So what have I learned from my young brothers in religious life? The Holy Spirit is still alive in the church. We are called to lives of integrity and authenticity. Deep commitment bears fruit. We are a people of everlasting hope. Mission must be rooted in contemplative living. The Gospel is more relevant than ever to our day and age. Devotion enhances our faith, does not distract from it, and nourishes the heart that feeds the mind. John Paul II said many incredibly good things. Identity is good. Symbols give witness. There is a real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Religious habits communicate identity, accompany poverty, and help to sustain our lives of chastity. Utopia is fanciful, inevitably leads to disappointment or resentment, and is not to be identified with the reign of God. Nor is God on only one side. Religion cannot be identified with politics. Place your trust in God. God works miracles.

And what wisdom do I have to offer? Life is not as

simple as it seems. It rarely works out as we envision it. We are human too. Complexity is a grace. We are made holy by what we suffer. Cynicism is not easy to overcome, but when we do, we encounter incredible joy. We must move at the pace by which God guides us. Human intimacy is a value, sometimes a life-saver, friendship a pillar in religious life. Extremes take us nowhere. Compassion is sometimes the only answer we have. Remaining faithful isn't as easy as it sounds. We can overcome. We learn wisdom from fellow pilgrims on life's journey. The older I get, the fewer things there are about which I am certain. Certainty and precision can be overrated. It is easier to speak authoritatively than it is to know what one is talking about. The greatest thing is love. The life to which you have been called will be more painful than you realize and more rewarding than you can imagine. That is true of Christian marriage as well. Don't fear mistakes, take risks, but have caution. Place your trust in God. God is always here.

And there is much more that each of us has to offer. Thomas Merton once spoke to his young novices about conversion. He said that we are called to at least two conversions in life, perhaps three. We speak of continuing conversion of course, continuing formation. But conversion is often not continuous and usually strikes with a force that is not anguish-free. Our first is post-baptismal, somewhere as young adults, what perhaps led us into religious life. It may have indeed been a conversion to the faith if we were not raised in it. But somewhere along the line, in religious life, we need another conversion, mid-way, to prevent us from losing a sense of vision and call, to re-ignite the dream, or re-gain a more mature innocence that we have lost as we let go of wounds inflicted along life's path. But there is a third conversion as well, as one approaches death, about which I have written elsewhere in my own struggle with breast cancer. Life is not a continuing conversion, but continuing conversions. I have often prayed for the grace of conversion, but of course wanted it to come in the way that I wanted it.

What have I learned from the young? To be a convert once again. Life is not over; it just keeps changing. Thank God.

The final question I would ask of the younger generation is: Are you really open to formation? And of the older generation: Are you really open to another conversion? And of vocation directors: Are you willing to be bridge builders, patiently perceiving beauty everywhere?

I hear the young saying what I myself once said as they follow in our footsteps: "Here I am, Lord, take me" (1 Samuel 3, Psalm 40). ■

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NRVC-2013

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, NY have introduced theological reflection to over 1,000 young adults who have taken part in their service program. Here's how they do it.



Volunteers reflect upon images of Jesus during a wordless prayer.

BY SISTER DONNA DEL SANTO, SSJ



Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ has been a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester since 1992 and has served as her congregation's

director of vocations since 2003. In 1996 she began and continues to coordinate the Sisters of St. Joseph Volunteer Corps. Since the beginning the program has had more than 1,000 youth join the sisters from a weekend to a year. Contact Sister Donna at ddelsanto@ssjrochester.org.

Theological reflection: a success story

As the Year of Faith winds down, many efforts to deepen the faith of the already-baptized have only just begun. Because vocation discernment hinges entirely on one's relationship with God, vocation ministers frequently find themselves nurturing spiritual growth in young people. Here is how one community has effectively conducted theological reflection with young adults involved with service.

I AM THE PRODUCT OF YEARS of volunteering. I was a VISTA volunteer, and later I founded a clinic for the uninsured that relied on more than 100 volunteer professionals. In 1990 I moved into St. Joseph's House, the Catholic Worker community in Rochester, NY, and from there I entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1992. So it was no surprise when I and Sister Marilyn Pray, SSJ, the director of St.

Joseph's House, had the idea of creating a program in which young people could serve in one of our ministries while living with us and other sisters, all the while knowing that the real work of this program would be to filter their experience through the lens of theological reflection.

In 1996 the Sisters of St. Joseph Volunteer Corps came into being, and since then more than 1,000 teens, college students and post-college young adults spend time with us living in community and serving in our ministries. Our home is in central city Rochester, NY and is a convent built in 1900. It has 19 bedrooms, a large kitchen, dining room and community room, as well as a beautiful chapel where we pray together every morning and reflect together in the evening.

Drawing upon a SSJ tradition of reflection

We realized from the start that service is the carrot to draw young adults to our program, whereas the treasure is found in the reflective process. Yet ... we already knew this would be the heart of our program, given our history as Sisters of St. Joseph. Around 1646, in the town of LePuy, France, a little band of women under the guidance of their spiritual director, Jean Pierre Medaille SJ, began to live a new form of religious life. They were not called to the cloister; instead, they wanted to respond to the needs of their neighbors suffering from the critical social, economic and religious turmoil of the time. They did this by offering women spiritual and corporal works of mercy, spiritual formation, and life direction guidance.

In the early days of our congregation, our first sisters had a method of praying and reflecting that today we call the State of the Heart. These first sisters would return home at the end of a day of service, and while making LePuy lace to support themselves and their ministries, would tell the stories of the day—where they had experienced the presence of God; how they were led by God; how they responded; how they were challenged. They were familiar with Ignatian and Salesian spirituality, and they knew the importance of reflecting on their life with God and with each other. This practice gave them an opportunity to search for the action of grace among themselves, to notice whether or not they were responding to that grace, in order that they might be able to follow God's desires for them.

This historical description and process alone will

not cut it for today's youth; yet it is a grounding and a starting place forged and tested over centuries of praxis.

So how could Sister Marilyn and I translate this understanding into the vernacular and develop a process that speaks to the Y generation and beyond?

One challenge is that many young Catholics today have not been well catechized. If they have not gone to Catholic schools, their last formal instruction in faith may have been at confirmation.

Another challenge for prayer and reflection is the need to help youth unplug from technology to allow themselves to focus and listen differently and be available to hear the voice of God in their lives.

Unplug, observe, bless

As we begin our time with a group of volunteers—whether a weekend, a week or a year—we ask everyone, including adult chaperones, to unplug themselves from their phones, iPads, you name it.... Next we begin with an exercise we call “Praying the City.” This entails driving in a mini-bus to each ministry site where volunteers will serve. The group is invited to enter into silence and to do what social workers or public health nurses might call a “windshield survey.” We ask them to notice people and places. Is there a traditional church building or a storefront church? Are there parks and green spaces or broken swings and boarded up houses? Are there libraries or Rent-A-Centers? What social and economic differences do they notice as we drive from neighborhood to neighborhood—all of which tells a story about the quality of life for the people the volunteers will be serving.

Our first stop is at the highest point in the city, Cobbs Hill. Here we have a clear view of the skyline of downtown Rochester with its tall buildings housing Xerox, Kodak and Bausch & Lomb. It's in places like these where decisions are made that affect people worldwide, often with little consideration for the people we will be serving; those who live in the cracks of our society who seemingly have no influence on global decisions. Then we tell the volunteers that they, because of their social and economic position as college students or college graduates, are in the top 5 percent of wealth in the world; their education alone will keep them from the abject poverty that affects the other 95 percent of the global community. They will have influence and the ability to make decisions in their future that could be for the good of those who may not have a “place at the table.”

Service is the carrot to draw young adults to our program, whereas the treasure is found in the reflective process.



Volunteers take part in what we call "Praying the City."

One of the students will read Matthew 5:14-16: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden..." We help them see and understand that this Gospel is about them. We invite them to consider how they might be light to those they encounter, including each other. We encourage them to consider their gifts and to offer them freely and generously. Then, together, we raise our hands, and we bless our city, the City of God. From there we drive to each of the ministry sites. At each site we listen to a special reading chosen to reflect that particular ministry, and then we all raise our hands in blessing the persons who will be ministering there. We repeat this at each site.

This mini-retreat process allows the volunteer to envision each ministry and to be able to better pray for each other throughout their days of service. Also the experience of story-telling integrated with Scripture and a blessing makes the readings come alive and have relevance. This process will take a whole afternoon!

Evening reflections

On our first evening together, after dinner, we gather in our chapel to begin our reflection. We always start with a song with a theme of "call" like: *The Summons, We are Called* or *Pescadores de Hombres*. We introduce Scripture in a way that helps young adults enter into the story as active participants rather than as passive listeners, much like the Ignatian process does. For instance we might have a reading such as John 1:35-38 to evoke from the volunteer: How were you called? What prompted you to say yes to coming? What are you looking for?

Sometimes we use the story of the call of Simon Peter from Luke 5:1-11: "Jesus tells Simon, 'Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.'" We ask them: Why did you say yes to coming? What do you think Jesus wants of you at this time in your life? How is Jesus asking you to go deeper during this time?

If the liturgical season happens to be near, say, Epiphany, we might use an opening song like, "What Child is This?" and the reading might be Matthew 2:9-11. Our questions might be: What are you seeking, and what gifts do you bring or seek to discover this week?

All of this reflection is about call. It's about connecting to the youth, to their experience and to what matters to them. At the same time, it's showing how Scripture speaks to us, right in this moment. At the end of our reflection time, we give each person a small journal we have created with images and questions designed to spur deeper reflection during their time with us and beyond.

This journal might have a quote such as: "Reflect that in reality you have a greater need to serve the poor than they have of your service," by St. Angela Merici. That quote is followed with the question: How did I serve someone today? And how was I served today?

Here are some other examples of quotes or readings with reflection questions.

When the star in the sky is gone,
When the Kings and Princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner
To teach the nations
To bring Christ to all

To make music in the heart. —Howard Thurman

In what ways did you bring Christ to others this week?

“Almost anything you do will seem insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”—Gandhi

What insignificant thing did you do that made a difference? How have you been fearless in loving?

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”—Margaret Mead

How did I make a change today? And how was I changed?

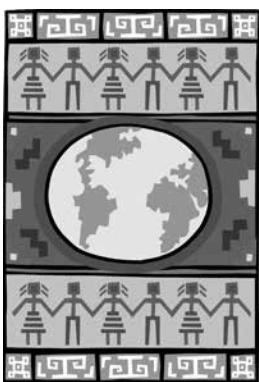
Nothing is more practical than finding God,
that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your
weekends,
what you read, who you know,
what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy
and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

—Father Pedro Arrupe, SJ

What has seized your imagination this week? In what ways have you found God this week? What resolution might you make for your return home?

As we create each journal, we try to be attentive to a variety of writers from Scripture and other religious traditions; poets, theologians and anthropologists. We include a variety of images that evoke thoughts of diversity and inclusivity.

Throughout our time together with the short term volunteers we have a theme for each day. For our first day of service we frequently use Sister Joyce Rupp’s poem, “Take Nothing for the Journey.” She bases the poem on Luke 9:1-6. At the end of the day, after dinner, we return to the chapel to reflect on the experiences of the day. We go back to the morning reading, and instead of saying, “He called the twelve together and gave power,” we say, “He called... (we name each person here) and gave them power...” This makes



A sample (above) of images that evoke thoughts of diversity and inclusivity.

it real and personal. We give each person a little piece of paper with these reflection questions: What did you discover that you brought to your day? What gift did you receive from one of the guests, a child, from another volunteer, from each other? How was God present in your experience? What surprised or challenged you today?

Everyone responds, including the sisters, because it’s not just about how these volunteers experienced God. It’s about how each of us did, so we model what we attempt to do every day in our lives.

Visiting the motherhouse, wordless prayer

When we have volunteers with us for a week, we make a trip to our motherhouse for a tour and to dine with our senior sisters. This experience helps our volunteers to realize how rich and life giving a life of service, community, prayer and reflection is by the conversations they have with sisters at dinner.

Following dinner we show our vocation DVD with questions like: What surprised you from this film? What questions did it raise in you about your own life choices? What else would you like to know about religious life? This is generally a lively and informative experience, both for the volunteers and the sisters!

We then move to our chapel for an experience we call: “Praying with the Face of Jesus.” We have 12 images of Jesus, from a laughing Jesus, to Jesus praying in the garden, to Jesus with the children—each one distinct. We distribute these images throughout the motherhouse chapel with two or three chairs in front of each image. We give each participant a sheet with the following information in order to guide them in this prayer experience.

The handout has the following guiding words:

Many of us were taught to close our eyes when we pray. Praying with icons, pictures, statues, etc. is an ancient practice that involves keeping our eyes wide open, taking into our heart what the image visually communicates. We focus not on what is seen in the icon or picture, but rather on what is seen through it—the love of God expressed through God’s creatures.

This is a prayer without words, with a focus on being in God’s presence rather than performing in God’s presence. It is a right-brain experience of touching and feeling what is holy, a divine mystery. Icons (pictures) are not simply art; they are a form of contemplative prayer and

are therefore one way to let God speak to us. They are doorways into stillness, into closeness with God. If we sit with them long enough, we too can enter into the stillness; and if we listen closely enough with our hearts, we just may discern the voice of God.

We encourage volunteers to cultivate, as they pray, an inner attitude of listening. We tell them that God is not an idea, and praying is not an exercise to improve our idea of God. Prayer is the cultivation of the awareness of God's actual presence. We may speak words to God or just look attentively at the icon/picture and let God speak to us.

We invite the youth to sit before three or fewer images, and to spend five to seven minutes with each and to

write down what feelings and thoughts they have while praying or gazing at the picture.

After sitting with three (or fewer) pictures, we ask them to consider: Which image struck you most? What do you think God/Jesus/Holy Spirit may be saying to you in this experience? How does what you did in service yesterday and today connect with this picture? What gifts of yours connect with this picture?

We then gather the pictures, set them in a semi-circle in the front of the chapel and sit facing them. We ask the group to share a part or all of the answers to any of the above questions. This is always a very rich sharing. After everyone has responded, we have a period of intentions in which each person prays: I am grateful for the gift of ... and I ask Jesus for the gift of ...

At the end we pray the "Our Father" and then listen

How theological reflection affected them

KEVIN, 26,
ONE-WEEK COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Theological reflection is immensely important. I have a tendency to go through the day without much reflection at all. You can miss a great deal of what is happening in life all around you, and perhaps even miss the deepest truths about yourself. Theological reflection not only allows you this vital look, it helps you reflect on it from a spiritual perspective.

I've incorporated a great deal of theological reflection into the retreat and prayer I get to lead at work. I myself still try to practice theological reflection as often as I'm able—one to three times a week.

GRETCHEN, 21
ONE-WEEK COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Since I knew that we were going to be asked to reflect on our volunteer days in a theological sense, I became more aware of how God was acting through others and me. Es-

entially, I "tuned in" while serving in order to have something substantial to reflect on during prayer time with the group. Having that in the back of my mind encouraged me to see, hear, love, and serve with the eyes, ears, heart, and hands of Christ. In a sense, participating in theological reflection made me accountable to act and think in a Christian way. I always feel stronger in my faith when I have the opportunity to share it with others.

PETER 24
YEAR-LONG VOLUNTEER

Being given a structured routine for daily prayer has been instrumental to expanding and deepening my spirituality. I think a lot of young people struggle with getting sucked into the busyness of their lives. For me personally, I know that I wouldn't be diligent about making time for theological reflection if I didn't live among serious religious folks who prioritized daily morning reflections. So our community supports my spiritual

journey by creating space in my life for practices I would struggle to maintain on my own.

Thinking about the reflection itself, it has been instrumental in teaching me new ways to practice spirituality. Walking/breathing meditation, prayers for special occasions, and cultivating intentions—these are skills I am developing.

DARBI, 21
ONE-WEEK COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Theological reflection was indeed helpful for me and really kicked off my faith formation. First off, I really enjoyed morning prayer to start our days centered on God. It really helped me to be mindful of him as I continued on with the rest of my day. It showed me the importance of giving my first thoughts, words spoken, and heart to God before engaging with a world full of brokenness and obstacles.

One way theological reflection was very fruitful for me was when

to John Michael Talbot's song: "Teresa's Prayer: Christ has no hands on earth but yours."

Making a social justice commitment

At the end of our time together we make a commitment of time to social justice, with special emphasis on Catholic Social Teachings. We do this near the end of their time with us because the volunteers would have had an experience of service and reflection to use as a starting point for this presentation and practice.

We often begin with a song called "Break My Heart," by Jennifer Martin. Part of it goes, "Please, break my heart, Oh God, with what breaks your heart, Oh God. Please, break my heart." And then we may use the story of the Good Samaritan or a similar piece of Scripture

to begin our conversation. We find it helpful to give the long view in understanding why social justice is so important and how it is core to our Catholic faith. We offer a brief overview, beginning with the Book of Leviticus and work our way forward, using stories from the Old Testament, especially about the prophets. We also use teachings of Jesus, the teachings of the early church fathers and mothers, and move right on into the social encyclicals of the church. This portion includes information about the popes who wrote the encyclicals, the social context in which they were written, and why they continue to be important in our practice of faith today.

At the end of our time with a group of volunteers we have a closing ritual which will include a song like: "Love Changes Everything" by Andrew Lloyd Webber, followed by a reading by Marianne Williamson from *A Return to Love*.

my peers shared aloud their own reflections. It was amazing how other people's experience of God could help me gain new perspectives and insights into my own experience.

Having a group of young adults come together and talk about faith is not exactly a common occurrence in today's society, and it is something that I am very thankful for because it has helped me to learn how to continue having those conversations. It would not have been possible without the sisters leading and facilitating the discussion.

STEPHANIE, 21

WEEKEND COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

I have found theological reflection helpful, even indispensable in my own experience of faith. I engage in community service because I feel that this is the best way for me to make manifest my faith. Simply going to church leaves me wanting a less passive experience. I can derive inspiration from church, but it is not suffi-

cient nourishment for my faith. I seek something more active. I find that "something more" in both community service and in theological reflection.

MARY, 20

ONE-WEEK COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Theological reflection has been helpful for me, not only the sharing aspect, but listening to other people's reflections. It would cause me to think more about the details and really pay attention every time I went out to do service. Thinking back to that week, I think the activity I was able to get the most out of was the night in the chapel at the motherhouse where we went around and looked at all the pictures of Jesus. Another night that sticks out for me was when we had images of the Catholic social teachings around the room and had to pick out one and say why it touched us. I found theological reflection to be very helpful and highly recommend it for others. I still practice it, but not as much as I would like.

ERIN, 22

ONE-WEEK COLLEGE VOLUNTEER

Theological reflection is helping me discern the next direction for my life. There are so many good choices out there for people my age. A big choice that a lot of us struggle with is finding the right career. And a lot of the time, it feels like we need to find that single right career this very instant. But there are so many steps to it, and we change so much on the journey, that the end goal changes a lot too.

Theological reflection in this area helps me take a step back (or a leap), breathe, and know that I don't have to have all the answers right this instant (or ever), that I'm not alone in this, and that God will help guide me if I take the time to listen. Also theological reflection helps me to either affirm that I'm on the right track or identify something that needs to change. It helps me integrate the life I'm forming for myself with my values and beliefs.



Volunteers live in the convent with four sisters during their service experience, allowing the sisters to model prayer and reflection.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

We use a variety of exercises to help volunteers understand their time of service and community through the lens of the Catholic social teachings. These exercises are too extensive to include in this article; however I would direct those who are interested in material on Catholic social teaching to the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org. Another good source is Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, whose website is www.cctwincities.org.

We invite the group to share experiences from their volunteering during which they expressed God's

presence and light, or they experienced another's light. Where did they experience darkness? What did they learn from the experiences?

We may have started the morning remembering our baptism and how it calls us forth to serve others. If we began with a baptism theme, we would then invite volunteers to take a white cloth, representing the white garment of their baptism, and create a symbol that would express how they had lived out their baptismal commitment and call while with us. We send the group to the dining room where art supplies have been laid out for their use. Then they return and share the creation and meaning of their white garment.

Following this experience the young adults are invited to make a resolution to take back home. We encourage it to be something concrete and do-able, that will help express something they learned in their time with us and wish to continue. We tell them, "If one of us calls you in a month, you should be able to say, 'I did this resolution four times, and here's how.'" This is done as a group so people can be held accountable.

Following the resolution we anoint each person with oil and a blessing and have a closing prayer to bless the entire group to send them out on mission. We end by singing a song, which frequently is "We Are Marching," which we sing as we march through the house with guitar accompaniment. Each person has a rhythm instrument to play as we sing and march, ending in the kitchen where we make ice cream sundaes. We realize that a life of faith is a life of prayer and action, which includes hard work and good fun!

Making a social justice commitment

All of our efforts in this ministry are aimed at fostering a vocation culture in which it is easy to ask, "What does God want from me, and what does the church and world need from me?" Sometimes we simply say to young adults, "We are incarnational people, and if we really believe that we bring the presence of Christ into the world, then how did you make God look good today?"

It is our dream that through this ministry our lives will give witness to the Gospel, and we will provide experiences to a new generation to help them be faithful followers of Jesus. We pray that they will respond courageously to God's invitation in their lives and come to see and believe that their presence, service and prayer are impacting our church and world with a vibrant energy and great hope, making God look good every day! ■

"ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN" BY PETER WENZEL



Our sexual dimension is knit together with every other part of ourselves. Healthiness in body, heart and mind helps us to live our callings well.

What every vocation minister should know about healthy sexuality

VOCATION MINISTERS are often the front line personnel who first get to know prospective candidates and hear their stories of being called to religious life. To better understand and evaluate the psycho-sexual dimension of candidates, vocation ministers will need a general understanding of healthy psycho-sexual development at various life stages and what factors lead to a mature and integrated celibate life. Furthermore, vocation ministers need a basic comfort with and awareness of their own personal psycho-sexual journey, as that may be their best asset in compassionately attending to relevant aspects of a candidate's journey.

Vocation ministers' training and experience should involve core elements of human sexuality. These include the formation of healthy intimacy and friendship, sexual orientation, patterns of strengths and weaknesses in candidates' relationship histories, and healthy and unhealthy patterns

BY KEVIN MCCLONE



Kevin McClone is a licensed clinical psychologist, certified chaplain and certified alcohol and drug counselor who has worked for over 20 years in

pastoral counseling and healthcare. Kevin currently is director of the Institute for Sexuality Studies (ISS), located on the campus of Catholic Theological Union where he teaches graduate-level pastoral care courses and has provided education, training and consultation on various dimensions of human sexuality to clergy, religious and lay men and women from around the world. He offers one-month, intensive programs at ISS every year in April, June and October.

of sexual expression. This article will explore these and other key areas vocation ministers should know about in order to foster greater psycho-sexual health and integration.

A healthy and vibrant celibate lifestyle demands an integrated sexuality that involves the whole person and ultimately leads to more generative acts of loving service. To be sexual is fundamentally to be relational and to grow in emotional maturity through every stage of life. Healthy and holy sexuality must be rooted in our Christian understanding of the human person. As persons created in the image of God, we have dignity and worth and are called to share fully in a relational covenant of love. Candidates to religious life and priesthood are called to live with their sacred gift of sexuality in a way that honors self, others and God. This will involve, first of all, a growing appreciation for both the positive and destructive aspects of their sexual nature. Indeed, sexuality is often both the most graced and the most wounded area of our lives. For some candidates, the wound may be much more pronounced. For others the grace becomes more evident. Yet both aspects are part of the mosaic of their psycho-sexual narrative.

Who am I alone? Who am I with others?

Vocation directors do well to recognize that separateness and autonomy are key to healthy adult intimacy and emotional maturity. I can't be together with you unless I have some sense of autonomy and separateness that I often discover in moments of real solitude. Navigating solitude draws us deeper into our true self, unveiling the masks and shadow selves that only serve to block spontaneity, freedom, and authentic loving. So to love another, or to draw close to another in bonds of intimate friendship, demands that candidates to religious life grow toward a healthy awareness and acceptance of their true selves. In other words, the degree to which candidates grow to love the person they are becoming and can share that authentic self with another, determines psycho-sexual maturation. Indeed, candidates who are able to develop such a dynamic of growing self-intimacy are better equipped to meet the psycho-sexual challenges of celibate sexual integration.

Healthy sexuality for candidates—for anyone, really—involves the whole person. For vocation ministers, healthy sexuality must go beyond popular secularized notions of sexuality that too narrowly focus on genital sexuality. Any healthy sexuality from a Christian anthropological perspective must address the whole person:

body, heart, mind and spirit within the context of all a person's relationships. Many have begun to realize that God intends increasing sexual wholeness to be part of our redemption. As Christians, sexuality is a fundamental expression of who we are. It touches our core as individuals. When our sexual energy becomes properly channeled and directed, it can lead to generative acts of love and intimacy that build up the human community. Yet, when this same sexual energy gets entangled with our needs to cope with stress, to avoid pain, to manage our moods, to manage our relationships, or protect a fragile ego, we end up using sexual energy more instinctively and at times more compulsively or addictively. For example, the phenomenon of “hooking up” (sex without strings)—practiced by some teens and college students—can become a way to manage one's sexuality while avoiding close relationships and commitment. Here sex becomes characterized as “casual and random” and is stripped of its spiritual center.

Assessing psycho-sexual health

Let us briefly explore each of these holistic dimensions—body, heart and mind—as a guide for vocation personnel in assessing a candidate's sexuality. This physical dimension of sexuality is rooted in the incarnational message of embodiment, or the word made flesh. This means the body with its feelings, thoughts, urges and longings is a place of divine revelation rather than something to be feared or an object of shame. So to be growing in this area will involve a deepening appreciation, respect and comfort for my bodily demands. The Whiteheads capture this message well when they state,

“What Christians hope for today is a return to the best beliefs in the Incarnation: in the flesh we meet God; in our bodies the power of God stirs; our sexuality is an ordinary medium through which God's love moves to touch, to create, to heal” (*Wisdom of the Body*, p. 9).

Many candidates to religious life and priesthood may have difficulty recognizing and caring for their bodily needs. Whether it be getting enough rest, eating healthily, exercising, or living a balanced lifestyle, they fail to become more intimate with their embodied selves, which leaves them vulnerable psycho-sexually. Vocation ministers exploring a candidate's psycho-sexual journey will want to attend to how candidates have managed stressful life events.

Unfortunately, for many people wounded in relationships, including sexual abuse, the result is often sexual shame or discomfort with their physical body. In my



"AN AFRESKO TOILETTE" BY LUKE FILDERS

Building the skills for friendship is of critical importance for vowed celibates so that they can enjoy the support and love of their friends.

own experience candidates who have been abused, physically, emotionally or sexually, often suffer from shame-based histories that may block deeper psycho-sexual identity and integration. Consequently when abuse is part of one's history, it is crucial to inquire further about therapeutic or conversion experiences that were part of a beginning healing process.

What about this affective dimension of the heart? Sexual health as it relates to the heart implies embracing the whole range of feelings and emotions that we have as embodied persons. The affective dimension of our sexuality is perhaps the most crucial, yet least attended to area. Emotional and affective maturity for candidates is genuinely hard work that begins with identifying, understanding and expressing a wide array of emotions that foster healthy relationships. Growth in this area implies cultivating openness to others in mutual respect and a growing willingness to develop skills of self-disclosure, listening, and empathy. Ultimately, my growth in affective maturity will flow out of a genuine awareness and appreciation of my strengths and limitations and the capacity to open myself up more deeply to others.

All our emotions are meant to move us in some direction, as signified by the root word *emote*, meaning "to

move." Healthy sexuality, then, involves becoming more aware of the movement of our desires, passions and longings as energy to attend to and sources of revelation and discernment. How can I properly direct this energy if I don't allow myself to experience it? To grow in love is to experience attraction, desire, love and joy but also anger, disappointment, conflict, loss, hurt and letting go, which flow from any disciplined committed love or vocation.

Handling loss, being a friend

Indeed growth in relationships not only involves attachment but separation, not only presence but absence. All human beings experience loneliness sometimes despite perhaps having close friendships and intimate bonds. So, celibate growth at each stage of the psycho-sexual journey implies some capacity to face loneliness and to grieve in order to move on to deeper levels of relating. Indeed, truly committed and generative celibacy demands grieving. The vocation minister can explore how candidates have navigated painful life transitions, loss and change in the past, and this will be a useful barometer for future strengths or vulnerability they may encounter.

Healthy sexuality involves a growing capacity to develop friendships at a variety of levels. This implies that no one or two people will be able to meet all of our emotional or relational needs. I may have some close friends with whom I can share deeply, some friends and family who are supportive but where there is less frequent contact, and others who nourish me at a more distant level without long term commitment. Vocation ministers can explore the overall pattern and balance of relationships with friends, family, school and work. Healthy relationships are linked to a healthy sexuality.

Vocation directors generally record a relational history or psycho-sexual narrative from candidates in the form of an autobiographical account. Some go even further by also doing a detailed behavioral assessment. Regardless of how detailed the background gathering is on each candidate, listening to each person's psycho-sexual journey involves compassionate and focused attention to the candidate's growing self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-esteem and self-identity as reflected in his or her life story. This self-identity includes a growing awareness and acceptance of the fullness of one's sexual self that allows one to risk authentic intimacy with others and God.

Each stage of this journey brings new developmental challenges, and sexual health will demand attention to each particular life cycle challenge. Thus sexual health

Work with a psychologist

While vocation directors can and will obtain psycho-sexual histories and relational narratives, in both informal and formal ways, a more detailed, structured and sensitive psycho-sexual assessment is best completed by a competent professional, such as a trained psychologist with experience in doing such assessments with clergy and religious. Such persons should have knowledge of religious life and priesthood. I feel that all vocation directors should have access to a trusted psychologist who is knowledgeable about the various dynamics of religious life, celibacy and the process of religious and clergy formation. This is aptly stated by the Vatican in paragraph six of “Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission of Candidates to the Priesthood”:

Therefore, it must be borne in mind that these experts, as well as being distinguished for their sound human and spiritual maturity, must be inspired by an anthropology that openly shares the Christian vision about the human person, sexuality, as well as vocation to the priesthood and to celibacy. In this way, their interventions may take into account the mystery of man in his personal dialogue with God, according to the vision of the Church.

Psychologists can be greatly aided by vocation personnel who already have some experience of candidates and may be able to alert these consulting professionals to areas of concern. Vocation directors will also want to share the normal battery of tests and interview areas

covered in an overall assessment. This more formal psycho-sexual history or assessment can be done early on as part of the overall psychological testing done before admission to a community. Questions dealing with issues of sexual orientation, past sexual behaviors and sexual abuse histories call for a trained professional who can best know not only what questions to ask, but how to sensitively ask those questions, how to recognize denial and resistance, and also deal therapeutically with the variety of vulnerable responses. For example, in some cases of sexual abuse the candidate may be revealing this painful information for the very first time and would need an experienced guide.

Sexual health for candidates to religious life and priesthood demands on-going growth in intimacy and affective maturity. So intimacy is not an option. Rather, as Wilke Au and Norreen Cannon put it, “intimacy is the hallmark of the Christian life.” This involves developing the skills that allow for true intimacy with self, others and God. As Christians we are called to experience ourselves as the beloved of God and to embrace others just as we have ourselves been intimately embraced by God. We meet and reveal God who is love only through one another. This gift of intimacy is both a mark of maturity and a fruit of the Spirit. It is a psycho-sexual journey that involves growing skills and capacities for mature loving. At the same time, it is also a divine mystery and gift of God. A competent psychologist, together with trained and involved vocation personnel, can together explore the capacity for intimacy and affective maturity given a candidate’s overall history.

at childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mid-life, and in older ages may appear quite different.

Red flags

Some red flags or warning signs with candidates to priesthood and religious life involve these psycho-sexual developmental extremes rooted in either family histories of excessive sexual repression or sexual compulsivity.

Either extreme can easily lead to ill health in the area of sexuality. On the one end, anxiety and fear of sexuality may lead to avoidance of closeness with others (asexuality), and at the other extreme it may lead to acting out impulsively (hypersexuality) out of similar feelings of anxiety, fear or shame. Healthy sexuality seeks to avoid these two extremes by fostering a more balanced style of relating that reflects deeper integration of body, heart, mind and spirit.

For some candidates, pornography and cybersex issues may be a part of their history that leaves them vulnerable to more distorted, fragmented or compartmentalized form of sexuality. Other potential red flags are dysfunctional relationship patterns in the family of origin, which may be marked by excessive moralism, judgment or shame. These might involve patterns of abuse, whether physical, emotional or sexual. For example research suggests that persons who experience significant abuse or family trauma are often compromised in their effort to grow in deeper intimacy.

Some other key risk factors pointing toward sexual ill health are psycho-sexual developmental blocks that leave one stuck at earlier stages of growth and development. For some candidates it means being stuck in more self-centered childhood or adolescent styles of relating, having still unmet intimacy needs for affection, affirmation and acceptance. For others, confusion around sexual identity and orientation may lead to sexual ill health. Personality disorders and histories of mental illness, such as anxiety or depression, may present further vulnerabilities. Lack of same age peer relationships with both men and women could be a further risk factor, as well as a pattern of emotional or affective immaturity.

While many candidates may have embraced the notion of embodiment, many have not and still denigrate or are at least suspicious of the wisdom of their bodies as sources of revelation. This attitude can be another red flag, warning of a lack of psycho-sexual integration. Healthy sexuality for vocation ministers implies avoiding the sexual dualism that has marked much of the Christian tradition. This dualism involves the false perception that the spirit is opposed to the body, with the spirit assumed to be higher and superior, and the body lower and inferior. Unfortunately a companion to this dualism has been sexism or patriarchy: where men identify themselves essentially with the spirit (mind), while men identify women with the body (matter), and assume that the higher needs to control the lower. This pattern of thought has led to unhealthy attitudes that block genuine collaboration between the sexes. Healthy sexuality involves a growing capacity to relate to both men and women in more genuine and collaborative ways, appreciating the masculine and feminine dimensions within each of us as true gifts.

Implications for vocation directors

Given this understanding of what healthy and unhealthy sexuality looks like, what are some of the implications

for vocation directors when it comes to assessing candidates? Vocation directors need to be aware that healthy sexuality will be rooted in the real, lived experiences of candidates—in their friendships and romantic relationships—and this journey toward health and wholeness is life-long. Healthy sexuality as we mature involves a growing capacity to relate in un-selfconscious ways toward more generative acts of authentic loving. Candidates need to be seen within a dynamic process of psycho-sexual growth. They will inevitably make mistakes and experience wounds in that journey toward wholeness. Vocation personnel can assist them in the process of psycho-sexual integration by encouraging deeper awareness and compassionate reflection on their relational journey, including painful relational experiences. Candidates who are still finding themselves may be compromised in giving fully of themselves.

Vocation directors, in reflecting with candidates, may have them ponder the following questions. Given your life in relationship growing up, what have you learned about yourself? What are your strengths and weaknesses in relating to others? Do I relate comfortably with those of the same sex? Opposite sex? Do I lack confidence in relating to others? Who do I find it easy to relate to? Who do I find it hard to relate to?

Am I able to exercise positive choices in my sexual activities? Am I able to be emotionally available to others? Do I understand, respect, and nurture my body? How do I cope with tension, anxiety and stress?

Can I pray comfortably about my sexual feelings,

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Helpful areas for vocation ministers to attend to are:

- Does the candidate value hobbies and have creative outside interests?
- What about healthy friendships?
- Does the candidate cultivate solitude or reflection to allow for relating in real and honest ways?
- Does this candidate seem genuinely comfortable with him or herself and able to embrace his or her sexuality?
- Does this person seem accepting of past failings and to have learned from past relational wounds?

longings, and attractions? Is there at least one person with whom I can share myself deeply, including my relational joys and struggles?

Finally, is my life imbued with meaning and passion and an aliveness that reflects a fullness of love's gift? For how can I share who I am, if I do not know who I am?

While candidates may have some adequate knowledge of their personal and familial history, they may still have trouble accepting the selves they are coming to know more deeply. This reality calls for a sexual ethic on the part of vocation personnel that avoids excessive judgment and moralism, which only serve to increase unhealthy shame. Those who are growing in healthy intimacy have learned through time to become more accepting of their strengths and also their wounds and limitations. They have let go of the need to live up to other's expectations or to cling to perfectionism. This inner freedom allows for greater spontaneity and less self-consciousness.

Developmental theorists writing on intimacy suggest that any healthy adult intimacy involves the capacity to share more deeply of one's authentic self with another. Having close relationships of mutual trust frees candidates to be more real, to let go of the need for pretense and risk revealing their true selves. Vocation directors can encourage and help foster this openness through their own authentic relating and mentoring with candidates. Sexual wholeness and healing happen when persons are challenged to move away from obstacles such as perfectionism, compulsivity and fear of sexuality into a healthier embrace of the fullness of sacred sexuality. Our allies in psycho-sexual growth are trust, openness and a healthy disciplined love that nurtures the commitments of our lives, honoring the self, others and God.

Vocation directors may benefit by seeing all of these dimensions of healthy sexuality as interrelated. For example if a person has not resolved certain sexual issues, like past sexual wounds or trauma, it will affect all other dimensions in some ways. Wholeness and holiness derive from the same root, and healthy sexuality calls us to the best of both. When all dimensions of my sexuality are growing, I am becoming more loving in the way God calls me to be.

Likewise each area of sexuality that is neglected or underdeveloped compromises our growth in other areas. Relationally, a person may be withdrawn and unable to disclose important parts of his or her past. Behaviorally the past unhealed sexual wounds may lead to various addictive and compulsive dysfunctional escapes used to avoid feelings. Physically, the genital sexual relationship

may be impaired, and physical care compromised. In addition various psychosomatic complaints are possible, and spiritually, a person's ability to trust can be compromised when sexual wounds are not healed.

More positively, if a person is sexually healthy in one dimension, there is often a positive impact on other areas. For example developing close friendships makes it less likely that people will look for unhealthy ways to meet their needs for intimacy.

In sum, the truth of our growth in relationships is that they are often messy, mistakes are inevitably made, and it's not always so clear what the right choices are, but if we are seeking to grow into greater sexual health, we will gradually become more comfortable and confident with the way that sexuality is a part of all the dimensions of our lives—body, heart, mind, soul and spirit. ■

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Sister Maria Sciaroni, ASCJ with her mother, Theresa Sciaroni, during a Family Gathering.

Parents and family members can be uneasy when their loved one chooses religious life. Here is how one community fosters friendship with families.

Building bridges with a Family Gathering

WHEN I ENTERED THE COMMUNITY of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1989, most of the sisters (myself included) had gotten to know the community as students in one of the schools where our sisters taught. Our families and friends were thus also familiar with the community.

Not so in the 21st century! Now we sisters more commonly meet candidates through some form of digital media, and it is no longer a given that the women joining us come from someplace where we have a community. Obviously the women who enter come to know us quite well during their discernment and formation experiences, but what about their families and loved ones? How are they to grow familiar with the religious community their daughter, sister, aunt, or granddaughter has joined? How can families become more comfortable with their loved one's choice to be part of our counter-cultural way of life? Without any personal relationships with our

BY SISTER VIRGINIA HERBERS, ASCJ



Sister Virginia Herbers, ASCJ, is an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, currently serving as one of three formation directors

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Families enjoy time together at the picnic table. The informal conversations can be the most meaningful part of the Family Gathering.

CT, for the parents and siblings of our sisters in formation. Its purpose is to help build a strong relationship between the ASCJ community and the families of our sisters in formation, especially those who live at a distance. We schedule the gathering in close proximity to our vow ceremonies to accommodate families already planning to travel to Connecticut to celebrate. However, some families that come are connected to younger, newer members who won't take vows for some time yet. We want these two groups to mingle because families

who have grown close to the ASCJs are often our best ambassadors to newer, sometime more anxious families. They understand the fears and concerns.

sisters, how can these parents and family members understand what their loved one has chosen?

Developing a strong relationship between our religious community and the sisters' families has always been a strong value for our Apostle community, so a few years ago our Formation Team followed the suggestion of our youngest members to create something—an event, program, workshop—to help familiarize their families with the Apostle community.

Our postulants said that their parents would benefit from understanding aspects of religious life that they themselves were learning about—charism, community living, profession of vows, ministerial life, etc. They said it would be wonderful if parents could create a network among themselves for support and fellowship. Given that most of the families were surprised, anxious, or even resistant to the prospect of a daughter or sister living a religious vocation, our formation sisters suggested that we invite these families to come together to spend time with the community and also meet and talk with other parents who might share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. We brainstormed with the postulants about topics and format, sent out an interest survey to the parents of our sisters in formation, and decided to give it a shot!

What follows is a program outline for what has developed into the annual ASCJ Formation Family Gathering.

What, when and where?

The ASCJ Formation Family Gathering is a three-day summer event hosted at our Provincialate in Hamden,

How has it evolved?

The first year we hosted the event in April as a “Parent Gathering” and had nine participants. Based on their feedback, we moved the event to the summer and broadened it to include siblings, both older and younger. We also adjusted it to be a dual-track event, meeting the needs for both introductory information and more advanced information, such as a more in-depth understanding of our ministries from a panel of sisters. The dual track allowed those who had attended previously to avoid repeating the same experience. Attendance for our second-year gathering increased from nine to 65 participants—we can only imagine what the future will bring!

Who is involved?

Obviously the families of our sisters in formation are the focus of the event, but we involve many different people in a variety of ways. The formation sisters are responsible for hospitality as well as for a panel presentation on “A Day in the Life” of a novice, postulant, junior professed, etc. If younger children attend, the formation sisters are also on “entertainment duty” while the adults attend presentations.

Our Formation Team provides an overview of the formation process and also fields questions about the

different stages of formation, program guidelines and expectations of the candidate at each stage.

Sisters from a cross-section of ministries are invited to give talks regarding religious community, ministry and apostolic outreach, Congregational history and charism and real-life experiences of religious consecration.

Parents and siblings of our current membership join us one day for a celebratory Mass and brunch, informally offering their own insights and experiences to the parents and siblings of our younger members. Our elder sisters join us to tell their own vocation stories, sharing their wisdom and “secrets” to living a happy and healthy religious life.

What have been the results?

Perhaps the most important results of our ASCJ Formation Family Gathering have been the positive connections made between our community and the families of our sisters in formation. The families have come to learn about and love the community, and the community has come to know and love the families of our newest members. The mutuality of respect, commitment and investment has been a benefit not only for the community and families, but most importantly for our younger sisters who very much want their families to understand and support their life choice. Parents and siblings can better understand the life choice of their daughter or sister and can thus offer encouragement and even positive challenge with a sense of deeper understanding. Additionally, the support network that has developed among the families, particularly the parents, has been of tremendous value as they keep in touch during their daughters’ formation journeys and beyond.

Feedback from participants

Hands down the most valuable aspect of the gathering is the time parents have to speak honestly with one another about their experience of their daughter’s vocational choice. After the first year’s gathering, we decided to add into the schedule an open-floor, closed-door discussion for parents only. It was facilitated by three parents whose daughters had been in our formation program for a few years already and who thus had a broader range of experience (and, more importantly, a positive one!) with both the community and their daughter’s vocational discernment. Having the chance for “straight-talk” among themselves provided a forum for parents to share honestly

and supportively with one another, allowing them to realize that there are other parents out there who are on the same journey—and who can share input and advice from further down the road!

Some comments from the parents:

“It was so refreshing—and a relief, too!—to know that I’m not alone in some of these feelings. I liked being able to talk to other dads about how awkward it is, and even isolating at times, to have a conversation come to a dead-stop when I mention that my daughter’s a nun. I guess it’s just nice to know other people understand the implications both emotionally and socially.”

“I gained a stronger understanding of vocation, how the order operates, how decisions are made about my daughter’s future, and the history and goals of the community.”

“I was surprised at how my [younger children] appreciated and enjoyed the sisters ... the experience of being with the sisters will enrich their lives forever. That alone was worth the trip!”

Lessons we’ve learned

IN-PERSON CONTACT IS VITAL. I highly recommend this type of event for any community trying to forge positive relationships with families that live at a distance. Although phone and e-mail correspondence is important, having face-to-face opportunities to develop and strengthen the relationships between community and family is indispensable.

STARTING OFF SMALL IS OK. When we offered this event the first time, we were uncertain of the outcome, and when only nine participants opted to come, we thought they would almost certainly suggest we offer it only once during the formation process. By the end of the first gathering, however, those nine participants were convinced of its value—as were we—and certainly the increased participation the second year confirmed our sentiments. Moral of the story: don’t be discouraged by small numbers in the beginning.

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION WITHOUT DEMANDING IT. Again, our first offering was accepted only by a handful of parents—particularly those wanting to ask questions about the novitiate. Their feedback after the event—and the positive effect it had on their relationship with their daughters—is what encouraged other families to come the following year. We think that this approach encouraged goodwill and openness.

YOU NEED YOUR MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION. This is not a "club" event! Get as many religious community members involved as possible, in whatever way feasible—presenters, liturgy helpers, cooks, participants at meals. The interaction between families and sisters is what truly makes the relationships real—don't underestimate the value of the little things!

BE HONEST, OPEN AND COURAGEOUS! The feedback from parent participants has been that the most helpful aspect of the gathering was the opportunity to talk with the sisters and also with one another about the difficulties and struggles of knowing how best to accompany a daughters' vocational journey within the structure of a formation program. Providing an open and honest forum for these conversations, difficult as they might be, is vital.

ARRANGE THE SCHEDULE ACCORDING TO YOUR BEST INSTINCTS. The format we follow is lon-

ger than what most communities would probably use. We are still tweaking our program, too, and are considering tightening the schedule to make the time commitment easier for busy families who need to return to work and other responsibilities. Be careful not to short-change the event, though—especially if you're thinking "free time" is wasted time. Those times are actually the ones where the greatest connections happen among the parents.

PLAN WELL. As you prepare, you may choose to solicit opinions from the community, the people in formation, or even families themselves about what to include in the programming. Be sure that whatever you include in your program, it works toward the desired outcome: stronger relationships between families and the community.

ENJOY! Making sure there is time to simply enjoy one another's company is a must—as is including time for the families to spend together with their daughter or sister! ■

FAMILY GATHERING SCHEDULE

PROFESSION DAY

- 11:00 a.m. Profession of First Vows, Renewal of Vows
- 1:00 p.m. Luncheon
- Free afternoon
- 5:30 p.m. Evening prayer
- 6:00 p.m. Light Supper
- 7:30 p.m. Reception for new novices & junior sisters

DAY ONE: CHARISM, LIFESTYLE, AND MISSION

- 8:00 a.m. Morning prayer (optional)
- 8:30 a.m. Mass
- 9:30 a.m. Brunch with sisters and their parents
- 11:00 a.m. Welcome and Introduction
- Session I: Charism, lifestyle and mission (younger siblings have free time with their ASCJ sister—field or gym games)
- 1:00 p.m. Light lunch
- 2:00 p.m. Panel presentation by sisters in formation: Stages of the Formation program
- 3:30 p.m. "A Day in the Life" creative presentation by sisters in formation
- 4:45 p.m. Evening prayer (optional)
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:30 p.m. Our Foundress, Mother Clelia Merloni

7:50 p.m. Ice cream social

DAY TWO: FELLOWSHIP AND FREE TIME

- 7:30 a.m. Morning prayer (optional)
- 8:00 a.m. Mass (optional)
- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast (optional)
- 10:00 a.m. Panel presentation by parents: Journeying with the ASCJs (younger siblings will go with their ASCJ sisters to the lakehouse for fun and games)
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 p.m. Afternoon of rest and relaxation at lakehouse
- 5:30 p.m. Vespers service
- 6:00 p.m. Picnic dinner followed by Closing Prayer Service (so that early departures can participate)

DAY THREE: WISDOM FROM OUR ELDERS

- 8:00 a.m. Mass
- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 10:00 a.m. Visit with elder sisters
- 11:30 a.m. Light lunch & departure



Members of the San Miguel Parish Vocation Club in Davao City, Philippines sing during an outreach program.

Parish life is where most people experience their faith regularly. And Parish Vocation Committees can help Catholics understand and value church vocations.

Secrets of strong parish vocation committees

SERRA INTERNATIONAL, along with many facets of the church, encourages a “culture of vocations” in parishes. That is, we’d like parishes to be places where people learn about how God calls each of us to be disciples—sister, brother, laity, priest—and about how we might each hear and respond to that call. When the U.S. Serra Club was asked to write about ways a Parish Vocation Committee can promote this type of vocation culture, we started with some research. We conducted a survey of dioceses to discover how many parishes in the U.S. have a vocation committee. We also requested suggestions about what makes a Parish Vocation Committee (PVC) successful.

Our respondents represent 22 dioceses of the 195 total. Within this sample, 10.9 percent of parishes had a Vocations Committee. The highest concentration of Parish Vocation Committees was in the Diocese of Galveston-Houston, TX, with 40.8 percent of parishes having them. The survey was not representative of the country as a whole, as the sample was

BY GINO DiMATTIA



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to the priesthood and religious life. He has served in Serra for 15 years, holding positions of club president and district governor. He is an occupational therapist in Lima, OH, where he is active in his parish and community. Gino wishes to thank the Vocations Committee of the USA Council of Serra International for help with this article and encourages readers to contact Serra for more information at (888) 777-6681 or www.serraus.org.

only 11.3% of the total dioceses in the country. Furthermore, the numbers people gave were often estimated or chosen from a range.

Nonetheless, the survey gives us a snapshot of what active parishes are doing. The survey shows that the most prevalent activities for promoting vocations are prayer-related programs, programs that support current priests and religious, and adopt-a-seminarian programs. Many respondents said they promote vocations during weekend liturgies and on national days of awareness such as National Vocation Awareness Week or Priesthood Sunday. Visits to seminaries, vocation retreats, parish vocation rallies, and altar server recognition programs were common.

Inviting parishioners to discernment is critically important, and programs such as “Called by Name” aim to surface those candidates who could potentially serve as priests, sisters, brothers or permanent deacons. (“Called by Name” is a program that dates back to the 90s that encourages parishes to make concrete invitations to young adults to consider a church vocation. Learn more at http://www.serraus.org/serrausa/serra_vocation_programs.htm.)

Help in surfacing names of potential vocations is a repeated theme across the country in both diocesan and religious community vocation offices. Serra has three main suggestions for parish vocation committees.

A. Identify needs

Look at needs not now being met by other agencies and programs, what the abilities of the committee members are, and what the diocesan vocation office suggests you can do to assist in promoting vocations. With this information members of the parish vocation committee can then establish objectives.

B. Decide where to concentrate your efforts

Think in terms of individuals and groups. Possibilities include but are not limited to: students in grade school, high school students, college-age young people, parish schools of religion, altar servers, youth groups and parish youth ministry programs, potential permanent deacons, military personnel, young adult ministry programs serving singles in the parish, minor seminary high schools, college seminaries, theologate seminaries, programs supporting priests and religious who have served for under 10 years and programs supporting priests and religious

who have served for over 10 years. Including these groups also would help the effectiveness of any program: fellow members of Serra Clubs, Knights of Columbus, and various parish societies and parent groups. These groups are the critical components of any positive culture of vocations. Supportive families and parishes are very important elements in discerning a call.

C. Consider the character of the parish

College campuses are fruitful ground for future vocations and should not be overlooked. For a list of campus ministry best practices for vocations, please consult the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website: www.usccb.org.

Present and future vocations are each important in the life of the church. The support of one should not replace supporting the other. Here are 20 programs that are popular, with descriptions of each. They range from very simple to complex.



Traveling chalice or crucifix A family or school class is given the opportunity to pray for and learn about vocations as a chalice or crucifix moves weekly from home to home or class to class. It is encouraged that a journal be

included so that there is a record of where the chalice or crucifix has been. To appeal to families, a miniature mass kit for children can be included. These are available through www.ourfathershouse.biz Parishioners who take the chalice or crucifix into their homes would be potential members of a parish vocations committee.

Vocations Awareness lesson plans and programs can be included at each grade level of religious education. Each grade can do a special project, and the reports can be combined into a resource booklet.

Create a collage of photos of priests, brothers and sisters who have been part of your community. Some have created a “Wall of Spiritual Leaders” with photos and brief biographies of parishioners who have become priests, sisters or brothers.

Adopt a seminarian. Greeting cards can be sent at the beginning of a new semester, holidays, exam times,

birthdays, ordinations, etc. This can be especially effective when grade school-aged kids participate.

Pray the rosary. Before parish meetings pray a decade of the rosary for any priest, seminarian or religious who needs prayers.

Sponsor a contest. Sponsor a poster, essay or coloring contest with a vocation theme, and exhibit the results. Some groups have included a trip to the seminary or convent, and those who attend write an essay to describe what they discovered. This project requires people to serve as judges, as well as volunteers to organize a trip to the seminary or convent.

Encourage a discernment group. Support a youth minister, high school chaplain or campus minister in forming a discernment group. The Melchizedek Project is one model for men's discernment groups; it uses "To Save a Thousand Souls" by Father Brett Brannen as a guide. A start up kit is available through: <http://www.melchizedekproject.com/request-start-up-packet/> Many communities of sisters sponsor women's discernment groups and could serve as resources. In addition, many discernment events and resources are listed on the VISION vocation guide website: www.vocationguide.org.

Encourage interviews of pastors, priests, sisters, brothers and deacons for the school newspaper or parish bulletin, especially on how they discerned their call. A "Vocation Corner" can be included in the same location in the weekly parish bulletin, calling attention to the many ways of looking at vocations.

Create a page on the parish or school website with vocation information, and update it regularly. A link to the diocesan vocation website could be added. If a website seems intimidating to you, consider working with a tech-savvy young adult to develop this.

Learn the significant dates for the parish priests or sisters, such as anniversary of ordination or profession of vows, and celebrate within the parish and school. Some congregations bless their pastor or associate pastor on the anniversary of his ordination.

Observe annual vocation awareness days: National Vocation Awareness Week, World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life, World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and Priesthood Sunday. Prayers of the faithful at



LAZARO CONTRERAS, OFFICE OF VOCATIONS, ARCHDIOCESE OF GALVESTON HOUSTON

Parish Vocation Committee members from the Archdiocese of Galveston Houston listen to a talk.

the weekend's liturgy or bulletin inserts can be included. Packets for celebrating vocation awareness days in English or Spanish are also available through the Serra Club website, www.serraus.org. The Holy Father publishes an annual message in conjunction with World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and this, too, is available online.

Offer a Mass. First Friday or first Saturday Masses can be offered for the intention of vocations. A rosary for vocations can be prayed before or after Mass.

Pray a vocation prayer together at all Masses or at specific Masses throughout the year. Have the prayer printed on refrigerator magnets and distribute it.

Eucharistic adoration can be offered on certain days or all week long, with a focus on praying for vocations.

Form a 31 Club. This involves asking 31 parishioners to pray the rosary or attend Mass on one regular day each month to pray for vocations. Participants who sign up might be asked if they would participate in the Vocation Committee.

Organize an Altar Server Appreciation Night and ask one of the priests to speak to the servers after a meal is served. A gift and a certificate of appreciation can be distributed as the servers are announced

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

individually. The parish vocation committee could focus on servers who are in 8th grade or who demonstrate outstanding leadership. Pastors, teachers or staff can give input. The meal and/or funding can be provided by a sponsoring group, such as Serra Club, Knights of Columbus, Lady Knights or the Catholic Order of Foresters.

Invite the Director of Vocations or transitional deacons to the parish for a weekend, for masses and possibly to share meals with parish families.

Note: The next three programs are best carried out at the diocesan level.

Organize a Focus 11 event. This is a diocese-sponsored program aimed at young people who are 11-years-old (5th and 6th grade) or who are in the 11th grade (high school juniors). It consists of a day of prayer, activities, fun, and reflection on church vocations for each of the age groups. Local clubs or vocation committees can assist by providing snacks and drinks, staffing a booth with religious items that children can take home, or taking "cut-out" pictures of each of the children as a "future" priest or sister.

Sponsor Operation Andrew. In this activity

parishes invite men to a one-day event with the bishop to consider the priesthood. The individuals travel to the event with their parish priest whenever possible. Dioceses usually put these events on the bishop's calendar annually. Parish vocation committee members can help with promotion or anything else the vocations office requests. A similar program that helps parishes or dioceses to invite women and men to consider religious life is Operation Miryam and Joseph.

Sponsor Quo Vadis and Fiat Days. These days are a camp for young Catholic men to learn more about the priesthood or brotherhood, to deepen their faith and to better discern God's call in their lives. The program involves talks from happy priests or religious, recreation, confessions, opportunities to talk one-on-one with religious or priests, and evening camp fires during which attendees hear vocation stories from those in formation. Parish vocation committees provide support in the form of meals, transportation, cleanup or funding. Other groups that might also assist are a Serra Club, Knights of Columbus, Lady Knights or the Catholic Order of Foresters. Quo Vadis and Fiat Days are large events that require coordination across a diocese.

A parish vocation committee does not have to be contained within a single parish. Many successful committees have been formed with groups of parishes. Pastors should be informed, and their approval of the activities is essential. It is not necessary that the pastor attend meetings, however. Some committees meet very little but do most of their work over the phone or by computer.

Organized committees have a mission, goals and objectives. They may list activities that can be implemented with the blessing of the pastor and of the parish council. Most parish vocation committees work in cooperation with the diocesan vocations office in pursuing the bishop's objectives for promoting vocations. At the same time, most religious order vocation directors also welcome parish collaboration, and parish vocation committees may want to contact religious men and women's communities in the region. Most will be happy to know about the parish vocation committee and will welcome its offer of concrete ways the committee could support them.

Whatever form a Parish Vocation Committee takes, and whatever its activities, the group can take heart from knowing that its mission is inextricably linked to the mission of the worldwide church: to know, love and serve God by being faithful to one's calling. ■



HORIZON
— Journal of the National
Religious Vocation Conference —

Feed your spirit



A parable about a postman reveals truths about following our own call and sparking a vocation in others.

In the 1997 movie, *The Postman*, Kevin Costner wrestles with his own calling and with inviting another to his mission.

Spirit still alive in “shaky situations”

IN HIS 1997 MOVIE, *The Postman*, Kevin Costner plays the role of a wandering actor accompanied by a mule, symbol for stubborn and barren, in a post-apocalyptic world. Some sort of war has happened, with massive climatic consequence.

All public institutions, including government, have collapsed. The country is prey to warlord armies. Townspeople have returned in self-defense to the medieval practice of the palisade and town gate. We hear internal voices, memories of past family and friends who reveal to us this man has been wounded emotionally and spiritually. Alone, with only his mule as company, he journeys with a maxim: “avoid civilization at all costs, but you’ve got to eat.”

Then one day when trying to escape from a slave camp, the wanderer stumbles upon a call to become a postman. This will eventually lead to the restoration of the defunct U.S. Postal Service. It happens during a storm when he takes shelter in a crashed post-office van. Within is a dead postman’s skeleton, which becomes his new companion (his mule has been killed). To pass the time he begins to read letters aloud from the dead postman’s bag. His voice is cynical, mocking, but he allows himself to be moved by the personal content of the undelivered letters. Next day, as a result, he dons the postman’s uniform and heads off to deliver the letters.

BY FATHER CONALL O’CUINN, SJ



Father Conall O’Cuinn, SJ is in his eighth year as vocations director for the Irish Jesuits, as well as rector of a large Jesuit community. He spent 17 years in three

African countries, mostly in formation. He completed the Associate Program at the Cambridge MA’s Centre for Religious Development while also working in a parish.

His first delivery is to an Irene Marsh, a blind woman, whose daughter reads the letter aloud in the presence of the townspeople. This is the first news in 15 years Irene has received of her family: they have survived the war. “You’re a godsend, you’re a savior,” she proclaims to the messenger. His response: “No, I am just the postman.” He has not yet embraced his identity as mediator of communication and bringer of good news.

We’ve all probably had that experience of having an inner call affirmed from the outside. It may have come as a confirmation by others who spotted a gift, maybe even before we recognized it ourselves. We may well have needed that confirmation before we could accept the new mission. This call comes to us in the ways of incarnation. It arises in the life of a concrete person in whom an idea, a desire, or a vision develops towards a concrete plan, which may or may not be put into practice. If carried out, it is often accomplished in fits and starts, as in the case of the Postman.

Back to the movie: the Postman is still very unsure of his call. The townspeople have taken to him big time. With the energy of enthusiasm [the word literally means possessed by a god] he offers to deliver any new mail, an impossible and naive offer. Irene Marsh brings him a letter with no address, just a name, and expects him to deliver it, somewhere. He feels overwhelmed and declares to himself, “I’ve got to get outta here.” While looking to steal a horse—remember there are no automobiles anymore—an old man asks him what he is looking for, and before he can answer points him in the direction of a derelict building which turns out to be the town’s defunct Post Office, the setting for the next encounter and confirmation.

Inside he finds the Mission Statement of the U.S. Post Office: “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

A young man, Ford Lincoln Mercury, startles him: “I knew you’d come here,” he says. They engage in a dialogue, whose genre we might classify as vocational discernment:

FORD: How do you get to be a postman, anyhow?

THE POSTMAN: You have to be in the right place.

FORD: How could I do it?

THE POSTMAN: I thought you wanted to drive cars.

FORD: Not anymore. That was kid’s stuff. This is real.

So, where’s the right place?

THE POSTMAN: Could be anywhere. Anytime.

Only another postman can make you a postman.

FORD: Kinda like vampires, right?

THE POSTMAN: Something like that. You have to be sworn in. The organization’s kinda shaky. It might not last. You’d meet a lot of people who don’t believe in you.

FORD: I’ll set them straight.

THE POSTMAN: It’s a lonely job.

FORD: I’ve been lonely all my life.

THE POSTMAN: So have I, Ford. So have I.

Without knowing what he is really doing, the Postman effectively ordains Ford by getting him to repeat the mission statement on the wall. He then declares him postman. Newly ordained Postman Ford astounds the Postman with this ardent declaration: “I’d give my life to get a letter through.” He is shocked by the enthusiasm of this young man, not just by his courage but also by how the young man mirrors back to the Postman his own ardor: at the gates of the town he had risked his life to deliver the letters to Irene Marsh.

We see in the dialogue above that the Postman has tried to dissuade Ford a number of times from offering himself. We might surmise that he is projecting his own reticence and fear onto young Ford. As he tries to nip Ford’s enthusiasm in the bud, he is confronted by his own lack of faith in his emerging mission. Through Ford he is forced to see that his call is about a movement that is far bigger than him. He still has to choose to go with that call or not. Like him, we too have choices to make.

Perhaps our fear of what the future might bring prevents us from taking the step which leads us to action and to faith in a future that is bigger than ourselves. Our desire to control or contain the loving energy of God may very well cause us unconsciously to block Spirit-movement in those who come to us seeking.

The Postman puts a final obstacle in Ford’s way, this time more personal: “It’s a lonely life,” to which Ford immediately replies, “I’ve been lonely all my life.” The Postman recognizes himself in this response, “So have I,” he admits, “So have I.” A starting point for a deeper dialogue between two humanities, no longer a clash of ideologies. Ford has opened the Postman up to himself. He points him to the next stage in his odyssey, toward full leadership.

The young lead the old, and the old are listening, a further sign that the Spirit, which blows where it wills, is bringing out something new from God’s storehouse. Out of a “shaky” situation, both personal and communal, even cosmic, a new community, mission and service has begun that is in continuity with and different from the old. ■

MAZUR/CATHOLICNEWS/ORBIS CATHOLIC CHURCH (ENGLAND WALES)



The writers in *Visions of Hope* indicate that there is no turning back from the changes ushered in by Vatican II. Pictured here are participants in a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II.

The dense reading in this book gives way to valuable insights for those who work with future church ministers.

Emerging theologians offer insights

VISIONS OF HOPE: *Emerging Theologians and the Future of the Church* is a collection of essays by 22 theologians born after Vatican II (edited by Kevin Ahern, Orbis Books). It seeks to show the relevancy and viability of the theology of Vatican II for the future of the Catholic Church by reflecting on contemporary issues vis-a-vis the council and its conciliar documents. The theologians, from seven countries, reflect a broad spectrum of theological training and address specific issues within ecclesiology, liturgy, ministry, ethics and dialogue. The overarching theme of the volume, as articulated by Ahern and Massimo Faggiolo, is that “no vision for the future of the church can ignore the insights of Vatican II... We are at a ‘point of no return.’” (3)

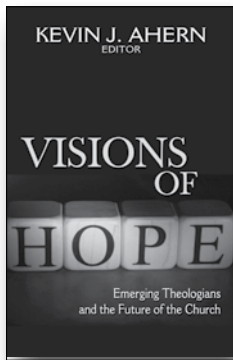
The volume and the individual articles are complex, heavily referenced, and they presume theological literacy, especially regarding the documents of Vatican II. Though a few essays seem to brush over contemporary ecclesial struggles with a somewhat naïve and hopeful vision, most are situated firmly in current church dilemmas. Out of this conflicted context, the book addresses contemporary issues such as the image of the body, inclusion and participation of people with disabilities, sexual abuse and

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She previously served her Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation in formation ministry and has published a book on the vow of obedience entitled *The Evolution of a Vow: Obedience as Decision Making in Communion* (LitVerlag, 2009).



authority, inter-religious dialogue, racism and pluralism. Whether these are the issues that the reader would name as most critical for the future of the church is one question to consider.

As articulated throughout the essays, a central issue of Vatican II is the relationship between the *ad intra* (internal) elements of the church and the *ad extra* (external) elements of the church. Massimo Faggiolo

points out in the introductory essay that there is “no return” to life before Vatican II. The changes and openness prompted by Vatican II cannot be reversed. How the church views the world directly affects how the church understands itself.

What makes the volume valuable and, perhaps indicative of the future, is that each theologian makes connections between the conciliar documents and contemporary issues in a manner not seen previously. The method used by these theologians, by and large, consists of a dialogue between the wisdom of the church and contemporary theory on specific concerns. These theologians take the church at its word and apply conciliar insights to new issues in ways that offer the church a new view of itself.

At the end of the volume, the theologians offer a summary document of their hopes and vision for the future. As committed Catholic theologians who love the church, who believe in the vision of Vatican II, and who acknowledge the real problems of the church and the world, they seek a church and a future that engages in the following actions: recentralizing Scripture, clarifying the roles of ministry, promoting vocations of all, seeing dialogue as multi-dimensional and as constitutive of the church, seeing diversity as opportunity not threat, offering an open discussion of the nature of moral authority in the church, developing a relational moral anthropology, acknowledging historical consciousness, creating channels of discourse for laments that arise in both the church and the world, developing a new model for discerning the “sensus fidei,” and a recommitment to the centrality of the Gospel. No small agenda for an already troubled church. These theologians, though, stand ready to assist in the development of such a future.

Three main ideas worth exploring

What does *Visions of Hope* offer to vocation ministers?

An initial response might be that, without a well-developed theological literacy, the fruits of this work are fairly deeply hidden. At second glance, three main ideas are worth the effort of exploring this volume.

First, understanding that Vatican II was essentially addressing the relationship between the internal and external dimensions of the church can be extremely helpful in dialoguing with young people today. Many young people see a discontinuity between what the church says and what the church does and are alienated by this lack of integrity. They see the injustices and sin within the church while it preaches against injustice and sin outside the church. The moral compass of today’s youth is often at odds with that of the church. A worthwhile theological framework may be to see the insights of Vatican II as a vision toward which the entire church is struggling to live.

Second, several articles address contemporary issues using non-theological frames to enliven conciliar concepts. One interesting example is Gina Ingiosi’s essay on “Mystical ‘Body’” in which she uses contemporary body image deconstruction to shed new light on the concept of the church as the “mystical body of Christ.” By taking the insight that “body” is only a reality when it is in operation, Ingiosi makes the connection that the church is a “mystical body” only when it acts like one. She concludes, “Given dynamic, embodied concepts of Christ and the church, the members must perform them. Without performance, the body does not die—it ceases to exist (p. 46). Such connections between the “secular” and the “sacred” are examples of the best of Vatican II’s mandate to engage with the world. Young people today see and value contemporary, “secular” wisdom, and they would be encouraged to see theology taking it seriously.

Third, as noted in a concluding essay, the future of ecclesiology is of primary concern for these theologians and for young people in general. For those ministering to people considering religious life, it is essential to be able to talk with young people about the tension between a church defined as “the people of God” and the church as hierarchical. Offering young people a broader perspective of the church from a deep and wide tradition can give hope to those considering a life of ministry.

These theologians demonstrate that no field is off limits when seeking to offer hope to a hurting world. In that sense, *Visions of Hope* demonstrates that there truly is no turning back. Theology must always be rooted in the Gospel and engaged with the world. Vocation ministers who understand this and convey it will provide the church with future ministers of hope and compassion. ■



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