HORIZON

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CHARISM AND VOCATION MINISTRY

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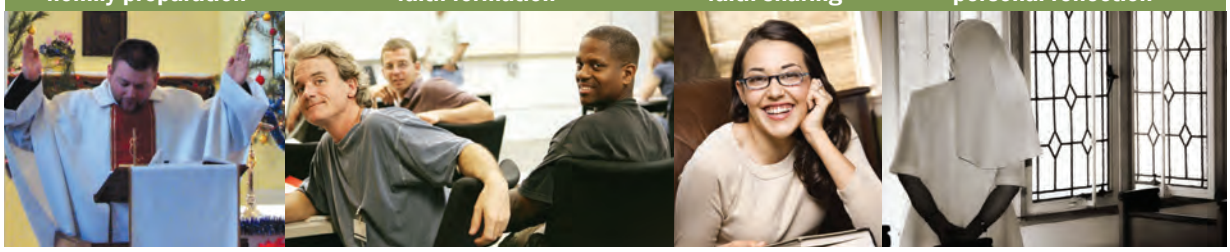

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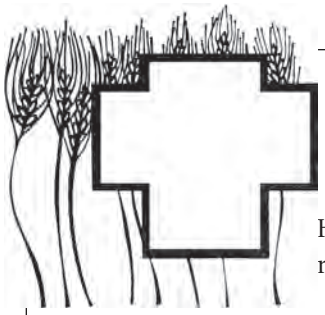

HORIZON

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

HORIZON serves as a resource:

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

HORIZON has a threefold purpose:

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

National Religious Vocation Conference

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

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

National Religious Vocation Conference Board for 2011-2012

EDITOR'S NOTE

A jambalaya of ideas and information

NOT LONG AGO I was in New Orleans where jambalaya is ubiquitous. I happily dug into it for my first meal in the city, and it kept reappearing as a main dish or side dish in menu after menu. Maybe because the glow of Cajun and Creole cuisine is still with me, I thought of jambalaya while considering the mix in this fall edition of *HORIZON*. Like a steaming plate of jambalaya, this edition has a mixture that we hope will both satisfy and nourish—that is, feed your hunger to understand the foundation and context of vocation ministry and nourish your efforts on behalf of new membership.

Jambalaya brings together a variety of foods that together are a meal unto themselves: a solid base of rice, spicy, rich sausage, delicate shrimp, chunks of chicken, and vegetables like tomatoes, onions and peppers to round out the dish with color, flavor and variety. In a similar fashion, this edition offers a variety that aims to satisfy different needs.

Our first piece, a series of essays on the links between charism and vocation ministry (page 4), contributes to the intellectual and theological basis for vocation ministry. This series was spurred by a directive in the National Action Plan, developed with the findings of the NRVC-CARA study in mind. With those same findings in mind, Sister Doris Gottemoeller, RSM (page 13) pinpoints the questions that communities should be addressing if they are to build a future. One other analytical article is John Allen's piece on "Catholic Evangelicals," (page 30) who, he contends, are poised to become leaders in religious life and the church at large.

Shifting from the world of ideas, other articles provide practical information for shaping programs: Joel Schorn presents the findings from a *HORIZON* survey about how vocation ministers conduct "Come and See" events (page 15). I report on strategies the Mercy Sisters are using to address the gap between what discerners are seeking and what the community has to offer (page 21).

Finally, as in a good jambalaya, Sister Lovina Francis Pammit, OSF adds another flavor altogether, providing both cultural insights about Filipinos and practical tips and resources for reaching out to and working with them (page 24).

I'm optimistic that our readers—both vocation ministers and their supporters—will take the flavors of our offerings here, add their own seasonings and cook up new ways to continue inviting a new generation into religious life.

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

The guiding light of every religious community is its charism. When the charism is embraced and authentically lived, it can both renew the community and attract people to it.

How does charism affect vocation ministry and renewal?

By Sister Mary Hughes, OP; Brother Paul Byrd, OP; Sister Mary Whited, CPPS; Sister Mary Emily Knapp, OP; Brother Seán Sammon, FMS

IF A CHARISM IS A GIFT of the Holy Spirit to the church at the time of a congregation's foundation, it should continue to be a source of renewal. How does religious charism impact vocation ministry?

In order to continue the conversation about the results of the NRVC-CARA study of new members, HORIZON put this question to a cross-section of leaders in religious life. In fact, each of the five writers were given three choices of questions but all chose to tackle this one. We present their reflections in keeping with one of the directives of the National Action Plan, which flowed from the fall 2010 "Moving Forward in Hope" symposium. Our hope is that these thoughts will spur fruitful reflection and response for all consecrated men and women.

CHARISM: GIFT TO THE PERSON AND THE CHURCH

by Sister Mary Hughes, OP

Discerning a religious vocation is a sacred part of a journey that can lead to consecrated life. The journey is, at the same time, exhilarating, scary, often filled with doubts, but ultimately filled with peace. There are multiple dimensions to each person's journey. At the very least, there is discernment about the call to consecrated life and discernment about the charism one is called to follow.

Our loving God is vast and possesses innumerable gifts. Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the religious foundation, and these gifts are put at the service of the church and all of God's people. For some congregations the invitation might be to reflect the mercy of God, and so the call would be to a congregation that holds out the works of mercy as its primary ministry and identity. Some are called to reflect God's love for truth and the need to speak the truth. Some are called to reflect to our world God's love for family. Others might reflect the love that pours out from God's sacred heart. No single congregation or religious order can reflect the fullness of God. Each one invites a variation on the path to holiness. Together, we offer to our world a glimpse of the glory of God.

Part of discerning the call to a particular charism is an honest assessment of one's own personal gifts, and, of course, listening for the gentle voice of God in one's heart. One may find that one loves members of a particular community, but never feels called to join them. On the other hand, as one continues to pray, one can trust that God will introduce a community one might never have thought of, but in which one clearly feels at home. Part of the work of the vocation director is to raise up the kind of differences and questions that arise because of the various charisms that gift our church.

Even a superficial assessment of our world today tells us that charisms given in the Middle Ages or given during the time of the early church, are very much needed now. In a world of polarization, bitter words, policies that reinforce poverty and practices that de-value human life, the presence and the glory of God are urgently needed. In order to be gifts to the world, charisms become the organizing principles around which the prayer and the activities of the religious congregation revolve.

While most religious communities have the prayer of the church as part of their ritual, the charism of a congregation invites its members to pray again and again with those psalms, prayers and readings that nourished the call of the founder or founders. If one is called to the charism, one will feel increasingly at home in the style and words of this prayer. If one is not comfortable, it might be a sign that this is not the charism to which the individual is called. While this fit with the charism may not be evident in one or a few prayer sessions, it ought to be evident over time.

The charism of the congregation determines the ministerial involvements. The expression of some charisms is clearly best served by the ministry of education. For some, it will be best served through the ministry of health care. Other charisms find their expression best articulated in social service ministries. Still other congregations have charisms that can be expressed in a variety of ways. In order to feel at home in such settings, one must be able to experience the unity that is located in the charism. It is this unity that allows the diversity to make sense. The unity, I would suggest, would be evident in the ability of the members to express this unity and identify the necessity of diversity. In healthy communities, this is very much present.

No single congregation or religious order can reflect the fullness of God. Each one invites a variation on the path to holiness. Together, we offer to our world a glimpse of the glory of God.

The charism is also the principle around which communal living is centered. In some congregations, the members were sent out two by two, but the larger community remains the base. In other communities, most live within the larger community and perhaps rarely go out from that source of nourishment.

Whatever the ministry, whatever the size of the community, or the manner of dress, each member of a religious congregation is called to be a lover of God. Whatever the charism, each of us is called to lean into God and draw our strength from God alone, rather than anything that might be external to us. As we grow in our love and understanding of the charism, this is what happens to us.

Father Pedro Arrupe, the former general superior of

the Jesuits, captured the essence of this discernment in these words:

> Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than 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 mornings, 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.

Vocation ministry is really about accompanying persons who are in the process of falling in love. The role of the vocation director is to support, to raise questions, and to rejoice with those who are falling deeply in love with God. At the same time, it is to accompany, to support, to raise questions, and to support those who are falling in love with the charism of a particular community or congregation. It is to stand with an individual who will say to the community, "I am responding to God's call and I am at your disposal." In this way, charisms can continue to be sources of personal holiness as they are poured out for the life of the church.

Charisms answer both the question, "What do we do?" and, "What do we have to do with each other?"

Sister Mary Hughes, OP is prioress of the Dominicans of Amityville, NY and former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

CHARISMS LEAD US FORWARD

by Brother Paul Byrd, OP

> "There is something in the eloquence of the pulpit, when it is really eloquence, which is entitled to the highest praise and honour. The preacher who can touch and affect such a heterogeneous mass of hearers, on subjects limited, and long worn threadbare in all common hands; who can say anything new or striking, anything that rouses the attention, without offending the taste, or wearing out the feelings of his hearers, is a man whom one could not in his public capacity honour enough. I should like to be such a man" (*Mansfield Park,* chapter 34).

Although Jane Austen puts these words in the mouth of a man interested in preaching more as a medium for gaining public acclaim than as a ministry, she is touching on a genuine concern for people called to preach. Namely, the question of how to convey the Gospel message in a way that one's audience, so varied in age, background, and intelligence, can hear it, and not in a perfunctory way, but with renewed interest. From the mouth of a true preacher, the words above would signify a passionate commitment to proclaiming the Gospel well, for the sake of others—an inner stirring that is part and parcel of who the preacher is, not just what he or she does. This is an example of a charism: a gift for the mission that is also an identity given by the Holy Spirit.

As a Dominican friar, I begin with the example of preaching because it is the readily identifiable charism that the Order of Preachers has retained over the course of the nearly 800 years of its existence. It was undoubtedly thanks to this clear mission of preaching for the salvation of souls, supported by the commitment to prayer, study, and life in community, that so many men and women came to join the order.

Factors in the vocation decline

But that was then. It is no secret that most religious communities, including the Dominicans, have suffered a serious decline of vocations in the past century, following the Second Vatican Council. Novitiates built for hundreds are now fortunate to house five to ten novices; with the "luckier" ones receiving around 20 or more. Many external and internal factors have contributed to the vocation decline, making this no simple problem to fix. I will outline only a few of these factors.

First, there is the classic battle against rampant individualism that emphasizes personal freedom and happiness over and against concepts like communal living and the common good. People immersed in such cultures are not likely to be interested in vowing chastity, poverty and obedience to a religious superior. Second, there is a misinterpretation of Vatican II that says one does not need to be a priest or a religious brother or sister to be holy. Indeed, there is a real sense that

we can no longer talk about religious life or priesthood as being special paths to holiness—but without the promotion of vocations on both the ecclesial and the familial levels, fewer people are taking the option seriously. Third, the recent scandals in the church, especially the sex abuse scandal, have done a great deal to disillusion people, giving them the impression that religious and priestly vocations are merely the false fronts of hypocrisy. And finally, internal problems like the lack of communal living and the lack of central apostolates offer little incentive to vocation inquirers to join communities that do not function as communities.

To combat these problems, communities are beginning to ask themselves: Who are we? What are we for? Are we still relevant, or must we change? Have we changed too much? These questions of identity inevitably lead religious communities back to their charisms, since charisms answer both the question, "What do we do?" and, "What do we have to do with each other?" With the clarity that comes from being able to answer these two questions, energy for mission is replenished and the renewal of communal life is given direction, which in turn enables religious communities to continue their unique participation in the Church's work and to attract new vocations."

Charism unifies and inspires

Given what has been said, it should not be surprising that religious charisms have everything to do with successfully attracting new vocations. Charisms, if articulated clearly and lived authentically as visions which unite diverse groups of men or women into brotherhoods or sisterhoods, allow discerners to see a part of themselves reflected in communities they visit, which in turn inspires them to join these communities.

"What you are, I am, too," is another way to express the unifying and attracting qualities of charism. This is what I felt when I first visited the Dominican friars in St. Louis and Chicago five years ago, and it explains why Austen's comments on preaching in *Mansfield Park* so resonate with me.

This naming of commonality—the oneness a group of people can share in Christ through a charism—is at the heart of the history behind religious life. It explains why people first joined St. Anthony in the desert, St. Dominic in the pulpit, and Blessed Teresa in the streets of Calcutta, and it is and will continue to be the reason people join religious communities—but only insofar as charisms are taken out of the exhibits of motherhouse museums and allowed to take center stage again, thereby combating individualism, clericalism and anything else that works at weakening the communion the community members have with each other and with the God they serve. Thus, charisms are not to be treated merely as theoretical mission statements but as the gifts of the Holy Spirit—gifts that move us, renew and reform us, leading us forward and sustaining us if we remain true to them.

Brother Paul Byrd, OP is assistant to the promoter of vocations for the Dominican Province of St. Albert the Great.

CHARISM: CENTRAL TO DISCERNMENT

by Sister Mary Whited, CPPS

As I focus upon the question of how religious charism impacts vocation ministry, I am reminded of how the Leadership Conference of Women Religious has been engaged in a contemplative process entitled "Behold I Am Doing Something New… Do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19). The process is designed to create a national conversation among women religious about the critical questions on the horizon for religious life. It is intended to enable greater contemplative engagement with the emerging questions being faced by the world and church and to strengthen and shape the mission of U.S. women religious. While the process has just begun, I believe it is already strengthening solidarity among women religious and reflecting the complementarity of charisms of individual communities.

Charisms are not to be treated merely as theoretical mission statements, but as the gifts of the Holy Spirit—gifts that move us, renew and reform us, leading us forward and sustaining us if we remain true to them.

As I think about this growing solidarity among many religious and the complementarity of charisms in relation to vocation ministry, I can't help but wonder: "How do we together

support the charism of religious life—in its various expressions—now and into the future? How do we strengthen our efforts and work together to nurture the multiple charisms that reflect the mystery of the sacred and respond to compelling needs of our church and the world? Do we perceive the new that God is doing?"

Throughout the ages many expressions of religious life have evolved. Some expressions are more reflective of the mystical tradition, with an emphasis on prayer and contemplation. Those that emphasize community and stability are more monastic. At the heart of apostolic religious life are mission and ministries. Various expressions reflect different experiences of God, different understandings of church, and different senses of how to be about the mission of Jesus in the world. There is so much richness in the various expressions of living religious life! There is ample room for a multiplicity of charisms of congregations to exist side by side. There is also a rhythm in which some congregations complete their missions and die and new congregations emerge. Joining together to nurture vocations in ways that affirm the various expressions of religious life and recognize the richness of various charisms evidences the reality that God is doing something new in us.

Throughout the development of the various expressions of religious life, there were times when one expression of religious life has attracted more vocations than other expressions. This time is not an exception.

Charism is central, shapes the lifestyle

Vocation ministers in the United States try to respond to the calls of religious vocation in an age when lay persons are taking more responsibility in the church. The NRVC-CARA study of new members indicates that those who are drawn to and remain in religious life do so for a variety of reasons, including a desired lifestyle and the charism of a particular congregation. Given the various expressions of religious life and multiplicity of charisms of individual congregations, it would be shortsighted to focus attention on a single lifestyle as though there is "one right way" to live religious life and any other way is "wrong" or "misguided." It is very important that members and congregations continue to assess whether specific elements of lifestyle are consistent with their unique expression of religious life and the charism of their congregation. However, it is simplistic to assume that a change in elements of lifestyle will result in new vocations. It is also important to realize that, throughout the development of the various expressions of religious life, there were times when one expression of religious life has attracted more vocations than other expressions. This time is not an exception.

While the NRVC-CARA study indicates that some persons who seek religious life look for a clear identity in elements of lifestyle, I believe that, at this time when religious life is in a process of transformation, it is important to emphasize the identity that comes from the prophetic nature of religious life and the charisms of our congregations. While lifestyle reflects some aspects of identity and may be a significant element in what attracts some new members to a congregation, identity is ultimately rooted in the charism of religious life itself and its various expressions, as well as the charism and mission of each individual congregation. The charism of a congregation is at the heart of the identity and life of the community. And so, in vocation ministry, it is important to assist those discerning religious life to explore various expressions of religious life as well as individual charisms of congregations. Even more than elements of lifestyle, the charism of religious life itself, together with the charism of a congregation, must be the primary focuses for discernment.

Sharing our charism, wherever that leads

The study indicates that new members who enter religious life are much more diverse in terms of age, racial and ethnic background and life experience. What is not directly addressed in the study is that persons discerning religious life reflect diverse perspectives around who God is, what "church" is, and how the "spiritual" relates to the "world." Vocation ministers are in a key position to help persons articulate these important aspects in relation to their attraction to religious life. They can help those they accompany to move toward deeper discernment around these significant aspects, integrally connected with the choice of pursuing religious life in a particular congregation.

Nurturing a call to religious life implies the sharing of charism. According to the study, "New members are drawn to religious life by a sense of call and a desire for prayer and spiritual growth…. More than anything else, they were attracted to their particular religious institute by the example of

its members and especially by their sense of joy, their down-to-earth nature, and their commitment and zeal." These desired aspects are grounded in the charism of religious life and reflect the charism of a congregation. If we believe religious life and our charisms are worth sharing, we will be eager to offer them as possibilities to others, regardless of whether they enter our congregation or choose another.

As religious life moves into the future in uncertain times, vocation ministry is a walk in trust. Such a walk requires a conviction that the Spirit is working in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we walk. Let us continue to walk the journey together, knowing that God is present in the many expressions of religious life and the various charisms that reflect so well the multiple facets of the Mystery of God and the many aspects of mission. Truly God is doing something new. Do we not perceive it?

Sister Mary Whited, CPPS died in August, 2011, not long after she wrote this article. She had served as superior general of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, MO, and as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Over the years her ministry focused on initial formation, education, adult faith formation, retreat ministry and facilitation. May she rest in peace.

FIDELITY TO CHARISM LEADS TO VOCATIONS

by Sister Mary Emily Knapp, OP

What do our religious charisms, some of which are hundreds of years old, have to say to the Facebooking, tweeting young people of today? The charism of a congregation is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to the founder, and it defines the distinct spirit of the congregation. In the years that have followed the Second Vatican Council there has been much turmoil in society, and rapid changes have impacted attitudes and expressions of religious life. The Council's call to return to the spirit of our founders continues to serve as an anchor that helps us navigate the powerful currents of culture and not be swept away by them. Fads come and go, but the message of Jesus Christ is a constant one that must be adapted to every time and place. If presented faithfully and lived joyfully within the life of its members, a charism that is "ever ancient, ever new" can have great appeal to today's youth. Steeped in the inspiration of its founder and the traditions of its community, each religious congregation is called to prudently adapt its religious charism to the needs of the contemporary culture. When this is done, the charism of the congregation can become a source of renewal and will have a direct impact on vocation ministry.

When we remain faithful to the original inspiration of our founders, the identity of our religious communities is set in bold relief, and that is appealing for young people who are seeking meaning and clarity amid a culture that tells them anything goes. When members of a religious community are formed in the charism, they know who they are, what they are about, and where they are going. Our world today can

be a confused and confusing one. Fundamental values that once were clearly understood and widely accepted are now being called into question (for example, sexual identity, the complementarity of the sexes, the institution of marriage, the basic unit of the family, etc.). In the midst of this confusion, young people are seeking answers, not in easy black and white fundamentalism, but in the rich tradition and teachings found in the Catholic faith. I am frequently surprised by college-age young women who are reading church documents in search of a deeper understanding of their faith: *Evangelium Vitae, Fides et Ratio*, and the beautiful Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*. I have found that these clear teachings of the church speak to these young women in ways that are life-changing. They desire to give themselves to an ideal that is intelligent and far-reaching. When they seek and find the truth that will set them free, they hold fast to it.

Young people are drawn to this witness of community life that has a deep simplicity and radical humility. There is an innate human desire to be a part of something larger than oneself.

Lifestyle checklist: seeking a noble cause

It is my experience that young people are drawn to religious communities which have a clear and well-defined identity. Often young women come to us with a checklist of characteristics they are seeking in a religious community, such as faithfulness to the church and the sacraments, the practice of prayer (individual and common) and Eucharistic Adoration, the wearing of a religious habit, and devotion to Our Lady. I find they are not inclined to such a way of life out of nostalgia but from the timeless idealism which has always moved young people to give themselves wholeheartedly to a cause. In speaking with the youth of the New Millennium in Rome, during World Youth Day 2000, Pope John Paul II challenged the young not only to give themselves totally to a cause, but to a person who fulfills their highest hopes and desires: "In saying 'yes' to Christ, you say 'yes' to all your noblest ideals." Christ is still calling and young people are still answering.

Young people are also attracted to visible witnesses of faith and to the joyful living of community—both of which are tied to the founding charism of a religious community. Ironically, while we live in a world of radical individualism where people feed on the ability "to do what I want when I want to," young people are drawn to this witness of community life that has a deep simplicity and radical humility. There is an innate human desire to be a part of something larger than oneself. These young people want to belong, to contribute to a cause. Our life in community seems to attract them all the more because it offers the opportunity to imitate those early followers of Christ, whose communal life was both an expression of their faith in him and a source of mutual support and example—a graced atmosphere where love is the common striving.

As Dominicans, the sisters of my own community are called to a "holy preaching," in the spirit of our Holy Father, St. Dominic. For our particular Congregation of St. Cecilia, founded in 1860 for the Christian education of youth, this "holy preaching" continues to be carried out in the classroom. Originally established at the invitation of the bishop in the small diocese of Nashville, TN for the education of the young women, we have continued the teaching mission in changing historical circumstances, seeking to adapt the same educational apostolate to meet the needs of the time. Our sisters are now present in over 36 schools in 21 dioceses (including Sydney, Australia and Vancouver, British Columbia).

Many charisms needed

Through the charism of the Dominican life and the apostolate lived in our congregation, we live the motto of Dominic, *Contemplare et Contemplata Aliis Tradere*, to contemplate and give to others the fruits of our contemplation. While first being called to be the Bride of Christ and placing prayer at the heart of our life, we then can use the energy and enthusiasm that results for spreading the Gospel, through teaching and taking Christ to the world.

For over 2000 years, men and women, in imitation of Jesus Christ, have sought to leave everything behind to devote their lives to him with an undivided heart. They have given their lives to Christ in community and in service of the church, carrying out many different and much needed works for the building up of the kingdom of God. "In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the church shine forth, and in doing so have contributed to the renewal of society" (*Vita Consecrata*, 1).

Today more than ever, the many charisms of religious communities are needed for the up-building of the church. In the measure that we are faithful to our founding charisms, the joy of the Holy Spirit will abound, and many among our youth will be more attuned to the voice of Christ calling them to religious life. This, in turn, will enable the Gospel of Christ to be spread to the ends of the earth. Let us together pray to the Lord of the harvest to give us a spirit of humility and faithfulness to respond to the church's call.

Sister Mary Emily Knapp, OP is vocation minister for the Dominican Sisters of Nashville, TN, which is one of the religious communities identified in the NRVC-CARA study as successfully attracting and retaining new members in recent years.

CHARISM AND THE PROCESS OF RENEWAL

by Brother Seán D. Sammon, FMS

Just what does the word charism mean? St. Paul used the term to describe those gifts given to each of us for the good of everyone, and he was intrigued by their universal presence and uniqueness. He was fond of pointing out that one gift is given to this person and another to that but always for the good of all. Paul also helped us understand that the charism that is part of the life of each of us is an important element in the ongoing change of heart that should mark genuine Christian living.

Pope Paul VI, realizing that the word charism takes on a different meaning when applied to a religious congregation rather than an individual, defined it as nothing more and nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit. He also suggested that allowing that Spirit to work in and through us can give rise to some surprising outcomes. The following story illustrates this point.

In 1686, after more than 30 years of exile in Bilbao, Spain, two Irish women, members of the Dominican congregation, set out once again for the land of their birth. They did so at the urging of the then provincial of the Friars of St. Dominic; he judged it safe enough to establish once again a convent in Galway in the west of Ireland.

Rising to the challenge Sisters Juliana Nolan and Mary Lynch made their way home in an open boat. They did so with full knowledge that upon their arrival in Ireland they would face many unknowns. When the full and final history of Dominican life in the church is written, these two women will hold prominent places. They endured exile, war, political upheaval, the crushing anti-Catholic penal laws, hazardous journeys, and financial insecurity to reestablish in the land of their birth the Dominican way of life. Mary was 60 as she took up this task; Juliana was 75.

Who but the Holy Spirit could give any of us the courage to do what these two women did? But becoming involved with the Spirit of God can be dangerous business indeed. The genuine renewal of religious life, however, cannot be accomplished unless we are willing to risk that involvement and, in so doing, reclaim the charism of our respective congregations. Understandably, doing so will involve a cost, and at times the price we are asked to pay can be very high indeed. If you and I are seriously interested in the renewal of religious life today, however, we need to put aside excuses such as age, temperament, fear of the future, etc. and get on with the task at hand.

The genuine renewal of religious life cannot be accomplished unless we are willing to risk involvement with the Spirit of God and in so doing reclaim the charism of our respective congregations.

Mary as model of openness to God

Mary of Nazareth is a prime example of a person who lived her life in the Spirit of God. Paul VI reminds us that the future mother of Jesus had the good sense to question God's messenger, and Luke tells us that the angel's news "greatly disturbed" her. And if we believe that she had free will, we will have to admit that Mary could also have said "no" to God's invitation. Instead, she said "yes" and in so doing changed the course of her life and that of human history.

If we look to Mary as a model of how to respond to the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the life of our congregations, we must also never forget that Mary was a woman of this earth. She suffered, experienced doubt, was joyful, and, like most women of her day, was probably illiterate. She also had to grow in her understanding from Jesus as son to Jesus as Lord.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux tells us that Mary is worthy of honor, not because she received special privileges, but rather because, like us, she suffered in the dark night of faith.

Over the centuries we have managed to domesticate this remarkable woman of faith. She is worthy of honor, though, not because she was the mother of Jesus but rather because she was his disciple. By imitating this aspect of her, we put ourselves in the best position to address the challenges that renewal presents to us today.

Charism and structures

Over time charisms give rise to structures. They become its institutional face and guarantee its valid expression. While all charisms develop structures, the structures can also change from time to time. Such a development occurs in response to changed circumstances or when the structures in place no longer capture the experience of the congregation and its members. We call this process renewal.

> We can never reduce charism to tradition alone. On the one hand, it places restrictions upon us; but on the other, it challenges us to go beyond ourselves.

Sometimes it occurs slowly over time; on other occasions it is thrust upon us by circumstances. The past four decades of religious life have been marked by a number of dramatic changes. More than a few observers would identify Vatican II's call for the adaptation and renewal of religious life as being the source of the upheaval that has occurred. Indeed, so pronounced has been the change that has taken place in our way of life that quite a number of commentators have suggested that we are undergoing a paradigm shift in our understanding of religious life. What does that mean exactly, and what bearing does it have on charism?

Paradigms are constructs that help you and me make sense of our experience. Theologian Jon Sobrino compares them to the hinges on a door. Moments of crisis and unhinging occur when the old and worn-out hinges can no longer support the weight of the entire door. Such a situation calls for the creation of new hinges so that the door may once again turn, and turn well.

Paradigms are useful in so far as what they help explain outweighs what they fail to explain. When the reverse is true, a paradigm shift takes place. A new model is required to explain the change. Most of us have read about past paradigms of religious life, including those from the ages of monasticism, mendicants, and more recently the era of apostolic religious institutes. If the paradigm that helps explain our way of life is shifting today, the expression of our charism cannot help but be affected. During a time of reform in religious life, we are called to undertake a process of discernment and to return to the spirit of our original charism. The challenge we face during a time of renewal or paradigmatic shift is different: reimagining our charism anew in light of the signs of the times. And that means having to deal with the Holy Spirit.

Vatican II taught us that you cannot contain the Holy Spirit. The charisms of our congregations need to be lived and preserved today not only by members; they must also be developed and deepened in union with the People of God, who are themselves in a state of continual growth.

The Council also reminded us that we are not to put limits on God's generosity. Prior to Vatican II conventional wisdom held otherwise. Most people thought that charisms were restricted to particular religious institutes and their members. Ignatius's charism appeared to reside with the Jesuits alone, Francis's solely with Franciscans, Dominic's inspiration available exclusively to members of his Order of Preachers. Today, however, we realize that the charisms that came into our world through the founders of religious congregations are touching the hearts and capturing the imagination of both the members of those congregations and laity alike.

A final thought about charism is that we can never reduce it to tradition alone. On the one hand, it places restrictions upon us; but on the other, it challenges us to go beyond ourselves. We are called to maintain a careful balance between both. To do so helps everyone understand the difference that exists between the apostolic work of one group and another.

The charism of any group is a vibrant, life-giving and self-correcting tradition, rooted in the interaction of past tradition with the call of the Holy Spirit to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. Have no doubt: the Spirit of God who was so active and alive in the founders of our congregations does long to live and breathe in you and me today, religious and laity alike. ■

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As religious communities reflect on the results of the groundbreaking NRVC-CARA study of new members, a few key questions can help focus the discussion.

Six essential questions for every religious community

By Sister Doris Gottemoeller, RSM

BY NOW THE RESULTS OF THE NRVC-CARA study of recent vocations to religious life have been widely disseminated, at least in summary form. By way of follow-up the National Religious Vocation Conference convened the "Moving Forward in Hope" symposium which produced a National Action Plan. In time we expect the various stakeholder groups will follow through on their commitments. In the meantime, and more significantly, individual institutes can profitably use this information for their own reflection and planning. Of course it would be easy to ignore or dismiss the findings. Some objections might be:

- The expectations of the younger members reflected here are naive, uninformed, immature, and, perhaps, nostalgic.
- The kind of religious life desired by many of these younger members represents a model which is no longer relevant. We have grown past it and evolved into something different.
- We are too busy. These are matters for leadership or vocation personnel.

But if we recognize the findings as valuable data—not everything that could be said by younger, newer members surely—but as valuable and challenging information, we can use the study as a springboard for congregational reflection. In order to facilitate such a reflection, I offer six inter-related questions to bring the congregation's beliefs and practices into dialogue with the new information.

1. Do we want new members?

If so, why? This is a challenging starting point. While we may be tempted to say *yes* without much thought, the question deserves careful thought because everything that follows is a consequence of this. The *why* is also critically important. Is there a reason beyond self-preservation and which goes to the heart of our identity?

Do we believe that religious life is a gift to the church, without which its Gospel witness would be diminished? If the answer is positive, then the data is important.

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2. Can we imagine changing in any tangible way?

In a few cases change may be unrealistic, and that needs to be faced. However, for congregations that are viable, but have received few or no new members in recent years, this is an important question. Not everything can be blamed on factors external to religious life, such as low birth rates, a culture of relativism or materialism, scandals in the church, etc. At some point we also have to look within and identify customs and practices which inhibit us from welcoming new members or which make us invisible or unattractive to them.

> Maintaining the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives requires intentionality beyond what many of us knew in earlier days.

3. Can we show young people attractive examples of community life?

This is not about having a few showcase communities that are especially designated as welcoming communities but about multiple examples, all characterized by an attractive and welcoming spirit. They can be of various sizes, with similar or diverse ministries, but all would have members fully engaged in a communal lifestyle.

Sometimes communities that have lived together comfortably for several years may even resist inviting current members who are in transition to join them, let alone welcoming an inquirer. One of the obstacles to achieving a welcoming environment may be lack of suitable housing. A commitment to vibrant community life requires a congregation to make available housing beyond apartments that can only accommodate one or two members.

4. Are Eucharist and communal prayer animating principles of the community's life together?

Because of the contemporary clergy shortage, not even all of our retirement centers can provide a daily liturgy. In addition members in active ministry may be on different schedules in different locations, precluding a common experience of Eucharist. Thus maintaining the centrality of the Eucharist in our lives requires intentionality beyond what many of us knew in earlier days. Daily participation is an affirmation of our ecclesial identity, an expression of oneness with God's people in all of their diversity, and a recommitment to Gospel mission. Similarly our communal prayer, oriented to the feasts and seasons of the church year, affirms our ecclesial identity, unites us with the needs of suffering humanity, and sends us forth in mission.

5. Are all of our active members engaged in ministry?

Occasionally I hear the comment made about a sister who has transitioned out of her current ministry, "She has to find a job." Yes, it is important that as many of our members as possible find work with appropriate remuneration and benefits. But work that is appropriate for religious involves an ecclesial mission, whether or not it is attached to a congregational or church institution. There has to be a Gospel intentionality and accountability that is an authentic expression of the congregation's mission. Wherever religious minister, they should feel comfortable representing to colleagues that they are there "on mission" from their religious congregation. Perhaps it is in this very setting that a potential new member will begin to consider the possibility of a religious call.

6. Are we willing to support a full time vocation director?

Depending on how we answer the previous questions, the vocation minister's work will likely be fruitful. The vocation director will have a credible story to tell and convincing evidence to back it up.

These six questions are matters for individual and communal discernment and commitment. No vocation director can succeed if the congregation is indifferent to his or her efforts or unable to give a credible witness to his or her description of religious life.

One of the most potent instruments of change in a religious congregation is new members. Just as today's senior members were instruments of change and adaptation in the decades after Vatican II, new members today will change us in ways we can't anticipate. What a blessing it will be if those new paths bring us closer to the Gospel vision we share! ■

A survey of how vocation ministers conduct "Come and See" events reveals what vocation ministers are doing, what works and what doesn't.

What are the best practices for "Come and See" events?

By Joel Schorn

THIS PAST SUMMER *HORIZON* ASKED members of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) to respond to a questionnaire about their discernment events. The survey was prompted in part by the 2009 NRVC-CARA study of recent vocations to religious life, which highlighted the importance of discernment events in attracting new members. A total of 130 vocation ministers completed the survey questions and filled in specific information about their discernment events.

The results presented here reflect what communities are doing and what they find effective or ineffective. At the same time the survey information might challenge vocation ministers to consider other discernment event methods and perhaps raise questions about what they are now doing.

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Inviting discerners to discernment events

Almost everyone reported using some kind of personal invitation to discernment events. Other methods a majority of respondents used were: community websites, e-mail and parish bulletins. Fewer than half publicized their events on Facebook or the VISION Vocation Network Events page (a space on the website vocation-network.org where vocation ministers can place free announcements about vocation events). More than two-thirds of respondents did not limit, or only sometimes limited, publicity to specific geographic areas.

Age ranges of discerners

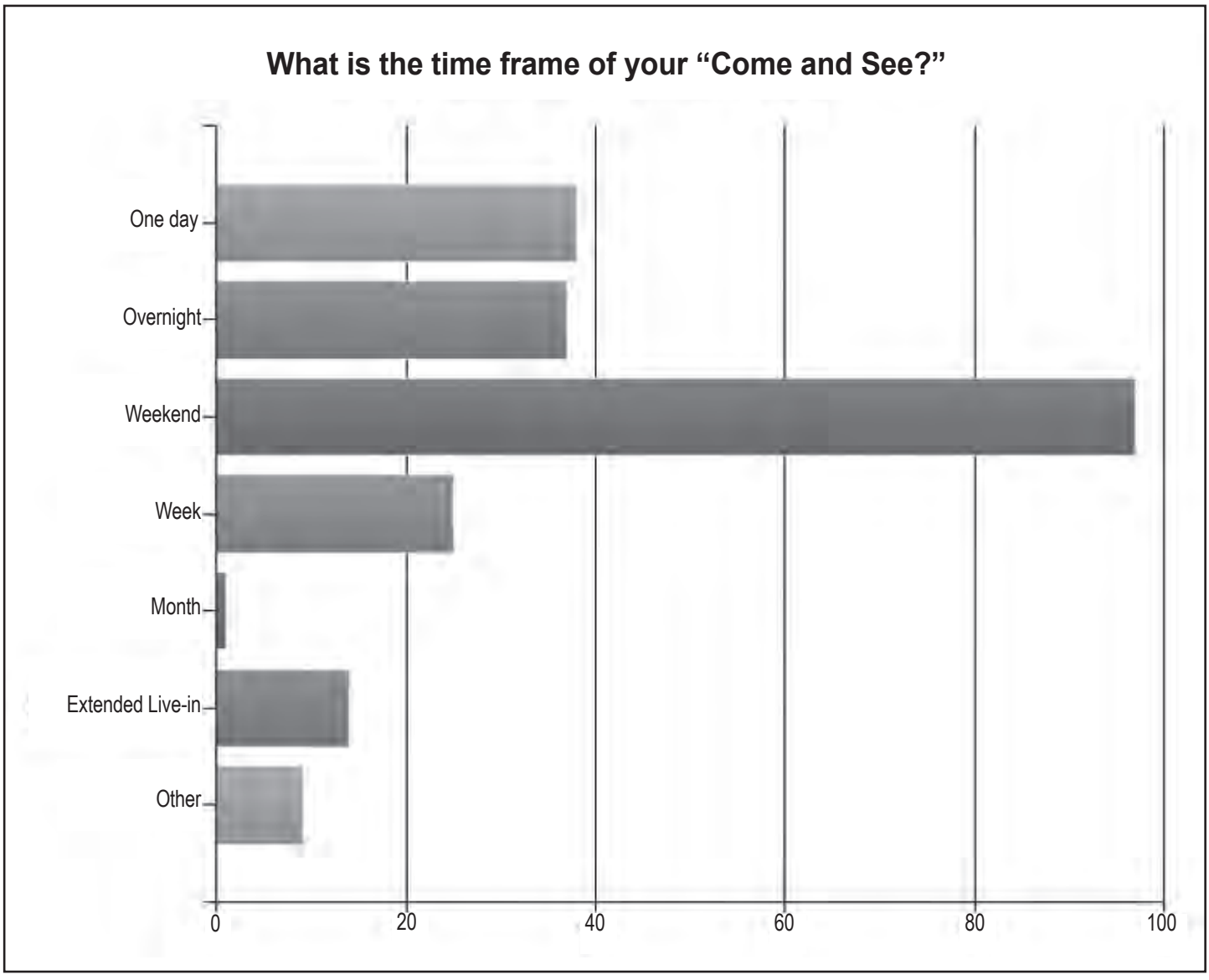
A large majority of communities accepted discernment participants between the ages of 18 and 40, with a significant but somewhat smaller number raising the age threshold to 30 or 35 or the ceiling to 50 or 55. A relatively small number went over 50 or below 18 or reported only a minimum age limit or no age limits.

Screening attendees

By far the most common form of screening those who wanted to attend a discernment event was through direct personal contact between the vocation director and the attendee, either in person, by phone, e-mail or in a couple of cases with Skype. A large number of communities recruited discernment event participants not from the general public but from people they were acquainted with already or who had previously inquired: associate members, students at their community's sponsored institution, etc. Some also sought referrals and references from parish clergy, and others did standard screening of participant background and interest-level, but almost an equal number (12 percent) did no screening at all. A smaller number evaluated attendees during or immediately after am event.

Scope of discernment events

Almost three quarters of discernment events addressed both general life discernment and discernment to a particular community, but not many focused only on general life discernment. Several events were aimed at helping to discern a vocation to religious life, whether that meant the possibility of joining their community or not.



Collaboration with other groups

Many communities have engaged in collaborative efforts with others at some point, either within their provinces, with other congregations, or through their NRVC region, though some noted that they regularly collaborate with other communities but not for discernment events. Many also reported working with diocesan vocation offices or otherwise cooperating at the diocesan level on discernment events. Almost as many who did collaborate, however, reported they did not.

Structured around a theme?

Not surprisingly the most common focus for those who organized their discernment events around a theme was the process of discerning a life's call, a vocation to religious life in a particular community, or both. Almost 70 percent of respondents indicated this focus. Several communities also structured their events around an introduction to community life, the ministries of the community, and prayer and Scripture. Over 40 percent also utilized the liturgical year in organizing event content—especially the seasons of Advent, Lent and Holy Week—or they built the content around professions, jubilees or other events in the community.

Use of formal discernment tools

Most communities did not use a formal, existing discernment resource, like a book, pamphlet, or course. A number, however, did and identified that they used one or more of the following:

"Come and See" quick facts

• 73 percent of religious institutes offer "Come and See" experiences.

• 68 percent of new members who took part in "Come and See" events found them "somewhat or very much" helpful, with younger members particularly positive.

—Source: NRVC-CARA study of new members

- Father Ray Carey's behavioral assessment tool
- Vocation ministry resources such as "I Heard God Call My Name" by Sister Timothy McHatten, OP; "God, Give Me a Discerning Heart"; *Vocations Anonymous* by Sister Kathleen Bryant, RSC; and the *Jesus Calls Women* DVD
- *Ten Evenings with God* by Ilia Delio (Liguori Publications)
- *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Loyola Press) and other books by Margaret Silf
- *Three Key Questions* video by Father Michael Himes

A fair number used the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola (in addition to the Silf book above) or another presentation of Ignatian discernment. About the same number utilized existing community discernment resources and someone skilled in using them. Others mentioned practices like spiritual direction, *lectio divina*, the Liturgy of the Hours, and devotions. One respondent expressed the need for new resources in this area.

"Come and See" organizers drew heavily on the presence of novices and others in formation, seminarians, student brothers and other candidates.

Involving others in the community

Most vocation directors communicated news of an upcoming discernment event by e-mail blasts to members, information in the community's newsletter, or via the community's website. Only two reported using Facebook or a blog. Most relied on word-of-mouth and personal communication with others in the community, and in several cases professed members were asked to recruit people to attend the discernment event.

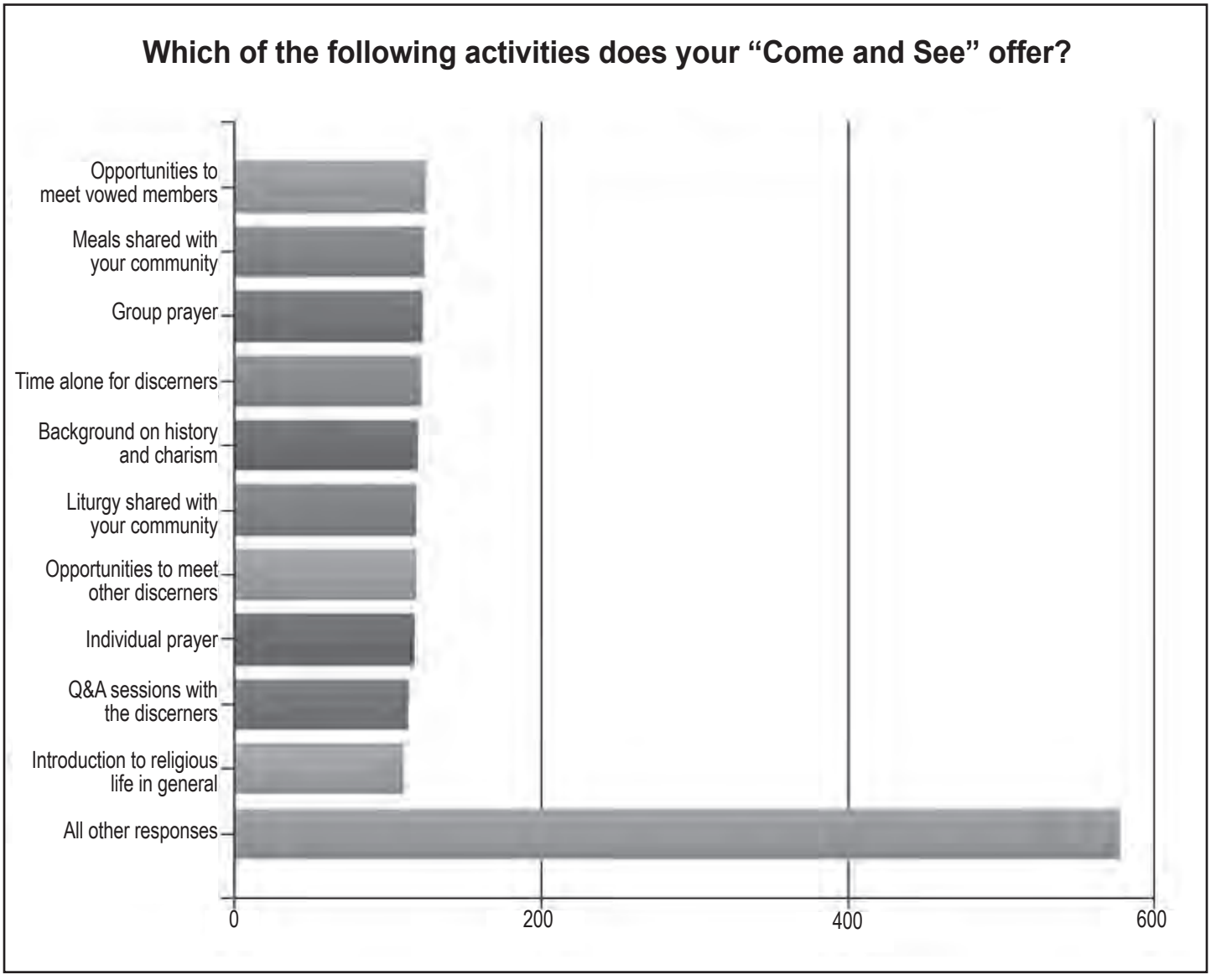
During the events themselves the vocation/formation/new membership teams naturally played central roles. "Come and See" organizers also drew heavily on the presence of novices and others in formation, seminarians, student brothers, and other candidates. While a number of communities involved retired sisters in the events, many also had newer, younger members be part of the event leadership. Some vocation directors opened participation in the event to anyone in

the community, while others invited particular members in order to insure a cross-section of community representation.

They also called on members who were qualified to make presentations on vocation discernment and various aspects of community life. In some cases a community's associate members or vocation committee that may include lay members were part of planning and staging the event. Some communities also made a point of including congregational leadership, if available, as well as representatives of different community ministries.

One respondent spelled out in detail the way she involves others in her community in discernment events:

- A letter is written every January to every member of the community reminding them of National Vocation Awareness Week and offering suggestions on how they might continue to be a welcoming and inviting community.
- Every sister receives brochures throughout the year to distribute to women who might be interested in attending a discernment event, and they are also asked to post them in places where a young woman might pick them up and be interested in more information.
- In August a list is published of all upcoming com-



munity vocation events for the entire year. Also listed are events in which they collaborate with other religious communities as sponsors, for example, Nun Runs and various places where they will have their vocation booth. Members are reminded that every sister is a vocation promoter—that is in their constitutions.

- All sisters in initial formation and temporary profession are asked to be part of the discernment weekends; they know it is a requirement.

- Some sisters are engaged during the weekend as panel presenters, and some are invited to be "companions" at a liturgy, a noon meal, and about an hour of one-on-one conversation with the discerner.

On this last point, several communities had professed members act as partners/companions/mentors for each discerner throughout the event.

Kinds of activities at discernment events

The chart on page 18 shows the fairly even distribution of the main activities taking place during "Come and See" events. "Other" included the following, presumably in addition to some or all of the things mentioned in the chart:

- One-on-one meetings with the vocation director
- Opportunity to meet retired sisters
- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- Theological reflection
- Spiritual counseling
- Immersion in community life
- Service opportunities or other exposure to ministries
- Liturgy with the community or at a local parish
- Free time
- Emmaus walks
- Singing
- Introduction to formation process
- Overview of ministries
- Art
- Facility tours
- Visits with associate members, oblates, etc.
- Sightseeing

Charging discerners for the event?

A large majority of communities, 75 percent, did not charge discerners for attending a discernment event. Of those who do, amounts ranged from $10-$50, especially if an overnight stay and meals were involved. Many also asked for or left open the possibility of a free-will offering. A significant number, though not most, provided subsidies, in particular for travel.

Follow-up

Vocation directors overwhelmingly used phone calls and e-mail to follow-up with discerners who have attended a discernment event. Almost as many also extended an invitation to a future community event—longer discernment retreats, meals, service opportunities, vow ceremonies, spiritual direction, and others. A smaller but substantial number also wrote letters or cards or had face-to-face meetings. A handful used the event evaluation as a springboard for further contact, enlisted a mentor from the community to contact the discerner, and/or put the attendee on a newsletter mailing list. A few had no follow-up at all or were unstructured about it.

Most said the best things about an event were, on the one hand, personal contact and one-on-one time with the discerner and, on the other hand, the value of the discerner meeting the community and getting involved in community life.

New media did a little better in this category than others, with more respondents mentioning using Facebook as a follow-up tool as well as connecting via blogs, text messaging and chat rooms.

Most and least effective practices

The approaches and activities reported to be the most and least effective show many of the tensions those in vocation ministry face; what worked for some didn't for others. Still, some fairly clear patterns emerged regarding what communities found to be more successful.

Many respondents talked about the importance of balancing the communal and personal aspects of the discernment event. Most said the best things about an event were, on the one hand, personal contact and one-on-one time with the discerner and, on the other hand, the value of the discerner meeting the community and getting involved in community

life. One respondent reported that what discerners want to know about most is what it is like to live in a particular community day-in and day-out.

A large number said it was important to have the discerners participate in community prayer, meals, recreation and celebrations, but at the same time they should have time for personal prayer, reflection and contemplation—what one respondent called "processing time." The challenge was to find the balance between talking and quiet.

One difficult or out-of-place discerner can negatively affect the experience for the others. Having a good mix of discerners was important—a result screening of participants could bring about.

There was also a lot of support for having discerners meet members of the community in formation. Other practices communities recommended: inviting discerners with whom the community is already acquainted; allowing time for personal sharing; offering question-and-answer sessions; having a member of the community companion or "shadow" a discerner for the duration of the event; and cooperating with other congregations and dioceses in organizing discernment events.

When it came to least effective practices, in one case a respondent noted difficulties with getting pastors to publicize the discernment event. Another cautioned those conducting the event to really listen to participants, rather than talking too much about their own experiences of vocation and religious life.

Group dynamics among the discerners was also an issue. Some respondents said it was important to cultivate the participants as a group—to have them connect with one another. At the same time it was noted that one difficult or out-of-place discerner can negatively affect the experience for the others. Having a good mix of discerners was important—a result screening of participants could bring about.

One area of differing responses involved just what to present to discerners. While many agreed it was good to avoid lengthy presentations and lectures during which the discerners merely sit and listen, some saw the need to provide information on the nature of religious life in general—because discerners know so little about it and may be familiar with it through only one community—while others thought getting too in-depth about religious life was overwhelming for discerners.

To address these issues, some communities said they were moving or had already moved to events that begin with a general life discernment model, possibly going on from there to discernment in the context of religious life and their community in particular.

A second area of difference had to do with scheduling. Some communities used short events, while others favored longer ones to give participants a better sense of the community. Larger questions, however, arose about whether to schedule discernment events at the same time each year; whether to repeat the same content and format for every event; the difficulty of scheduling around the busy lives of young people; and how to get discerners to commit to attending and actually showing up.

Another less effective practice some respondents mentioned: having the event off-site away from the community's actual residence (but, some said not to bore the discerners with facility tours!). Some noted the problem of discerners receiving a negative image of the community during their visit and stressed the importance of providing a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere, while at the same time not "putting on a show" that inaccurately reflects daily community life.

It's my hope that by showing what communities are and are not doing with their discernment events, the results of the survey will provide a kind of clearinghouse of recommended discernment event ideas. They also offer communities a mirror to hold up to their own events in order to see what they might do differently. "Come and See" events seem to be here to stay as a useful way to give discerners a taste of religious life and a time to reflect on their individual calling. ■

The Sisters of Mercy are building on their "pockets of energy" to encourage the kind of communal life that young adults seek and to help new members feel at home.

Strategies to address the lifestyle gap, help newcomers fit in

By Carol Schuck Scheiber

VOCATION MINISTERS KNOW it is hard to shift the culture of a religious community in a new direction. Getting everyone on board with the latest vocation push may not always work, but an approach that one community is using successfully is to "build on pockets of energy." In a conversation with *HORIZON*, vocation minister Sister Sheila Stevenson, RSM, with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (in the New York, Pennsylvania, and Pacific West Community) discussed four strategies that tap into the enthusiasm of members willing to make commitments and adapt to different styles of living: Welcoming Communities, Host Communities, a Mentor Program and Companioning Groups.

Welcoming Communities

Sister Sheila's community shares a problem illuminated in the NRVC-CARA study of new members: a discrepancy exists between what the study shows that young adults are seeking in terms of lifestyle and what communities have to offer. Specifically, young adults tend to be attracted to habits, large-group living, corporate ministries, and frequent prayer in community.

Communities whose lifestyles have changed in ways that minimize these characteristics are asking themselves whether it is practical, authentic or even desirable to embrace these traits. Others are asking whether it is possible for communities to offer aspects of these desired traits.

For their part, the Mercies consciously studied the issues and chose to form "Welcoming Communities" which could offer two of the sought-after characteristics: large-group living and frequent communal prayer. (The other sought-after characteristics—habits and corporate ministries—would be much harder to introduce. Mercy Sisters typically do not wear a habit, and the institute has turned a number of its corporate ministries over to lay leadership.)

The Welcoming Communities are households in which women seriously inquiring about the Mercy Sisters or in the early stages of incorporation can live and experience a warm embrace from a community of three or more people. "Vocation ministers work so hard to get people in the door…. It's very helpful to have a place where you know people will be welcomed and accepted. Being able to have a positive experience of communal life is more than

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half the battle for inquirers," says Sister Sheila.

The Mercy Welcoming Communities consist of three or more professed members who commit themselves to praying together most days and having days of reflection as a community. On a daily basis they invest their energies into both spending time with and adjusting to new people and new personalities.

The Mercy Sisters now have eight Welcoming Communities in the U.S. To form them, the vocation teams introduced the concept of Welcoming Communities to leadership and then to membership through chapters, assemblies, community meetings and newsletters. Next, the Leadership Team both invited particular sisters to consider living in these communities and called for applications from vowed members interested in living in them. A discernment process was held with the vowed members willing to be considered, and finally the Leadership Team selected who would live in the Welcoming Communities.

"Not everyone is called to live in a Welcoming Community," Sister Sheila points out. "It takes energy, flexibility and the willingness to be open, especially to newer, younger members."

"Not everyone is called to live in a Welcoming Community," Sister Sheila points out. "It takes energy, flexibility and the willingness to be open, especially to newer, younger members. It also takes time and commitment to learn, understand and integrate the culture from which the newer members are coming. There has to be a commitment to being present regularly in community and to engaging with the incorporation (formation) process, which includes meetings with the incorporation minister, evaluations and open dialogue with the newer member."

Host Communities for short visits

Around the same time that the Mercy Sisters began forming Welcoming Communities, they also asked their various households to consider making a smaller commitment: to serve as a Host Community for an inquirer, having a woman visit for up to three weeks. Host communities are usually households with an extra bedroom or two. Host

Part of the Welcoming Community in Rochester, NY gathers to celebrate with Sister Laurie Orman, RSM (right) after her final vows ceremony. Sister Carolyn Rosica, RSM is on the left and Sister Marie Joseph Crowley, RSM appears in the center.

community members commit to spending time with the inquirer individually and as a group. They live their usual communal and ministerial lives while welcoming the inquirer to share in their lives.

An ongoing challenge for the Mercy Sisters—and for many religious institutes—is that contemporary living space for many apostolic congregations prohibits large-group living. Over the past 30 or more years religious communities have lost many large parish and hospital convents and have moved to smaller apartments or houses in neighborhoods. Economics also played a part in this move, and usually three sisters moved to a three-bedroom living space and four moved to a space for four people. These new arrangements eliminated extra space for hosting guests.

Mentors and Companioning Groups

In spite of challenges, the Mercies also took another approach to new membership that builds on what Sister Sheila calls "positive pockets of energy." They now assign mentors to incoming members. Mentors act as a support and sounding board to a woman in formation, helping her integrate into the community. They help a woman in formation to negotiate both the subtle and the important aspects of the Mercy culture: finding a seat in the chapel, understanding customs, learning about the community's history and documents, negotiating community living, etc.

The Detroit Welcoming Community shares a light moment. Gathered are Sister Renee Kettering, RSM (front) and (left to right) Sisters Mary Kelly, RSM; Maureen Mulcrone, RSM; Karen Donahue, RSM; and Marie Henderson, RSM.

A fourth Mercy strategy that builds on positive energy within membership has been to form Companioning Groups that involve both vowed members and those in the incorporation process. Some of these groups have existed for several years. They gather every four to six weeks to reflect on some aspect of the spiritual life or religious life. Companioning Groups have studied and reflected upon articles from Catholic periodicals, statements by the Mercy Sisters, the Mercy constitutions, direction statements from chapters or assemblies, and reading materials focusing on contemporary church issues.

"These groups," says Sister Sheila, "have been very helpful in introducing newer members to professed members and engaging them in deep conversation about important topics." Through the Companioning Groups, women in formation also experience different ways of praying since the leadership for prayer is shared among the people involved.

Because the Mercy Sisters have been consciously making choices for several years now to "build on the pockets of energy" in their institute, says Sister Sheila, "The gap is closing between what is and what newer members want. The newer members are seeing what is realistic; and the professed members are saying, 'We can make these adjustments.' We went bit by bit from a highly structured existence to a very unstructured one. It takes time to reconsider some of those changes and to make new choices." ■

A Filipina vocation director explores the cultural world of Filipino-Americans and what it means for vocation ministers.

Understanding and working with Filipino candidates

By Sister Lovina Francis Pammit, OSF

LAST YEAR I WENT TO A CELEBRATION at a local parish of the feast of the Infant of Prague, called "Santo Niño" by Filipinos. As I sang hymns in the Cebuano language during Mass, I felt a surge of pride for the many Filipinos in the Chicago area who traveled all the way to suburban Frankfort, IL for this occasion. I don't even speak Cebuano (one of the many languages spoken in the Philippines) but I could somewhat understand the homily given by the pastor, a Polish priest who was missioned in Cebu, Philippines years ago. After Mass, the feasting continued with food, dancing and socializing.

I was impressed by the way the pastor welcomed the assembly and how he seemed totally at home with this Filipino community. I was watching the young people perform folk dances when I realized that this type of gathering was ideal for connecting with any minority group. Being a Filipina or "Pinay," this event was a rare treat for me—a taste of home—but as a vocation director, I also saw this event as an opportunity to plant seeds through my presence and by building relationships with the people I met.

Religious vocations increasing

It is worthwhile to reach out to the Filipino community for many reasons, including the fact that Asians and Pacific Islanders in general tend to join religious orders at a higher rate than in the past. The 2009 NRVC-CARA study results show that 2 percent of religious community members in perpetual vows are Asian/Pacific Islander, yet 14 percent of those in initial formation in religious communities claim that ethnicity. This 12 percent disparity between professed and new members tells me that there are more prospects out there.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops estimates that the Catholic population in the United States included more than 1.5 million Filipino Catholics as of 2001. (Filipino-born individuals are the second largest immigrant group in the United States, second to Mexicans.) In order to reach the prospective candidates within the Catholic Filipino population, I suggest that we vocation ministers become more proactive and intentional in finding where they are, in being present to their community in the places they

Sister Lovina Francis Pammit, OSF is a Franciscan Sister of the Sacred Heart and is currently co-director of vocation ministry for her congregation. Her ministry includes collaborative service with groups including Chicago Archdiocesan Vocation Association, Joliet Area Vocation Association, National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association and other youth and young adult groups in the Chicagoland area.

gather, in building relationships, and in inviting them. We also need to be prepared when they do come.

My congregation, the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart, like most in the United States, is made up mainly of Caucasian members. (The NRVC-CARA study states that on the average, 94 percent of finally professed members are Caucasian.) Being a small community mostly living in the Midwest, my congregation is not as ethnically diverse as an international community would be. Nevertheless my community currently has five professed sisters who are from the Philippines. If each of us talked about our vocation journey, our stories would not necessarily indicate that our attraction to this community was due to the community's diversity, nor that we were able to identify with sisters coming from the same ethnic culture. The presence of members of the same ethnic or cultural background helps, but in the long run, the reason for entering must be deeper—such as identifying with the charism and mission of the community and feeling a sense of "at-homeness," that one's unique gifts fit in with the rest of the members.

But what about communities with 94 percent Caucasian members? How can they begin to reach out to Filipinos? I believe that our communities need to take action to open wide the doors of our hearts and homes to prospective candidates from all ethnic groups in the church today. We need to gear ourselves for a multicultural community with its diverse ways of relating and being. We may not have to go so far as to learn a new language, as did the pastor I mentioned earlier, but I am sure it wouldn't hurt!

Those working with Filipino candidates—or even just reaching out to the Filipino community—can start by learning some essential elements of the culture, beginning with the sense of group identity.

Filipino norms

Those working with Filipino candidates—or even just reaching out to the Filipino community—can start by learning some essential elements of the culture, beginning with the sense of group identity. For Filipinos being in relationship with the group or community is very important. In the Philippines, people value a sense of *pakikisama* or *pakikipagkapwa* (literally translated as getting along with others). This concept is more than mere tolerance. One scholar, Katrin de Guia, defines this core value as "shared identity." Vocation and formation ministers might recognize the potential of this core value to develop in young people a sense of solidarity and identification with the "other" (those who are different, the poor, the marginalized, etc.).

This concept of shared identity with a group begins in the home. The family, as the basic unit in Philippine society, consists of the immediate family plus extended family, i.e. grandparents or one or two other relatives—usually an unmarried aunt or uncle. Distant relatives are referred to as

aunt or uncle. A sense of hierarchy and respect for elders is apparent in how older siblings, cousins and peers are addressed with an honorific title. For example, in the Tagalog language, younger siblings address the older brother as *kuya*, and the older sister as *ate*. (These titles can also be used with the first name, such as Kuya Jun or Ate Linda). An older adult or stranger is addressed using a plural form as a way of conferring respect. Additional honorific words *ho* or *po* are also used for these elders. For instance, when a young person is about to leave, he or she would say, "*Aalis na po ako,*" loosely translated as, "With your permission, I shall leave now." When entering a house, children and younger people ask for a blessing from the elders saying, "*Mano po*" and either kissing the elder's hand or placing the elder's hand on their forehead.

Knowing something about Filipino respect for authority will help us understand certain protocols when dealing with candidates and their families.

Compared to Americans, Filipinos are much more likely to use "Mr." or "Mrs." when addressing strangers, business superiors or colleagues, teachers and professors, and those not within the family or circle of friends. If used within the neighborhood, the title *Mang* and *Aling* would be used with the first name instead of Mr., Mrs. or Ms. with the last name (i.e. Mang Rafael or Aling Rosa). Once relationships have been established, children are encouraged to call trusted adults *Tito* or *Tita* (Uncle or Auntie), with the implication that these adults are to be treated with respect like the elders in their own family. In some families children may address adults without the *po* and *ho* honorific words and use regular pronouns as an expression of intimacy and affection. This might not happen, however, until children grow up to be adults themselves.

Implications for vocation ministry

What can vocation ministers gather from these titles and forms of interaction? First of all knowing something about Filipino respect for authority will help us understand certain protocols when dealing with candidates and their families. For example, in a Filipino home parents and older siblings have a strong influence in decision-making for the family, including vocational decisions regarding adult children and siblings.

Another implication is that relationships, people and the common good are more important than goals or objectives. We need to note that lateness in arriving or in starting an event is not considered rude in the Filipino community, unless those involved have been in the U.S. for a while. The vocation director must be sensitive and understanding during candidate interviews and when visiting with the family. And, yes, it is important to get to know the family and establish relationships and trust by visiting the candidate's home and by encouraging the family to visit the community and ministry sites.

Another thing to note from the way Filipinos address each other has to do with relating to hierarchy or authority. If your community's leadership style is more circular or based on a servant-leadership model, this could be counter-cultural for a Filipino candidate. Or, if a vocation minister prefers to be called by his or her first name, a Filipino candidate might be uncomfortable with this arrangement. The sources provided at the end of this article provide further details about relating to Filipino candidates and their families.

Characteristics of Filipino Catholicism

Unlike other Asians, Filipinos are mostly Christian because the Philippines were under Spanish rule for over 300 years. Some 80 to 85 percent of Filipinos are Roman Catholic. Scholars of Filipino culture often refer to "folk Catholicism"—an integration of cultural beliefs and devotions with Catholic practices. I would simply note that most Filipinos born in the U.S. adhere to traditional devotional practices and express their Catholic faith in their own way. For example, American Filipino Catholics hold *fiestas* (feasts) to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary (a common practice in the northern Philippines) or the Infant of Prague (common in the central Philippines). Novenas are popular, including the Our Lady of Fatima block rosary—an affair that involves prayers at several host houses. There is also the *Simbang Gabi* (or *Misa de Gallo* in Spanish, literally translated as "rooster Mass"), an advent novena in which people go to Mass early in the morning (as the cock crows), although in the U.S. *Simbang Gabi* is held in the evening.

Because Filipinos have retained their basic Asian core

values and have been influenced by many cultures, including that of Spain, they have learned to integrate these various elements into daily life and religious practices. For example, some Filipino women might do things like offering to a saint a rice cake and egg along with a lit candle and flowers. They might also make such an offering to commemorate the anniversary of a relative's death. The food offering might be puzzling, even alarming, to Americans, but to Filipinos, it is a customary Catholic devotion. Vocation ministers might note that if their congregation has its own special devotions and practices, Filipino candidates would be most receptive to them because this helps them build traditions that identify themselves with the community.

Fortunately more and more of these Filipino celebrations and devotions are now being held in U.S. dioceses, thereby engaging more active participation and leadership in the Filipino-American community. This increase in participation and leadership means that our religious communities, by engaging in these events, might benefit by making connections with our Filipino brothers and sisters. Beyond participating in these events, perhaps religious communities would consider providing space for such events. This kind of collaboration would build relationships and be a starting point for fostering a vocation culture within the Filipino community.

Attitudes about religious, hospitality, duty

In the Philippines, priests and religious are highly respected, sometimes placed on a pedestal. In most cases churchgoers there never interact with their parish priests, except during sacraments and when asking the priests to bless religious objects. In some situations, a relationship may be established between the priest and the family when the priest is asked to bless a home or to say Mass for a special occasion. Despite this distance between priests and parishioners, lay leaders abound in the Philippines. Women especially take the lead in community devotional practices and in hosting parish events. Filipinos who have been in the U.S. for years are still very respectful of priests and religious but tend to be more comfortable interacting with them.

One issue that could either be beneficial or a problem is boundary setting. In a home in the Philippines most things are shared in the family, so there are limited personal boundaries when it comes to things and space. Children usually share bedrooms and even beds, and the whole family shares one bathroom. Poorer families even use their living room as the bedroom at night with just a mat on the floor for a bed. Depending on a prospective candidate's background while growing up, vocation ministers need to consider the similarities and differences between living in a close-knit family and living in a religious community. Whether the prospect is to visit or experience community living in a smaller convent, friary or local house or the headquarters or motherhouse, it is helpful to maintain open dialogue regarding differences in cultures, even down to such details as learning how to make a bed with sheets and blankets or defining how things and spaces are shared or accessed.

Parents have the obligation to raise their children, but in turn, the children are expected to return the favor.... This sense of family obligation can result in a prospective candidate feeling like he or she is abandoning family responsibilities.

The other side of the boundary issue is the concept of hospitality. In a Filipino home, it is customary to give up one's own bed or space for the guest. Visitors can drop in any time, and the family is obligated to offer refreshments or to invite them to eat if it is mealtime. Mostly Caucasian religious communities may experience conflict with Filipino newcomers about what is appropriate when hosting guests. For example, it would be rude and totally inhospitable to a Filipino not to provide guest rooms and meals to visiting family. It is best to discuss arrangements for visitors beforehand to avoid an embarrassing situation.

Another aspect of the Filipino culture is the concept of *utang na loob* (sense of obligation), and with it comes *hiya* (shame) and *amor propio* (honor). Parents have the obligation to raise their children, but in turn, the children are expected to return the favor. For example, children do not move out until they get married. Older children, especially the eldest, are obliged to help with finances, especially in putting their younger siblings through school. In fact, even after adult children marry, the new families are still expected to help their families once they are established and are doing well financially. This sense of family obligation can result in a prospective candidate feeling like he or she is abandoning family

responsibilities. The vocation director can help in this matter by listening to the candidate's concerns and also by engaging in dialogue with the parents.

Vocation ministers should be aware of other Filipino family and relationship patterns. Cultural expert Damon Woods notes that sometimes family relationships override moral codes and protocols, making family members obliged to help their kin gain jobs, positions and favorable business deals. Filipinos might establish relationships thinking, "What can this person do for me now or later?" or, "I'll approach this person because he or she is Filipino, and so I have more pull."

Psychologists with cross-cultural training advise not using standardized psychological testing if the applicant has not mastered English or if the candidate's cultural orientation is significantly different from Americans.

For example, a Filipina inquirer might discover that one of the contact people in the vocation office of a community she likes is Filipina. More than likely, this inquirer will call the Filipina contact and will only reluctantly talk to the actual vocation director. If the vocation director successfully earns her trust and confidence, the inquirer might call her again with more questions. However, if the inquirer is uncertain of answers from the vocation director or wants to back out of an appointment, she would likely call the Filipina contact to ask her to deliver a message.

When it comes to dealing confidently with those in authority, Filipino candidates would most likely identify with and trust someone with whom they already have a relationship. The known person, not necessarily the proper authority or assigned mentor, would be the candidate's "go to" person. When these patterns of favoring the known person or the Filipino person emerge, the vocation minister will need to clarify roles and set boundaries.

Tips for assessments, testing, live-ins

Behavioral assessments are another area where cultural sensitivity is important. If an assessment will explore personal information, including sexuality, I suggest having someone other than the vocation director do the assessment. If the vocation director is the person with whom the candidate has built a trusting relationship, the candidate might be embarrassed to reveal intimate things to the person they have so far considered to be their main community contact. Not all Filipino candidates will feel this way, but the important thing is to be especially sensitive to the comfort level of the candidate.

For many communities, psychological testing is a standard part of the application process. However psychologists with cross-cultural training advise not using standardized psychological testing if the applicant has not mastered English or if the candidate's cultural orientation is significantly different from Americans. This modification will not be necessary for Filipinos who have lived in the United States for several years.

Live-in experiences are also common during serious discernment. When Filipino candidates are doing extended live-in experiences, I recommend giving them a chance to cook Filipino food or other dishes with which they are familiar. In the same way that local houses of religious "start anew" by holding an orientation process or house meeting each time a new professed person comes to live there, so must a local community provide an initial "getting to know each other" orientation for the sake of the candidate. Of course there will be some non-negotiables, but expectations must be clarified, and explanations should be provided for the way things are, allowing room for dialogue, compromise and exchange of ideas.

No matter what one's culture is, the entry process involves a lot of adjustments. When I was a candidate 11 years ago, I used to ask each person what her plans were before I asked for a ride or some other kind of help. Most of the time, I used to feel my way through (*pakikiramdam*) instead of outright asking others what they felt or how they were doing. One community practice that really saved my sisters and me a lot of heartache was from the Franciscan Rule and Life of the Third Order Regular, "Let them make known their needs to one another so that each can find and offer to the other that which is necessary." Vocation and formation ministers may want to help candidates work through matters of integrity, such as being true to one's self when learning new things and when changes become overwhelming or seem to drain one's identity.

Opening up our homes

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore in depth,

but communities that want to truly be open to people of every cultural and ethnic background need to commit themselves to learning about other cultures and to becoming more aware of their own culture. In the *Review for Religious* article "Multiculturalism in Religious Life Today," Sister Catherine Harmer explores the stages of making others feel "at home"—first by being at home with ourselves, then by realizing that our home must be opened wider beyond mere tolerance, always keeping in mind that "the oneness Jesus calls us to is real … and that we must transform ourselves to bring it about."

Plenty of materials provide insight into the Filipino mind, heart and soul. However, just because we become acquainted with a person's background does not make us an expert on that person. Let us remember that each and every prospective candidate who walks through our doors is a unique individual seeking to respond to God's call in his or her life. May our own wisdom and experience as vocation directors, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, be our guide in working with candidates. ■

Resources for understanding Filipino candidates

***Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith*,** by the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001. http://www.catholiccommunications.org/mrs/harmony.shtml.

***Asian Pacific Handbook for Vocation and Formation Directors*,** by the Asian Pacific Standing Committee of the National Religious Vocation Conference. Chicago: National Religious Vocation Conference, 1996.

"Cross-cultural Issues in Vocation and Formation Ministry," by Adam MacDonald, et al, *HORIZON*. Summer 1994.

"Indigenous Filipino Values: A Foundation for a Culture of Non-Violence," Katrin de Guia in *Towards a Culture of Non-Violence*. Ugnayan. Rizal Technological University, Mandaluyong, Philippines. March 5, 2008. Forum Keynote. http://ethnicfilipinos.ph/filer/Indigenous-Filipino-Values.pdf.

Kwintessential Philippines – Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/philippines-country-profile.html.

"Multiculturalism in Religious Life Today," by Sister Catherine M. Harmer, in *Review for Religious*. September-October 1993.

***The Filipino Americans 1763 to the Present: Their History, Culture, and Traditions*,** by Veltisezar Bautista. 2nd ed. Naperville, IL: Bookhaus Publishers, 2002.

The Philippines: A Global Studies Handbook, by Damon L. Woods. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2006. 151-155.

"U.S. in Focus: Filipino Immigrants in the United States," by Aaron Terrazas and Jeanne Batalova. Migration Information Source. Migration Policy Institute, April 2010. http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=777.

The inner core of committed young Catholics are frequently "Evangelical Catholics" with a strong Catholic identity and a missionary zeal.

How "Evangelical Catholicism" is shaping the church and religious life

By John Allen

As reporter John Allen took in the sights and sounds of World Youth Day in Madrid this past August, he reflected on what he calls "Evangelical Catholicism"—an approach to the faith, he says, that is influencing not just World Youth Day but also the larger church, including those who are entering religious life.

We offer his thoughts here as one framework for understanding the contemporary church and its emerging leaders.

WORLD YOUTH DAY OFFERS the clearest possible proof that the Evangelical movement coursing through Catholicism today is not simply a "top-down" phenomenon, but also a strong "bottom-up" force.

"Evangelical Catholicism" is a term being used to capture the Catholic version of a 21st century politics of identity, reflecting the long-term historical transition in the West from Christianity as a culture-shaping majority to Christianity as a subculture, albeit a large and influential one. I define Evangelical Catholicism in terms of three pillars:

- A strong defense of traditional Catholic identity, meaning attachment to classic markers of Catholic thought (doctrinal orthodoxy) and Catholic practice (liturgical tradition, devotional life and authority).
- Robust public proclamation of Catholic teaching, with the accent on Catholicism's mission *ad extra*, transforming the culture in light of the Gospel, rather than *ad intra*, on internal church reform.
- Faith seen as a matter of personal choice rather than cultural inheritance, which among other things implies that in a highly secular culture, Catholic identity can never be taken for granted. It always has to be proven, defended and made manifest.

I consciously use the term "evangelical" to capture all this rather than "conservative," even though I recognize that many people experience what I've just sketched as a conservative impulse. Fundamentally, however, it's about something else: the hunger for identity in a fragmented world.

Historically speaking, Evangelical Catholicism isn't really "conservative," because there's precious little cultural Catholi-

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cism these days left to conserve. For the same reason, it's not traditionalist, even though it places a premium upon tradition. If liberals want to dialogue with post-modernity, Evangelicals want to convert it—but neither seeks a return to a status quo ante. Many Evangelical Catholics actually welcome secularization, because it forces religion to be a conscious choice rather than a passive inheritance. As the late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris—the dictionary definition of an Evangelical Catholic—once put it, "We're really at the dawn of Christianity."

Paradoxically, this eagerness to pitch orthodox Catholicism as the most satisfying entrée on the post-modern spiritual smorgasbord, using the tools and tactics of a media-saturated global village, makes Evangelical Catholicism both traditional and contemporary all at once.

Evangelical Catholicism affects those considering religious life

Evangelical Catholicism has been the dominant force at the policy-setting level of the Catholic church since the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978. If you want to understand Catholic officialdom today—why decisions are being made the way they are in the Vatican, or in the U.S. bishops' conference, or in an ever-increasing number of dioceses—this is easily the most important trend to wrap your mind around.

You'll get Evangelical Catholicism badly wrong, however, if you think of it exclusively as a top-down movement. There's also a strong bottom-up component, which is most palpable among a certain segment of the younger Catholic population.

Once upon a time the idea that the younger generation of intensely committed Catholics was more "conservative" belonged to the realm of anecdotal impressions. By now, it's an iron-clad empirical certainty.

We're not talking about the broad mass of 20- and 30-something Catholics, who are all over the map in terms of beliefs and values. Instead, we're talking about that inner core of actively practicing young Catholics who are most likely to discern a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, most likely to enroll in graduate programs of theology, and most likely to pursue a career in the church as a lay person—youth ministers, parish life coordinators, liturgical ministers, diocesan officials and so on. In that sub-segment of today's younger Catholic population, there's an evangelical energy so thick you can cut it with a knife.

Needless to say, the groups I've just described constitute the church's future leadership. Once upon a time the idea that the younger generation of intensely committed Catholics was more "conservative" belonged to the realm of anecdotal impressions. By now, it's an iron-clad empirical certainty.

Case in point: A 2009 study carried out by Georgetown's Center of Applied Research in the Apostolate, and sponsored by the National Religious Vocations Conference, found a

An exuberant sense of pride in being Catholic marked the celebrations of young adults from around the world who attended World Youth Day.

marked contrast between new members of religious orders in the United States today (the "millennial generation") and the old guard. In general, younger religious, both men and women, are more likely to prize fidelity to the church and to pick a religious order on the basis of its reputation for fidelity; they're more interested in wearing the habit and in traditional modes of spiritual and liturgical expression; and they're much more positively inclined toward authority.

To gauge which way the winds are blowing, consider women's orders. The study found that among those which belong to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, considered the more "liberal" umbrella group, just one percent have at least 10 new members; among those which belong to the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, seen as the more "conservative" group, a robust 28 percent have at least 10 new members.

For the most part, it's a mistake to diagnose this trend in ideological terms, as if it's about the politics of left versus right. For today's younger Catholics, it's more a matter of generational experience. They didn't grow up in a stuffy, all-controlling church, so they're not rebelling against it. Instead, they're rebelling against a rootless secular world, making them eager to embrace clear markers of identity and sources of meaning.

Among youth, Evangelical Catholicism usually becomes ideological only if the older generation paints them into a corner, demanding that they choose sides in the church's internal battles. That tendency, alas, seems equally pronounced on the left and the right.

Evangelical Catholics and World Youth Day

For sure not all the youth gathered in Madrid this week are Evangelicals. I've covered five World Youth Days (WYD), and it's my observation that you can generally identify three groups: A gung-ho inner core; a more lukewarm cohort, who don't think about religion all that much, but who still go to Mass and see the faith as a positive thing; and those who are just along for the ride, perhaps because their parents would pay for WYD but not spring break in Cabo. (These are usually the kids outside playing hacky sack and eating ice cream during the catechetical sessions.)

Pastorally I've always thought the aim was to nudge a few young people from that second group into the first, and from the third group into the second.

That said, the Evangelicals clearly set the tone. World Youth Day is perhaps the lone international venue where being faithfully, energetically Catholic amounts to the "hip" choice of lifestyle. To be clear, this passion isn't artificially manufactured by party ideologues and foisted on impressionable youth, like the Nuremberg rallies or Mao's Red Guard brigades; it's something these young believers already feel, and WYD simply provides an outlet.

In that sense, World Youth Day is the premier reminder of a fundamental truth about Catholicism in the early 21st century. Given the double whammy of Evangelical Catholicism as both the *idée fixe* of the church's leadership class, and a driving force among the inner core of younger believers, it's destined to shape the culture of the church (especially in the global north, i.e., Europe and the United States) for the foreseeable future. One can debate its merits, but not its staying power.

In the real world, the contest for the Catholic future is therefore not between the Evangelicals and some other group —say, liberal reformers. It's inside the Evangelical Catholic movement, between an open and optimistic wing committed to "affirmative orthodoxy," i.e., emphasizing what the church affirms rather than what it condemns, and a more defensive cohort committed to waging cultural war.

How that tension shakes out among today's crop of church leaders will be interesting to follow, but perhaps even more decisive will be which instinct prevails among the hundreds of thousands of young Catholics in Spain this week, and the evangelical generation they represent. ■

Snapshot of U.S. vocation ministry

New Orleans archdiocese to open house of discernment for women

Beginning in September 2012, women in the Archdiocese of New Orleans considering religious life will have the option of living in a house of discernment.

The house, to be located in central New Orleans, aims to provide residents with a supportive environment and ample opportunity for prayer, spiritual growth, ministry and contact with a variety of sisters. Up to 10 women will be able to live in the house alongside two sisters from distinct religious orders who will serve as mentors.

"It's an exciting project," says Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, SSF, executive director of the Department of Religious for the New Orleans Archdiocese, which is sponsoring the house. "The archbishop (Gregory Aymond) really believes in religious life.... There are about 42 women's congregations in the archdiocese, and they are strongly supportive."

A variety of sisters from the area will spend time at the house, sharing in meals and other activities, and inviting residents to visit their communities.

While many of the details of the house are still being determined in collaboration with the women religious of the archdiocese, Thibodeaux anticipates that the residents will be post-college age and working. They will be expected to be in spiritual direction; take part in community prayer, meals and events; to contribute to room and board; and to be involved with ministry to the extent their work schedules permit.

To learn more, contact Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, SSF at (504) 861-6281 or srsylvia@archdiocese-no.org.

Committee developing tools to discuss NRVC-CARA study of new members

The National Religious Vocation Conference has gathered a group which met in late September, 2011 to begin creating a tool to help religious congregations have in-depth exchanges about the implications of the 2009 NRVC-CARA study of new members.

The group creating a discussion tool includes, from left to right, (back row) Sister Virginia Hervers, ASCJ; Brother Jonathan Beebe, CSC; Ms. Jean Dennison; Father Mark Soehner, OFM; Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCM; (front row) Sister Charlene Diorka, SSJ; Sister Lynn Levo, CSJ; and Sister Maria Therese Healy, O.Carm.

Creating such a tool is one of the objectives of the Moving Forward in Hope National Plan promulgated in early 2011. Among other things, the group discussed creating a DVD to showcase the reflections of newer religious regarding the study. Further details will be forthcoming.

NRVC announces convocation theme

The theme of 2012 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference, to be held November 1-5 in Plano, TX (near Dallas), will be "Vocation Ministers as Ambassadors for Christ: A Reconciling Presence." The two keynote speakers will be Archbishop Joseph Tobin, CSsR, secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and Sister Kathryn Hermes, FSP, lecturer, author, retreat leader, and spiritual director. Details and registration information will be forthcoming.

Archbishop Joseph Tobin, CSsR; Sister Kathryn Hermes, FSP

History of Catholic sisters exhibit in Indiana and California, now on DVD

The interactive museum exhibit chronicling the history of women religious, "Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America," continues to tour the country. Sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the exhibit can be seen:

• **In South Bend, IN** until December 31, 2011 at the Center for History (centerforhistory.org) in association with the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College.

A visitor takes in the Women and Spirit exhibit.

• **In Sacramento CA,** January 24, 2012 - June 3, 2012 at the California Museum of History, Women & the Arts (californiamuseum.org)

In addition a DVD documentary based on the exhibit is now available for $19.95 and can be ordered online at womenandspirit.org, a website with extensive information and educational resources on the exhibit.

NRVC and members to be part of NCYC

As HORIZON went to press, NRVC and approximately 70 religious communities were poised to host exhibits at the "Vocation Village" area of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis, IN November 17-19.

The NCYC is a biennial event for Catholic teenagers and their adult chaperones that promotes vibrant faith and community through prayer and worship, keynote addresses, workshops, concerts, exhibits, etc.

Some 20,000 people took part in the 2009 NCYC.

NRVC is hosting the Vocation Village, which provides a real-time experience of religious life today. Board member Father Anthony Vinson, OSB, and associate director Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCC are representing NRVC at the event.

Survey on education debt garners strong participation

Fifty-five percent of U.S. religious communities took part in a survey about how college debt is affecting new membership. The survey was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate on behalf of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) with funding from the Conrad Hilton Foundation. NRVC will be releasing survey results in late fall 2011, all of which will be posted on its website, www.nrvc.net.

Throughout the United States, the level of educational debt has been rising, with college graduates shouldering an average of $22,900 in debt in 2011, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Many religious communities find it unaffordable to absorb such debts from new members. By securing accurate information about the effect on communities and by calling attention to the problem, NRVC hopes the larger Catholic community can work toward solutions. ■

BOOK NOTES

Book is a treasury of information and insight

By Sister Patricia Kenny, RSM

IT IS A COURAGEOUS WRITER who chooses to launch into the mysteries of the consecrated life. As those who live this life know, explaining it even to those with some background in the faith is challenging. The term itself only saw the light of day after Vatican II, and some consideration was given at that time to granting a separate chapter for the religious life in the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. In the end it was decided that religious life would be treated in the chapter on the "Universal Call to Holiness." Not until 1996—when Pope John Paul II published the long-awaited apostolic exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*—did the term "consecrated life" become a part of common parlance (common in some Catholic circles, that is!).

Father Pier Giordano Cabra successfully takes on the challenge of addressing consecrated life in his book *A Short Course on the Consecrated Life: Reflections on Theology and Spirituality* (2004, Institute on Religious Life). Cabra is a priest of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Nazareth, a well-known scholar and a respected authority on the theology and spirituality of consecrated life. His book approaches the subject from an historical view and what he calls a "synthetic vision." This short volume is neatly divided between the beginnings of religious life shortly after Jesus Christ's ascension and the current understandings of the many dimensions and approaches to consecrated life in our time.

Liberally laced with excerpts and citations from church documents and *Vita Consecrata* in particular, the student or researcher on this subject has an invaluable resource from which to posit new ideas and analysis. Newer members of religious communities and their vocation and formation directors would find this little book a treasury of material for discrete presentations and discussion. Discovering the origins of thought and practices in religious life over the centuries is fascinating, and the connections the author makes between the ideals envisioned and the practices lived are a study in the very human evolution of this way of life.

The author carefully delineates distinctions among the three types of consecrated life—contemplative, active apostolic and secular consecrated life. The

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understanding of consecrated life as, first of all, an experience of God, a giving of self to Christ by following him, and a movement of spirituality is pivotal. Cabra points out that theology normally follows and sustains life and action. The fact that diverse spiritualities and theologies ultimately find their base in the mystery of Christ is the infinite fruitfulness of this mystery in and for the church.

While the first half of this book is devoted to the historical development and refinement of what came to be called religious life, it provides a solid underpinning for understanding the many iterations of terms including monasticism, fraternal life, state of perfection, evangelical counsels and mixed life. The influences brought to bear on the church and religious life in particular during the time of Luther and the Catholic reformation is fascinating. Also helpful is the book's development of the importance of the intention of the founder. The book gives examples, such as the glorification of God through contemplation and liturgy as practiced by Benedictines, Carmelites, Poor Clares, Cistercians and Trappists; mission and service in community as practiced by various religious orders; animation of the world by profound inclusion ("in the world but not of it") as practiced by a number of religious institutes.

A "special following" of Christ

The second half of the book, titled "For a Synthetic Vision"—a term the author does not define—concerns the relationships between consecrated life and mission. Cabra notes that a failure to recognize these connections reduces mission to action, activity to self-affirmation and risks aligning religious with the demands of the secular world. (I wonder why he sees this as a risk—the risk of becoming too "worldly"?)

The author begins his examination of mission by drawing a distinction between two ways of living the Christian life, two ways of following Jesus: one is the way of the apostles, leaving all things to devote themselves to preaching, teaching, healing. The second is the manner of the majority of the disciples who were directed to "repent and believe the Gospel" and tried to live their everyday lives according to Jesus' teachings. Cabra points out that because the words "follow" and "disciple" have ambiguous meanings, there is a need to speak of a "special following," which is that of the 12 apostles. Theirs was a commitment of obedience to God through the mediation of Jesus, a renunciation of their own plan of life and a willingness to live in community with the others. These came to be identified with the evangelical counsels. Cabra's examination of the evangelical counsels as they apply to the priesthood relies on significant quotes from Scripture, tradition and apostolic exhortations; discussions of the "new family" of Jesus; Mary's way of life; and Paul's example.

Chapter 10, "A Theological Approach," is worthy of a short course in itself. It begins with the identity of the consecrated life and the new and special consecrations that go beyond the initial consecration of every Christian in baptism. The author notes that those who go beyond by following the evangelical counsels are in no way "more consecrated" than a layperson. It is more a question of the nature of this choice. The chapter goes on to develop carefully the states of life and their various dimensions—prophetic, Paschal, eschatological and charismatic—concluding with a reminder that this presentation is not done "with the intent of standing out over others, but of serving according to the gift received."

The final chapters of this excellent resource consider the constitutive elements of the mission of consecrated life and how they are articulated in the specific elements of consecration: chastity, poverty, obedience and fraternal life in community. Each chapter but the last begins with a look at the New Testament, the distinctive characteristics of the consecrated virtue, the impact of each for the community, meaning both the internal group with whom one lives and the external community in proximity and in some way influenced by the monastery, abbey or other religious house. Specific examples from Scripture, including parables, the Beatitudes and quotes from Jesus' words to those he met during his travels, flesh out Cabra's vision of how the counsels actually come alive in a consecrated life.

The book is not a difficult read, but neither is it entertaining. It is a scholarly effort to bring into focus the many and sometimes ambiguous aspects of what we often call religious life and now recognize more accurately as consecrated life. The chapters are subdivided into relatively short segments which lend themselves to conversation, question and answer sessions and meditation in some instances. The earlier part of the text which covers the historical vista is a treasury of information for those who want to know how we have come to where we are. The second half of the book is a systematic study of the elements of consecrated life that should be part of the formation of anyone who hopes to live this life with an understanding of its magnetism, its mystery and its apparent contradictions. ■

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