

HORIZON



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PROCESS ADDICTIONS, NEW MEDIA, VIETNAMESE CANDIDATES AND MORE

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nrvc@nrvc.net www.nrvc.net

Executive Director
Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC

Editor
Carol Schuck Scheiber

Proofreaders
Sister Mary Ann Hamer, OSF, Virginia Picuch

Editorial Advisory Board
Sister Anita Baird, DHM; Sister Carol Mucha, RSM; Father Kevin Nadolski, OSFS;
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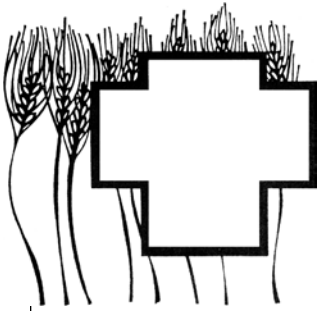
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HORIZON

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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Let's fuel the fire

I'm fascinated at the way the concept of "vocation" emerges in secular culture, especially by the way it so closely parallels our Catholic understanding. Not long ago I stumbled across a reference to vocation that I found inspiring, even if it was entirely secular. I believe this story goes right to the heart of vocation ministry.

Philippe Petit, the Frenchman who walked a high wire strung between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center back in 1974, confesses that his devotion to his craft is a *vocation*, a *calling*. Now in his 60s, Petit discloses this sense of calling in an interview included on the DVD of the documentary *Man on Wire*. Petit's attitude comes as no surprise, though, to those who have viewed *Man on Wire*. The film is a riveting portrayal of his clear-eyed effort to walk between the Twin Towers—the intricate planning, the constant practice and conditioning and the gathering of numerous people to help him carry out his most memorable feat. Petit perseveres despite numerous setbacks until one fine August day, he puts one foot in front of the other on a wire high above New York and mesmerizes a city.

Petit was, and is, a man on fire. The beauty, daring and artistry of high wire walking are the consuming passion of his life. He reflects on his beginnings:

I cannot give a recipe for how one can become a high wire walker. I would tend, looking at my own

life, to think that the only way to become an artist is to have no choice, to be called. I always say in the case of the Twin Towers that I didn't choose those towers, they chose me. So being called is something very beautiful. At first, it's a song, like a foghorn you can hear.... A calling is also a profession of faith. It's a vocation. So I mix it all up again. I think there is no recipe. The only motto I see is passion.

In spite of the language he uses, Petit is not a religious man. Yet don't all of us in vocation ministry yearn to possess Petit's fervor for our own calling? And don't we all want to connect with young adults who have the dedication, commitment and zeal he displays? If we're still head-over-heels for God, for our vocation, we will inspire and attract others.

My hope and prayer is that *HORIZON* be an instrument for fueling the fire that drives vocation ministry. Whether the pages in this edition give you a better understanding of candidates or new ideas for promoting religious life online or in a parish, I hope they move you forward in a calling driven, like Petit, by a consuming passion.



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

Vocation ministers are starting to see individuals with process addictions—problematic, compulsive behaviors focused on everything from gambling to Internet porn. An expert looks at what drives these addictions and what vocation ministers can do.

What every vocation minister should know about process addictions

BY CHRISTIANA ASHABO

ADDICTION IS NOTHING NEW. It has existed since the beginning of time, as we can see in the story of Noah, who may be one of the first known alcoholics. Four short verses in the Book of Genesis (see page 5) reveal the addiction behavior pattern and the three-fold nature of the denial that helps keep addiction intact: shame, defensiveness and social isolation.

Addiction has been viewed in a limited way for a long time, but in recent years there has been a shift within the treatment community and the general public to see addiction in a broader way. Addiction is the word we now use to describe troubling behaviors that we now label as cybersex or Internet addiction, gambling addiction, etc.

At Southdown Institute, a treatment facility for priests and religious, we are seeing more religious and priests experiencing process addictions (compulsive activity or behavior). These often hidden process addictions can manifest by themselves or in combination with drug or alcohol addiction. Process addictions can focus on a number of different areas, including spending, gambling, debt (these three are inter-related), Internet use, relationships, sex,

hoarding, shoplifting, chaos, food, exercise or computer games.

The number of people suffering from process addictions is growing at an alarming rate with the advent of the Internet. A person can switch an addictive relationship from object to object or event to event. Sadly enough, the same technology that has brought us so much progress, joy and excitement has also overwhelmingly taken over some people's lives, resulting in broken relationships, loss of jobs or ministry, and legal and financial difficulties. Health issues, such as fatigue, headache, back pain, depression and anxiety are linked to Internet or cybersex addictions. Regardless of the nature of the Internet activities the addicts engage in—such as sex, pornography, gaming, shopping or relationships—the hook is so powerful that they become, in a sense, enslaved by the Web. The Internet is now an area in which addicts who would not otherwise act out their addiction feel safer to act out in the privacy of their home. Their addictions are not new; what is new is that an online venue allows and speeds the addictive process. This new technology provides addicts with illusions of control and safety, while leading to out-of-control behavior.

Seek pleasure, avoid pain

Addiction taps into the most fundamental human process. Regardless of the nature of the addiction, the drive for the addictive behavior or how it is acted out, the addictive process can turn creative, life-giving energy into a destructive, demoralizing force.

Underlying most addictive behaviors is the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain, especially the psychic pain that can accompany religious or priestly life, such as loneliness,

Christiana Ashabo is a certified addiction counselor and addiction relapse prevention specialist at Southdown Institute, near Toronto, Ontario, and in private practice. She has published several articles on the subject of process addictions and has presented seminars and workshops on the topic as well.



helplessness, fatigue, anger, shame or depression. External substances, such as alcohol, drugs (Activan, Valium) and sugar alter our subjective experiences. To the extent that a substance does so quickly and consistently, the greater its potential for being used in the development of an addictive disorder, such as alcoholism. Inhaling nicotine or snorting cocaine provides almost instantaneous and powerful stimulation, which contributes to the speed of developing an addiction to those substances as compared to others.

We now know that psychoactive drugs are not the only

cause of shifts in our emotional state. Other human activities are capable of mediating this, such as the endogenous “high” long distance runners experience, along with withdrawal symptoms should they stop running. The influence of repetitive behaviors—such as those seen in compulsive spending, gambling, Internet surfing, excessive sexual activity and perhaps even compulsive work—appears to mediate the same neuroadaptive process. That is, they alter in a predictable and consistent way an individual’s subjective experience.

Underlying most addictive behaviors is the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain, especially the psychic pain that can accompany religious or priestly life, such as loneliness, helplessness, fatigue, anger, shame or depression.

Process addictions (which involve an activity or behavior) often resemble chemical addictions and have similar characteristics. However, the major difference is that an addiction to chemicals entails a person putting a toxin directly into the system and, consequently, into the brain. The chemical, and the by-product of that chemical, damage the brain and alter brain chemistry, perhaps permanently. Process addiction, on the other hand, is purely behavioral and is less damaging to the body and the brain. However, it can also alter brain chemistry. Research in the addiction field continues trying to fully understand the power of process addictions. It is not yet certain in what ways process and chemical addictions are alike and in what ways they are different. Clearly, however, there are many similarities, especially in the reactions of persons experiencing them, such as the initial positive and pleasurable mood changes and the out-of-control and aimless searching for wholeness, happiness and peace

Noah: first addict on record?

These verses from Genesis 9:20-24 are interpreted by many to show classic alcoholic behavior.

Now Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of the wine, he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside about it. Shem and Japeth, however, took a robe and holding it on their backs, they walked backward and covered their father’s nakedness; since their faces were turned the other way, they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah woke up from his drunkenness and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said: “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”

through a relationship with an object or event.

Regardless of the addiction, every addict engages in a relationship with an object or event in order to produce a desired mood change, state of intoxication, or trance-like state. The end result for both chemically dependent and process addicts is that they become even more lonely and

Every addict engages in a relationship with an object or event in order to produce a desired mood change, state of intoxication, or trance-like state.

empty. Looking at the overall pattern of process addiction, it is best understood as the result of a matrix of various factors that represent past and present, environment and person, physiology and psychology and personal processes of change that ultimately determine the course

of the addiction. As an individual becomes more and more involved with an addictive behavior, it becomes a priority to seek opportunity to engage in the behavior.

Understanding sex addiction

There are numerous types of process addictions, but in this article I'd like to specifically address two that are relatively well-known and well-understood: sex addiction and gambling. Sex addiction is complex due to the many ways it can be acted out. For example a person can be a sex addict and never have physical contact with anyone but engage in sexual thought patterns and behavior that become obsessive-compulsive and out-of-control. This understanding is important in giving the sex addict a framework for observing his or her internal experiences, behavior patterns and personal constructs with some perspective. A position of increased understanding of the signs of sex addiction can pave the way for important shifts in the illusion the addict has created.

Sexual addiction is obsessive-compulsive sexual behavior which, if left unattended, will cause severe distress and despair for the individual, family and community. The sexual addict is unable to control his or her sexual behavior and lives with constant pain, alienation and fear of discovery. The addiction progresses until sex becomes more important than friends, family, important relationships or work.

Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., said the activities sex addicts choose may vary, whether it be pornography, endless affairs,

Process addiction defined

Process addictions involve an activity or behavior that initially provides a rush of positive feelings—an intense excitement or high. Over time the behavior becomes compulsive and all-consuming, cloaked in secrecy and denial, and the pursuit of the behavior takes over a person's life and well-being.

one night stands, masturbation, exhibitionism and so forth. In and of themselves, these behaviors are not an indication of sex addiction. What makes a behavior an addiction is an overwhelming preoccupation with it, a disregard for consequences and the inability to stop.

A person is considered a sex addict if his or her sexual behaviors take up excessive amounts of time, energy and resources or cause them to act in ways that go against their underlying values and beliefs. Sex addicts are often unable to keep commitments made to themselves or others to stop or change their problematic sexual behaviors, and most have difficulty maintaining healthy, honest intimacy. It is important to know that sex addiction is not simply a problem of being too bored or lonely or not getting enough sex. Sex addicts use cruising, flirting, fantasy, intrigue and the sex act itself in an attempt to manage seemingly intolerable life stressors, underlying emotional conflicts and past trauma. Sex addicts seek sexual highs to substitute for the support and intimacy they readily need but do not allow themselves. Even when surrounded by friends, family, or supportive community, they turn to the isolating intensity of sex rather than reaching out to those close to them. Some sex addicts engage in an endless cycle of empty and unsatisfying intensity-based relationships, while others live in the isolation of compulsive masturbation and porn addiction.

Cybersex addictions on the rise

Sexual addiction crosses all borders; the negative effects and risks of Internet porn, and cybersex use are seen in the dramatic increase in the number of priests and religious with issues related to their online sexual activity. For many of these individuals the Internet has become an outlet for unresolved sexual difficulties and unfocused sexual energy, including

the acting out or repetition of traumatic experiences. It is not uncommon for individuals who go online for their social and sexual needs to forsake, avoid or neglect real world relationships. According to sex addiction experts Al Cooper and Eric Griffin-Shelley, most sex addicts seem to find enough solace in their online lives that they lose the motivation to address dissatisfaction in their off-line lives and therefore neither address nor resolve their problems.

Cybersex addiction can enslave persons for years without intervention because of its potential to be kept private and secret. Al Cooper describes the psychological components of Internet addiction as the “triple A engine.” He suggests that three basic components attract individuals to the Internet; accessibility, anonymity and affordability. Cooper indicated that the combination of these three factors explains why the Internet is a powerful medium that attracts millions of users, including the cybersex compulsive.

As an addiction therapist working with clergy and religious at the Southdown Institute, my experience with clergy cybersex addicts proves Cooper’s statement to be accurate. Most of these clergy cybersex addicts reported that although they have had sexual fantasies over the years and would have liked to act on them either by buying porn, attending porn movies, or engaging in anonymous sex in a park, rest room etc., the fear of being recognized and caught kept them from acting on their fantasies or urges. Some religious or clergy reported that the distance involved in obtaining the sexual activities was a factor for not acting out. With the advent of the Internet, they reported that all they wanted or needed became available to them in the safety and privacy of their room, where they felt safe to explore their sexuality. Some rationalized that cybersex helped them to keep their vow of celibacy and to not cross professional boundaries. This illusion kept them hooked on the Web to the point of either getting caught with accessing porn or acting out in real life because of the addiction’s progressive need for a more intense “high.”

These cybersex addicts used the Internet to deal with unintegrated sexuality, to escape from problems or to relieve feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression. Cybersex erodes personal freedom by keeping sexual desires inflamed in order to promote the industry. Meanwhile cybersex addicts often feel their behavior is both harmless and victimless. Following is just one list of the very real consequences of this process addiction: depression and other emotional problems, social isolation, harm to primary relationships, ministry loss or decreased job performance, mismanagement of funds,

frequent absenteeism from community events, deteriorating quality of decision making, frequent tardiness, low self-esteem, extreme loneliness, unexplained anxiety, legal problems because of child pornography (including arrest and jail time), extreme feelings of remorse and guilt. Any of the above factors should be a red flag for vocation ministers and should be taken seriously by further professional assessment.

Gambling turned compulsive

Like sex addiction, pathological gambling is often a hidden addiction. It cannot be detected by a blood or breathalyzer test, and it does not leave needle marks. It is relatively easy for the compulsive gambler to hide lottery tickets, sport picks, visits to casinos, etc. from community members, friends, co-workers and family.

Gambling may be a means of escape from personal conflicts or problems in the community, at work or with others. Problem gambling is a catch-all term that refers to patterns of gambling that compromise, disrupt, or damage personal, family, community or vocational pursuits.

There are two types of pathological or compulsive gamblers: “action-seeking” gamblers and “escape seeking” gamblers. Both have the same predictable course of addiction and same outcome, but they have very different motivations.

The action seeker is most often male and enjoys the adrenaline rush that accompanies high risk, high stakes gambling. The escape-seeking gambler is more likely to be female with strong avoidant personality traits. She likely is experiencing difficulties with interpersonal relationships and seeking relief from painful emotional experiences. Escape gamblers are particularly drawn to the numbing effects of repetitive play machines, especially video poker.

Regardless of whether they are seeking action or escape, pathological gamblers have difficulty coping with the details and stressors of everyday life, solving problems and engaging effectively in relationships with others. For them, gambling

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often represents a refuge where they can escape from day-to-day problems and alleviate psychological pain. Most of the time they believe they can influence, predict or control the outcome of the game, giving them an illusion of control and a sense of security, at least for that moment.

Often pathological gamblers will describe feeling like “they have been in a trance” or “taken on another identity” or “were outside of themselves.” According to California behavioral scientist Durand Jacobs, when gamblers experience these dissociative feelings early in their gambling careers, it indicates a predisposition to becoming a compulsive or pathological gambler.

For some, gambling is an inexpensive way to dress up, get out of their community and avoid loneliness. It can be an expedient way to escape depression, anxiety, boredom and isolation.

Signs of compulsive gambling include: large amounts of time spent gambling and little time for family, friends, community, or other interests; progressively larger and more frequent bets; borrowing money from different sources and increasing debt; repeated promises to cut back but inability

to stop gambling; frequent high and low moods; depression, restlessness or withdrawal when unable to gamble; lying about whereabouts; preference for gambling over important gatherings and events. Although occasional visits to a casino do not indicate a problem, the risk of problems with gambling increases when gamblers are depressed, angry, rebellious, have a sense of entitlement, have an avoidant personality, or are workaholic or narcissistic.

Gambling in North America once was largely a male preserve. However, the expansion in gambling opportunities over the past decade has coincided with a greater acceptance of gambling among women. Women are now as likely as men to be classified as problem gamblers. This trend is evident among religious communities where women religious are beginning to emerge as the gender group most likely to experience gambling problems.

There are several reasons why more and more women religious are gambling. Besides the easy access, convenience and opportunity to socialize, for some it is an inexpensive way to dress up, get out of their community and avoid loneliness. It can be an expedient way to escape depression, anxiety, boredom and isolation, or simply to reward themselves for

a hard day’s work. Recently, I met a woman religious who had won a brand new car worth \$24,000. She traded it in for less than \$2,000 so that she could stay longer at the casino. For this sister, gambling was not social recreation; nor was it about winning money. Rather she gambled for the excitement of the “action” and to escape from worries, depression and pain.

Men and women religious with gambling problems are aware of the stigma that society attaches to priest and religious problem gamblers—especially in view of their chosen vocation. Sisters especially hold high expectations of themselves and face shame about their imperfections. While men and women religious have a strong sense of responsibility for others, often they tend to neglect their own needs; hence religious who are problem gamblers are often isolated from support. The hidden nature of their gambling means the problem is not readily identified until it reaches the desperation phase when they can no longer finance their gambling. They begin to experience hopelessness, emotional breakdowns or even suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Effect on the addict and the community

There is no doubt that process addiction—whether related to sex, gambling, shopping, food, exercise, etc.—can damage people’s lives and the lives of those around them. All addictive behavior is motivated by positive intent. The motivation could represent a search for completeness, a desire to feel good and a desire to feel at home with one’s self and with others. While addicted individuals long for wholeness, addictive behavior disconnects them from reality, from friends, family and their religious communities. The result is that they feel even more lonely and empty. Hence social isolation and extreme feelings of loneliness lead the addict to depression. The depression may well have predated the addiction, but depression always results from the inability to get out of the vicious cycle of the addictive behavior. Other effects could be difficulty with studies or ministry; mismanagement of funds, leading to debt or theft from community funds; deterioration of the quality of work or decision-making; feelings of remorse, guilt, fear, anxiety or paranoia.

When the addiction grows deeper, the addict becomes overwhelmed with intense shame. Shame is a common denominator in all forms of addictive behavior (Carnes 1991). Patrick Carnes believes that shame is at the core of all addiction and that shame-based persons are particularly vulnerable to addiction. When ashamed of the hidden

problem, the addict may rage against those around him or her in an effort to insulate the self against exposure and pain by transferring the shame onto others. Rage functions to keep others away so no one will suspect or question the addict's behaviors. It also allows the addict to be enraged at others, creating a crisis rather than noticing his or her own feelings of shame. Another observable defense against the addict's shame is contempt—contempt of others may be an attempt by the addict to bolster his or her feelings of low self-worth and self-contempt caused by the burden of shame. In viewing others contemptuously, addicts no longer feel their own shame and pain. If the addict fails to stop the addiction, he or she may become preoccupied with perfection to make up for a sense of unworthiness. Over-moralizing, religious preoccupation, "rigidity," and over-control regarding body functions, such as eating or exercise, may be manifestations of this defense. The addict hopes to present an image to others of being perfect so no one suspects the hidden shame and out-of-control behavior.

A spiritual deadening takes place. The longer the

addiction goes on, the more spiritually isolated the person becomes—the saddest and most frightening aspect of addiction. Since addiction is a direct assault against the self, it is also a direct attack on the spirit or soul of the person suffering from any form of addiction. Since a chemical or behavior blocks the person's ability to effectively connect with his or her own spirit, there is little chance to connect with the spirit of others or with the Spirit of God.

The addict's strange, observable behavior puts community members in the position of trying to figure out what might be going on with the addict, and this can sometimes lead to rumors in the community that may or may not be true. The religious community members are particularly affected by the lack of the addict's connectedness with other community members, such as being absent from prayer time, meal

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activities and events. The addict will always come up with reasons or excuses when confronted, and this usually evokes anger and resentment from the community members toward the addicted person. The anger and resentment may or may not be expressed directly to the addict, but the community can become polluted with the unexpressed anger by the community members. The confusion and difficulty for the community members stems from not being able to put their hands on what is going on with the individual, due to the hidden nature of process addiction.


Red flags for process addictions

Frequently what seem like innocuous behaviors could be indicators of a problem. Possible warning signs of a process addiction include:

- chronic lateness for assigned tasks,
- unaccountability for time away from the community,
- depression,
- recurrent forgetfulness,
- fabrication of stories,
- isolation,
- difficulty in relationships with community members,
- excessive financial concerns,
- sudden changes from normal behavior including loss of interest in work, ministry or community events and activities.

Tips for vocation ministers

We live in a society with many people addicted to chemicals or behaviors. Candidates to religious life come from this very mix of people. Some of these candidates may be more at risk of developing some form of addiction than others, due to their predisposition to the addictive process. Vocation ministers face the task of screening candidates and encouraging ongoing assessment at different stages to determine each candidate's level of functioning in the community. First and foremost, a thorough assessment by the vocation minister is critical. The interview questions that a vocation director asks need to




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be direct, but not leading, and they should be presented in a manner that makes the candidate feel comfortable and safe enough to answer honestly. Vocation ministers must always keep in mind that candidates are not going to feel comfortable discussing sexual thoughts and behaviors or other types of process addictions during an interview, especially if the assessment is a one-time interview. The most effective assessment allows time for building a relationship between vocation ministers and candidates. In addition to the vocation director's own interview, it is critical to have a professional psychological assessment done. A psychologist may be able to uncover many unconscious defenses and the anxiety behind them.

Clergy and religious who come from family backgrounds characterized by rigidity and dysfunction, with themes of abuse and neglect, may suffer early attachment disturbances. These disturbances appear to be a key root cause of both narcissism and sexual addiction. Compulsivity and obsession

offer some relief from the pain and rage of the disrupted self in those who are too defended to find comfort in healthy intimacy.

These deep-set psychological wounds are themes that should emerge if a thorough psychological assessment is done. Combined with the vocation director's own interview and experiences with candidates, information about existing addictions or a predisposition to addiction is critical.

Problem drinking, drugs or behavior can wreak havoc on an entire religious community. Yet, awareness brings the hope of recovery and healing. Vocation ministers may find themselves at the front lines of a battle with addiction, and their own pastoral and professional response can be the first step toward wholeness. A vocation minister's early recognition of a process addiction gives the candidate the opportunity to step back and address his or her problem before pursuing the rigors of formation. ■

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An experienced youth minister brainstorms ways vocation ministers can use Internet media to promote vocations. Such technology can be the gateway to making lasting human connections.

Use new media to promote vocations

By D. SCOTT MILLER

IN THE FIRST SEASON of the acclaimed television show, *The West Wing*, was an episode in which President Bartlet is confronted with the possibility to provide a stay of execution and commute the sentence of a man on death row. The scene concludes with Bartlet being visited by his parish priest, Father Tom Cavanaugh, who counsels the president. The very last scene finds Bartlet in the Oval Office with a rosary in his hand, taking a knee on the carpeted seal of the president and receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.

The casting of the priest was not accidental. *The West Wing* producers chose Karl Malden in his last performance before his death. Forty-five years previous to his portrayal of Father Cavanaugh, Malden portrayed Father Barry in *On the Waterfront*, a role for which he was nominated for an Oscar.

It is easy to bemoan the decline of positive portrayals within the media of priests and religious men and women. No longer do we find fictional portrayals of Father Chuck O'Malley or Sister Bertrille from the likes of Bing Crosby in *Going My Way* and Sally Field in *The Flying Nun*. Nor do we

D. Scott Miller is the coordinator of adolescent faith formation in the Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. He has worked in youth or young adults ministry for more than 30 years. See his blog at www.catholicYMblog.com



find many Susan Sarandons or Spencer Tracys portraying real-life heroic models such as Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ of *Dead Man Walking* or Father Flanagan of *Boys Town*. Yet, to complain about Hollywood's recent inability to portray heroic sisters, brothers or priests is "old media" thinking.

Previously media was defined primarily by the ability to broadcast messages through print and analog venues such as television and radio. In the last three decades the explosive use of computers and Internet have "democratized" control of the media. The post-election protests in Iran in 2009 were "Twittered," which affected the content on the evening news. If you wanted to find meaning in Michael Jackson's death, you could survey Facebook's status updates faster than your newspaper's editorial page. "Virtual communities" are now being used to help effect social change in ways that previously were the domain of church denominations or political parties.

If you want to influence the image of religious vocations, you can no longer remain dissatisfied as a consumer of what Hollywood, radio or the print media are distributing. It is time to become a provider of media content yourself. The "new media"—Web sites, social networks, video-casts and podcasts—all await new stories to be told of those living their vocations heroically.

The definitive choice

Those of us promoting vocations have plenty of messages to convey via new media. In March 2009, Pope Benedict XVI addressed young people while visiting Angola. He noted their

fear of commitment: “Do not be afraid to make definitive decisions. You do not lack generosity—that I know! But the idea of risking a lifelong commitment, whether in marriage or in a life of special consecration, can be daunting. You might

Twitter and Facebook updates can swing back and forth from the silly to the sacred. Nonetheless, they offer an insight for a “follower” to see within you “the love of the heart of Jesus.”

think: ‘The world is in constant flux and life is full of possibilities... By making a definitive decision, would I not be risking my freedom and tying my own hands?’”

In a culture which often sees definitive decisions as constraining, vocation ministers need to be able to communicate the freedom and joy that

come with resolve. As Catholic Christians, we are, first and foremost invited by the Lord to “remain in my love.” (John 15:9) In another setting, Pope Benedict spoke of all those who have taken the risk of commitment in following a church vocation: “Today, as in all ages, there is no lack of generous souls ready to give up everyone and everything to embrace Christ and His Gospel, consecrating their existence to His service within communities characterized by enthusiasm, generosity and joy.”

To the limited extent that the old media covers the pope’s addresses, the decisiveness, generosity, church fidelity and love of the Lord that are clearly a part of answering a vocational call can be conveyed. However, within the old media (TV, film, radio and print) the attention paid to church vocations is limited. That is why those of us who care about religious life and priesthood must find avenues within new media to tell our story, to convey the joy in our lives.

Status updates, photos, blogs offer window on religious life

Within social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, those in religious life can take brief moments to offer “status updates”—thus allowing their “followers” to have insight into their daily lives. These updates could include brief notes regarding any of the following.

- The simple:

Thank God for a beautiful sunny morning.

Hard workout this morning. My arms and legs are still sore.

Just had a great burger at the Red Robin.

- The ministry:

Buried a beloved member of our order today. Join me in praying for her family.

Taught second graders today. They just crack me up.

Bishop was in for confirmation. One of the kids told me that his homily “rocked.”

- The mission:

Today’s Gospel reading is about “the eye of the needle.” Always a toughie to preach about.

Our parish just delivered 100 casseroles to the downtown shelter. Pray for the homeless.

Just read this great article in HORIZON and decided to take up Twittering.

Twitter and Facebook updates can swing back and forth from the silly to the sacred. Nonetheless, they offer an insight for a “follower” to see within you “the love of the heart of Jesus”—as well as to see the everyday activities of a person in religious life. To get started, just follow the step-by-step directions found on the home page of Twitter.com or Facebook.com.

In addition to “status updates,” it’s also easy to post photos on social networking sites so that those in your network can see members of your community, their ministry activities, scenes from your motherhouse or residence, service activities your community has sponsored, and so forth.

Many in religious life already have blogs, and two of the leading blogging sites make it very easy to self-publish your daily activities, reflections, photos and even links to video clips. A blog can be started in a matter of minutes at Wordpress.com or Blogspot.com.

Post your own videos

The technology related to video-casting is also well within reach of vocation ministers. YouTube.com can be used to share homilies, offer reflections on daily Scripture, provide Lenten or Advent meditations, share vow ceremonies or ordinations, etc. (A number of other Web sites also offer free video posting, but YouTube is the best known. An Internet search can lead you to others.)

My strongest visual image from a large National Catholic Youth Conference happened years before I carried a small

camcorder with me to these events. The conference exhibit hall held large inflatable obstacle courses and games. One day it was invaded by a small, youthful contingent of novices from a local women's community. All they did was play every game and smile and good-naturedly tease one another. The joy these young women brought with them was the strongest witness on behalf of vocations that I have ever seen. I only wish I could have caught it on videotape! These are the sorts of joyful moments in religious life that could and should be shared with the world using new media.

In fact posting a video has become more an expenditure of time than a costly expense. A brief survey of your community may very well find someone with the tools and skills necessary for you to get started. It is entirely likely that many of these potential volunteers will be from younger generations.

For those who don't find a volunteer, the tools are fairly simple, both to buy and to use. A digital camcorder can be bought for less than \$200. And many vocation ministers already have digital cameras that have a "movie setting" allowing them to record short films, ideal for posting on YouTube. To post material, simply register on YouTube.com and follow the instructions, available both in writing and on video.

If we are to encourage young people into making decisive choices regarding their vocation, we must be able to present them with greater insight into religious life. Today's young adults will need to be able to find their generation's heroic Father O'Malley or Sister Bertrille on the screen—on their computer screen, that is.

Influence the culture

Let's return for a moment to the words of the pope in Angola. Pope Benedict talked about how difficult it is to make definitive choices. He responded to young people's concerns about risking their freedom and constraining their options, "These are the doubts you feel, and today's individualistic and hedonist culture aggravates them."

The potential of our work utilizing new media must not be limited to potential candidates themselves. We must be able to make use of it to help transform the culture around the candidates as well.

At the Archbishop's Summit on Vocations held in spring 2009 in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Father David Toups of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops suggested that our church is not experiencing a crisis of vocations so much as

a crisis in discipleship. If our parishes, schools, and families were able to more greatly embrace the commitments of discipleship, then it is likely that responding to a vocational call would not seem so out of context from the surrounding culture.

Those who desire to support vocations might find opportunities and venues within the new media to communicate that there are those within the culture who support answering a call to religious life. For religious communities of priests, the "Year for Priests" has offered a wonderful opportunity.

In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, we have sent weekly e-mails to our youth ministry contacts, religious educators, and school personnel offering

them a link to a brief video posted on YouTube. In the video a young person identifies the positive impact a priest has made on his or her life. The videos are all short (less than five minutes), and the e-mail places the young person's message in the greater context of the church and encourages recipients to forward the e-mail to young people they know who might make good priests. The very same concept could be used for a similar campaign about women or men in consecrated life.

Many more possibilities for such programming exist, and these should be an imperative for Catholic youth ministry. In the 1997 statement, "Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry," the U.S. bishops added vocational discernment to the "essence" of ministry with adolescents. A comprehensive approach to ministering with young people must include the work of discerning vocations. However, this approach is not limited to the young people themselves but must include the entire village that surrounds them.

The gateway to human connection

In looking at ways to harness new media to communicate vocation messages, it helps to remember that the end goal is flesh-and-blood relationships, not high-tech flash. The highest ideal and supreme example of communication is found in God who became man and brother to us. That

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Jesus Christ had to come to earth in bodily form to repair the fractured relationship between God and humans should tell us something of the importance and significance of real relationships. Jesus walked among us. He listened. He spoke. He told stories and engaged in word play. He shared meals. He touched and was touched. He healed others with forgiveness, a touch, or a vocal command.

Jesus is the fullest experience of God being in relationship with us. We who desire to communicate God's love for others and invite others to be disciples of Jesus must recognize the value of real relationships. Simon Chan in the June 2007 edition of *Christianity Today* magazine reminds us that "[The use of technology] is especially important when it comes to the ultimate meaning of communion. Technology has created what we call virtual reality. It can give you a sense of intimacy. But whether it is real intimacy or not is quite another matter.

"I think this is where the Christian understanding

of community enables us to look beyond what modern technology can offer, because the Christian understanding of real communion is embodied communion. Communion means bodily presence. That's at the heart of our incarnational theology, God coming to us in person; it's the meaning of the resurrection of the body. So no matter what virtual reality technology can create, it will never be an adequate substitute for communion."

Our use of technology is meant to be a gateway toward deeper relationship. We can utilize the sense of virtual intimacy to build toward embodied communion. While using the new media to assist with vocation outreach, we must always be mindful that it is an aid to our primary personal contact. No virtual video, podcast or Facebook status can replace the real spoken invitation from a friend.

God will save us

Karl Malden, as Father Tom Cavanaugh in *The West Wing*, told the familiar parable of a man who lived by a river and heard a radio report of an impending flood and the request for immediate evacuation. But the man said, "I'm religious, I pray, God loves me, God will save me." As the waters rose, a rowboat came by with an offer of help. But the man responded, "I'm religious, I pray, God loves me, God will save me." A helicopter came by as well (because any good story must adhere to the rule of repeating the point a third time) but the man held to his claim that God would save him.

The man in Father Cavanaugh's story drowned. In the afterlife, he insisted on an audience with God and expressed his disappointment in the Lord's seeming inactivity during the flood. God responded: "I sent you a radio report, a rowboat and a helicopter. What are you doing here!?"

In our work of promoting vocations, may we not be judged harshly that we were sent the capabilities to use social networking and the opportunity to produce and distribute freely our own blogs, Web sites, podcasts and videos. We have the opportunity to be a presence in the milieu of the next generation of disciples. May we respond to these occasions of grace and not make the same mistake as the man at the river.



HORIZON articles on communications

Ideally any efforts at using new media should be part of a larger vocation-communications strategy. For help with all aspects of your vocation communications, see these articles from past editions. NRVC members can access these articles online at www.nrvc.net (click on "Publications" then "HORIZON archives").

Help the media to help you

by Karen Katafiasz, p. 22, Winter 2008. *Treats ways to work effectively with the media, including identifying and suggesting possible stories, preparing community members for interviews, maintaining positive relationships with reporters.*

Tap your Web site's potential

by Anne Boyle, p. 10, Winter 2008. *Provides checklist for creating and maintaining an effective Web site and detailed advice for driving traffic to the site.*

Go pro: work effectively with a communications staff

by Jean Dennison, p. 4, Winter 2008. *Explains how vocation and communication ministers can best strategize and collaborate to create a strong, consistent public awareness of vocation opportunities within a community.*

The 10 commandments of DVD production

by Sister Judy Zielinski, OSF, p. 30, Spring 2007. *Gives step-by-step advice for working with professionals to develop DVDs.*

Reach young adults where they are: online video and social networking

by Brother Brian Halderman, SM, p. 27, Spring 2007. *Discusses why and how vocation ministers can use online resources such as Facebook.com, Myspace.com and YouTube.com.*

Put the Web to work for vocations

by Sister Kathleen Wayne, RSM, p. 21, Spring 2007. *Gives overview and examples of Web resources for reaching and communicating with discerners and prospective discerners.*

What every vocation minister should know about public relations and advertising

HORIZON interviews Helen Wilkie, p. 11, Summer 2001. *Discusses role of advertising, tips for better ads, low-cost PR strategies, contracting with outside professionals, value of media coverage, and more.*

With one voice: Addressing vocation communications throughout the congregation

by Sister Annmarie Sanders, IHM, p. 3, Summer 2001. *Explains strategies for developing a vocation communications plan, including assessing your community, knowing your audience, planning your message, evaluating your efforts.*

Work effectively with the news media

by Sister Beth Murphy, OP, p. 8, Summer 2001. *Treats ways to reach out to media, starting with developing a media plan, honing a "nose for news," working with reporters, making the most of coverage.*

To be effective in working with Vietnamese-American discerners, it helps to understand their culture, history and attitudes toward the church.

Working with Vietnamese candidates in vocation discernment

BY FATHER BINH NGUYEN, SVD

IN RECENT YEARS, a number of media outlets have noted the increasing number of Vietnamese men and women who are becoming Catholic priests, sisters or brothers. This trend is particularly true within my own religious order, the Divine Word Missionaries. Between 2000 and 2008, out of an average of 10 ordinations each year, seven to eight of these new SVD priests were born in Vietnam. This phenomenon triggers the question of why Vietnamese vocations are increasing so rapidly, and how can vocation ministers work effectively with them. Some may give quick answers, but they could not possibly be complete because this is a complex phenomenon. To understand the Vietnamese vocation boom—and, even more importantly, how to work well with Vietnamese candidates—one must begin with this group's culture, religion and history as the foundation.

Cultural foundations

Vietnam was ruled by the Chinese for one thousand years,

Father Binh Nguyen, SVD is a priest of the Divine Word Missionaries. He currently serves as associate pastor at Resurrection Church in St. Louis, MO. Born in Vietnam, he came to the U.S. when he was 23 years old. Father Binh was a vocation minister for his community from 2002 until 2008, during which time he worked primarily with Vietnamese discerners.



and Chinese culture is infused with Confucianism. Therefore, Confucius' philosophy and teachings are the most prevalent principles in Vietnamese culture. In Confucius' philosophy, the value system is based on four basic interrelated tenets: allegiance to the family, yearning for a good name, love of learning and respect for other people. (See these concepts developed further at <http://www.vietnam-culture.com/articles-18-6/The-Vietnamese-Value-System.aspx>.)

Family allegiance The most important element in the Vietnamese value system is allegiance. No individual lives for his or her own benefit but rather for the well-being of the whole family. Accordingly, an individual's success is always attributed to the family, which takes pride and honor in it. Likewise, an individual's failure or misconduct is borne in the name of the family. The shame of a family member, therefore, is the shame of all members of the family. It is always the case that parents are responsible for the misconduct of their children and blamed for not having taught their children adequately. Thus children, single and married alike, are to consult with their parents in every situation, including career and education decisions. In addition, since parents are seen as people of wisdom, children are expected to come to them out of respect and to learn from their life experience.

Good name The Vietnamese are extremely concerned about having a good name, both in terms of reputation and in terms of what one is called. The name of an individual is very important to that person's character and destiny, and all names bear some meaning. Girls' names are chosen from the names of flowers, while boys' names signify happiness, great power,

success, or eternity. Girls' names signify feminine images, and boys' signify masculine figures. A good name is considered more valuable than material possessions.

A good name is also closely associated with a good reputation. A rich man with a bad reputation is looked down upon, while a poor man with a good reputation is more greatly admired. Again, one's name is connected to one's family. An individual who has bad behavior certainly destroys the reputation and the face of his or her parents and the whole family. On the contrary, the one who achieves higher education certainly brings pride and esteem to the whole family, which is considered a great blessing for the parents.

Love of learning The third point in the Vietnamese value system is the love of learning. Due to the significance of the good reputation and the good name of the family, the Vietnamese strive for higher education. Parents are proud to have their children complete higher studies and pursue an important position in society, such as a doctor, teacher, engineer or pharmacist. For the Vietnamese a person with more knowledge enjoys social status and prestige. Therefore gaining knowledge is considered more valuable than wealth or material success. As a result the rich who lack knowledge are looked down upon and shamed. In the Vietnamese social system scholars are ranked first, then farmers, artisans and tradesmen. (Religious rank at the top, alongside scholars.)

Respect The last but not least component in the value system is respect. Respect is the very first sign that tells whether an individual comes from good parents and, therefore, a good family. This respect is expressed when

greeting another by words, gestures and body language. Thus, respect is a virtue of utmost importance. It is the very first lesson taught to an individual while he or she is still an infant. Parents and older siblings assist an infant in putting hands together as a gesture of gratitude and respect. When an infant becomes a toddler, he or she is taught to bow the head toward parents or older brothers and sisters every time he or she is given a present, including food. A child has to get permission from his or her parents or older siblings when getting anything in the house, even food that is on the table. Children are to ask permission from their parents or older siblings when leaving the house for any legitimate reason. In returning home, they politely inform their parents by using words and gestures of respect. These rules of respect are strictly applied in all circumstances. Failure to show respect may cause punishment. The basic principle is that children are to show respect to parents, older siblings, cousins and other relatives. They should also show respect to any elders they have contact with in public places. In principle an individual pays respect to people who have social status, such as teachers, clergy and religious, supervisors and people in high positions.

The most important element in the Vietnamese value system is allegiance. No individual lives for his or her own benefit but rather for the well-being of the whole family.

Persecution of Catholics

In addition to these four cultural foundations, religion is an

important part of the Vietnamese world. Formerly there were three main religions in Vietnam: Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In modern days, however, Buddhism is the most well known and recognized. Only about 8 percent of the population of Vietnam is Christian. The faith was initially introduced to the North of Vietnam in the 16th century by missionaries from Spain, France and Portugal. With many initial difficulties due to language barriers, political conflicts and stereotypes, the missionary work proved slow. But the work was carried on faithfully until the beginning of the 19th century, when the first wave of persecution began to emerge and endured for the reigns of several kings. As a

The Vietnamese tend to be loyal to the church and its teachings, obedient to bishops, priests and religious, concerned about the good name of their church, and highly respectful of church leaders.

result, thousands of Vietnamese Catholics were persecuted before they were granted religious freedom with full respect and dignity.

Then came the second wave of persecution, which occurred in 1945 under the control of the Communists in the North. This persecution led to immigration and refugees within the country. In 1950

over a half million Catholics fled to the South to escape the Communists. Those who remained in the North continued to practice their faith but under strict control. Others gave up their faith due to the lack of shepherds. The Northerners had no choice but to endure their lives under the rule of Communism until the present time.

In April 1975 the Communists took over control in the South of Vietnam. This victory of the Communists became a horror for the Southerners in general, but particularly for those who joined the first exodus wave in 1950. All civilians suffered under the Communists, but Catholics suffered the most because they were one of the main targets of attack.

Many churches, seminaries, convents and other properties were confiscated. Seminaries and convents that were not confiscated ceased to function. Catholic schools were turned over to the government by force. Professors were relocated to the so-called re-education camps. Thousands of priests, nuns and catechists were imprisoned. The people of God were scattered and prohibited from going to church or

attending catechism classes. This severe oppression led to a second exodus for the Vietnamese.

Exodus in search of freedom

The victory of the Communists in the South of Vietnam served as the main catalyst for a second major exodus that has taken place in several waves since 1975. The first wave occurred as soon as the former regime surrendered to the Communists in April, 1975. This wave involved mostly officers, who knew of the political turmoil to come. These people made their way to safe destinations with the protection and assistance of American soldiers. The second wave alarmingly arose about three years later. Thousands

Resources for working with Asian candidates

Asian Pacific Handbook This 35-page book provides an overview of Asian culture and gives recommendations for screening and interviewing Asian candidates. There are sections on Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Filipino cultures. The handbook was produced by the NRVC Asian Pacific Standing Committee.



Time for Tea This 62-minute VHS video relates the experiences of five Asian Pacific men and women as they respond to their call to priesthood or religious life. It comes with a study guide for helping communities prepare to welcome Asian Pacific candidates. This resource was produced by the NRVC Asian Pacific Standing Committee.



of Vietnamese poured out to sea, often in makeshift boats, regardless of the danger of storms and pirates. Some 600,000 “boat people” risked their lives to seek freedom. They kept fleeing the country until 1992, when the United Nations closed the refugee camps in Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

In addition to these waves of refugees, three programs were initiated in 1989 to allow immigration to the U.S. One allowed in immediate family members of U.S. residents; another granted visas to Amerasian children; and a third allowed political prisoners to immigrate.

Religious views and orientation

This history of persecution and exodus has strongly shaped the religious views and orientation of Vietnamese-American Catholics. So too, have the four cultural tenets of the Vietnamese: allegiance to family, desire for knowledge, value for a good name, and the primacy of respect. Vietnamese Americans tend to be loyal to the church and its teachings, obedient to bishops, priests and religious, concerned about the good name of their church, and highly respectful of church leaders. In a social context, the church serves as the liberator for the Vietnamese.

Traditionally Vietnamese Catholics pray morning and evening prayers. Family members often pray the rosary every morning and evening, followed by the litany of the month. Many families in the United States are still able to practice this pious tradition. Children are typically all sent to church and catechism classes. A child is initiated into the religious formation as soon as he or she reaches the age of seven and continues the program for approximately 12 years. Adults and children alike are well motivated to faithfully attend daily and Sunday Masses. Many stay after the Mass for special devotions. Priests and religious are considered spiritual leaders who are called and chosen by God to serve the church. Accordingly they are given both worldly and heavenly power. To Vietnamese Americans they deserve respect and admiration.

The constant persecution and hardship that formed Vietnamese-American Catholics definitely contribute to their zealous devotion. Their faith has been tested through persecution and deprivation. This tested faith affirms and strengthens their bond with God. Religion is seen as a peace provider. Many young people find happiness and value in sacrificing themselves to serve the poor and the church. This great awareness of the value of self-sacrifice is gradually

assimilated in the mindset of young people who recognize the call to the priesthood and religious life. The Vietnamese people are convinced that devoting one’s life to the kingdom of God is a true blessing, not only for oneself but also for the immediate and extended family. Accordingly a young man or woman who follows a calling to priesthood or religious life normally gets 100 percent support from his or her family and from the Vietnamese community. According to the Federation of Vietnamese Priests and Religious in the U.S., in 2004 there were 450 Vietnamese-descent priests in the United States and about 1000 Vietnamese-descent sisters.

The delicate issue of sexuality

While sexuality is a sensitive issue for most cultures, sexuality in Vietnamese culture is perhaps more delicate than elsewhere. In

Confucianism, marriage is a relationship of the two extended families. It is definitely not the sole business of a man and woman who get married. In addition, an individual’s misconduct yields shame for all family members.

Therefore, dating is extremely prohibited. One may be severely punished for sexual behavior outside of marriage. In this culture, sex is generally considered a sin rather than a gift. Thus sexuality is not a topic to be treated in conversation either at home or in public, including school.

As a vocation director, I restrained from asking my candidates a direct question about sexual orientation. With older candidates, I had to be even more sensitive still in treating the issue. With younger candidates, however, the question of dating, sex and relationships is a common part of the interview.

One should be aware that cultural differences and language certainly contribute to the environment of an interview. For instance, some Vietnamese candidates may feel more comfortable with non-Vietnamese interviewers in regard to sexuality. Though this was not a common situation in my own experience, it is good to be cautious.

Another related issue here is celibacy. Since self-sacrifice for the sake of the church is valued by Vietnamese-Americans, celibacy, generally speaking, doesn’t seem to be a major

The constant persecution and hardship that formed Vietnamese-American Catholics definitely contribute to their zealous devotion.

hindrance for Vietnamese in the process of discernment. Though it is hard and challenging, celibate life is seen as admirable and worthy of esteem.

Family support for vocations

Here is an example of the tremendous support that Vietnamese families give to vocations. I began in vocation ministry as soon as I was ordained in June, 2002 and finished my second term in June, 2008. During those six years, it is not an exaggeration to say that 90 percent of my time was spent living out of my suitcase. It was both a rewarding and challenging experience. During this time, I stayed in motels eight times, no more, no less. Where did I stay the rest of the time? I stayed with families that I was already acquainted with prior to my ordination and with the families that I met in the line of duty. I rarely stayed in rectories, even though I could choose to. Instead I wanted to have more contact with people who could entertain me with their life journeys, people who enriched me tremendously. This experience clearly proves that family and vocation are interrelated in the Vietnamese community.

Another story illustrates my point. An Irish priest in his 70s was allowed to take a vacation in Orange County, CA, the family home of many Vietnamese sisters, brothers and priests. This was the chance he had longed for so as to visit the families of the seminarians he had been zealously teaching and mentoring for approximately 20 years. Friendship and exploration set the tone for his trip. He was booked almost every day for lunch and dinner and was amazed at those meals, lunch and dinner alike, with the abundance of tasty food on the table. He counted a minimum of five courses for each meal. He never spent a penny for meals during his vacation. He truly enjoyed the friendship and respect from the families of the seminarians he taught. Prior to leaving Orange County, he joked, “In the next life, I will choose to become a Vietnamese priest.”

Include families in discernment process

As these experiences with Vietnamese American families show, the link between family and vocation is very strong. Indeed, family is the first step in the vocation discernment process for Vietnamese Americans. “Family is the first seminary” is the way one Vietnamese bishop puts it. I am convinced of this truth. For this reason, every single Vietnamese candidate is compelled to share his or her

discernment process with his or her parents. There are, of course, exceptions for individuals who are more westernized. However, in the long run, even these individuals may find they have restless hearts until they share their vocation exploration with their folks. Because family allegiance is so important, a vocation director should never skip this essential step. By all means, a vocation director should look for a chance to meet in person with each candidate’s parents, even if the vocation director doesn’t speak the same language as the parents. The meeting between the vocation director and the parents empowers the discerning process of candidates.

There are also cases in which individuals—out of self protection—don’t want to let their parents know of their vocation interests. Parents take serious pride in adult children who enter the priesthood or religious life. Discerners who are still uncertain about entering a community or seminary may hesitate to share the idea with parents who will likely express certain and ecstatic joy in the matter and will hastily share it with the larger community. Likewise, there are pastors who customarily announce the news when their parishioners engage in the discernment process. Again, some discerners feel uneasy with this approach because they are concerned about the embarrassment of changing course.

Immigration concerns reappearing

While families are generally enthusiastic, immigration officials may not be. From 1975 until just recently, most Vietnamese discerners had few problems in regard to immigration status. Unlike other ethnic groups, the Vietnamese had few troubles attaining legal status in the U.S. Sadly, this good fortune is fading away. A new wave of exodus from Vietnam is underway right now, but in this post-911 world, the doors to the U.S. are not wide open. Growing numbers of Vietnamese candidates are disqualified for application to religious orders due to invalid immigrant status. And increasing numbers of young men and women enter the United States with either a tourist or student visa. These visa holders may not be up-to-date with federal regulations. As a result, their immigration status can be a problem when it comes to joining religious communities.

In spite of these recent immigration problems, young Vietnamese men and women will likely continue to investigate religious life. Their families will continue to nurture and support them. The vocation ministers who take into account the rich history, traditions and cultural sensibilities of this group of committed Catholics will be in the best position to minister effectively to them. ■

As many young, robust religious communities claim “new evangelization” as their focus, it’s helpful to know what this emphasis means in terms of ministry and what it means for the future of the church.

The call to new evangelization

BY DAVE NODAR

“New evangelization” is the focus of a number of religious communities that are growing, many of them communities that are less than 20 years old. Some observers of religious life see this focus on new evangelization as an emerging trend. In an effort to keep readers abreast of new currents in religious life, HORIZON asked the director of an organization dedicated to new evangelization to tell more about this ministry focus and what it means for the church.

WHEN ONE REFLECTS on the crises the church is facing today, particularly in the West and certainly here in the U.S., it should cause us to ask, “What must we do?” Consider a few examples that we are all aware of: the discouraging number of vocations in many religious orders and dioceses and the equally distressing statistics concerning the drop-out rate of practicing Catholics. In most dioceses, 30 percent or less of baptized Catholics attend Mass on Sundays. In other words, 70 percent of baptized Catholics are missing in action. Add to that the reality that young adults, ages 18 - 39, who account for over

40 percent of baptized Catholics, are the least active in the church. In many dioceses less than 20 percent of people in this age group attend Mass on Sundays. Unless these young adults return to the faith, the Catholic Church in America will rapidly decline.

New evangelization, new hope

How can this be? After all, the good news of what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth is what transformed the world at the time of the early church and was so transforming in the lives of many of the founders of religious orders. I would like to look at a significant development over the last 45 years that I believe holds great promise for the challenges we face.

Since Vatican II, there has been a revolutionary re-emphasis on the essential mission of evangelization. This return to our primary mission is absolutely crucial for all Catholic institutions and individuals to embrace and learn to do effectively if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st century. As we have entered the third millennium, the popes have been re-directing and re-focusing the church’s priorities. As Pope John Paul II wrote, “The moment has come to commit all of the church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 3).

For the Catholic Church to commit all of her energies to a new evangelization and mission to the nations would be a radical change in emphasis. The reality is that the vast

Dave Nodar is the founder and director of ChristLife, a Catholic ministry headquartered in Baltimore, MD that trains and equips Catholic laity and parishes to evangelize. He is also the author of the booklet Characteristics of the New Evangelization. Learn more about ChristLife at www.christlife.org.



majority of Catholics—clergy, religious and laity—are not inclined to evangelize. The term “evangelization” itself sounds Protestant. Additionally the Catholic Church is understood by many of her own members, as well as by those outside her life, to be primarily liturgical, pastoral and hierarchical. One might argue: “Aren’t evangelization and missionary activities what Protestants do?” Yet the church teaches that she is missionary by her very nature—evangelization is a duty of every Christian (*Lumen Gentium*, 17).

Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii*

I believe that this consistent emphasis on the person of our Lord Jesus and encounter with him is very significant for the church at this time in history.

Nuntiandi, wrote, “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation

proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...” (14).

While the notion of evangelization may seem foreign, inappropriate and even distasteful to some Catholics, in light of the times we are living in, the changing world scene, the deterioration of Western civilization, and the weak condition of the church, this urgent call to a new evangelization is imperative. The entire church must come to embrace this calling and make it a normal part of Catholic life. It is critical to the renewal of parishes as well as religious orders.

Think of it this way: if you were to enter a Walmart and no products were on the shelves, you can bet that the manager of the store would be quickly brought in before the company executives to explain why he or she was not fulfilling the corporate mission statement. Similarly I believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to the very real challenges that we face to return to the mission of our Redeemer as a source of hope and renewal for us personally, for the church and for religious orders.

I would like to present briefly a few key elements of what the recent popes have referred to as the new evangelization. In my booklet, *Characteristics of the New Evangelization*, I deal more fully with the subject. (This booklet can be downloaded for free at <http://www.christlife.org/resources/articles>.)

A return to the basics

1) New Evangelization centers on Christ The new evangelization, like all evangelization, must be founded on the person of Jesus Christ. The church has made this clear time and again. Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (27) declared: “Evangelization will always contain—as the foundation, center and, at the same time, the summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ ... salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” Later Pope John Paul II said: “The new evangelization is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Savior” (*Commissioning of the Neo-Catechumenal Way*, January 3, 1991).

Similarly Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly called us to return to the essence of our faith in the person of Jesus Christ: “Our knowledge of Jesus is in need above all of a living experience: Another person’s testimony is certainly important, as in general the whole of our Christian life begins with the proclamation that comes to us from one or several witnesses. But we ourselves must be personally involved in an intimate and profound relationship with Jesus” (Rome, October 4, 2006).

This is not new in the church’s proclamation. However I believe that this consistent emphasis on the person of our Lord Jesus and encounter with him is very significant for the church at this time in history. It is very easy for us as Catholics to be distracted by the riches that God has given to the church: her history, apostolic succession, her liturgy, her theology, the charisms of religious community founders, Mary and the saints, her art, etc. With so many wonderful treasures we can be, it seems, distracted from the pearl of great price, which is the person of Christ and the call to union with the Trinity through him.

2) The necessity of learning to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ Upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, we can see another characteristic that distinguishes the new evangelization. We are called as Catholics to witness to the Gospel with our lives. But this, without the proclaimed word, is not sufficient. How will others know the reason for the hope we have unless we make a clear and explicit proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This is particularly relevant at this time period when frequently in the church—and certainly here in the U.S.—Christian formation is woefully lacking. There is a need to re-establish basics of the faith in order for catechesis to be effective. Many people are not clear on the *kerygma*,

the basic Gospel message. Additionally many Catholics do not understand the Holy Spirit's role in our lives as adults. They don't understand how the Spirit, given in baptism and confirmation, is the transforming power for living as a Christian. Effective catechesis demands effective evangelization—calling people to Christ and in him to interior conversion. This evangelization must occur within the church—in parishes, seminaries and other adult education settings—as well as in mission to those outside of the church.

Catholics fuzzy on core beliefs

Recently, when applying for a loan, the bank manager asked me, “Who is your employer?” When I answered, “ChristLife,” she asked what ChristLife was. I answered, “A Catholic organization.” She then asked, “Do you serve the poor?” I said, “No, we help people to understand the meaning of life and know personally that God loves them.” In the midst of a busy bank, she took off her glasses, tears welling up in her eyes and said, “Last Sunday I was at Mass and thought to myself, if anyone asked me, ‘Why are you here and what do you believe?’ I wouldn't know what to say.” She opened up her heart and shared a great need. This was an opportunity of grace, to which I was privileged to respond. I shared that our faith is most importantly about a person, Jesus, and that in him we find true life. Before leaving, I discussed ways she might learn more about the basics of the Good News in a particular parish that offered an evangelizing series.

This encounter illustrates a couple things. First, there are many Catholics still attending church who are not clear on what they believe. The woman I mentioned above is not an isolated example. There are many people like her. Second, people need someone to share with them that they can encounter Jesus personally and enter relationship with the Trinity through him. The question for many is “how?” They need someone to explain basics of the Christian faith, which is the Good News of what God has done in Jesus of Nazareth, in simple and relevant conversation. Each one of us needs to learn how to do this clearly and confidently, meeting people where they are. And we need to remember that sharing the Good News with another person is one of the most wonderful privileges that God grants to us as his children.

While evangelization is a process that includes catechesis, the sacraments and much more, the starting point must always be the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our privileged call is to invite others to encounter personally the love of Christ in whom we have fullness of life. If we learn

how to evangelize and then, actually evangelize, i.e., share our relationship with Christ, we will find that people's lives are radically changed and that they are hungry to learn how to live our Catholic faith.

Let me offer one more story about the need to evangelize and re-evangelize. Recently during a series we offer, *Discovering Christ*, which explicitly communicates the basics of the Gospel, a 60-year-old former religious, with her master's in theology, came up to me after a teaching and asked, “Did you say that at the essence of our faith is the person, Jesus Christ, and in him we can have a relationship with God?” I said, “Yes, that is essential to living our faith.” She exclaimed, “I never heard that and didn't know that it was actually possible!” As the late Cardinal Suenens of Belgium stated, “Many Catholics have been sacramentalized but not evangelized.” We must return to basics and begin to learn how to embrace evangelization as our essential mission.

There are many Catholics still attending church who are not clear on what they believe. ... They need someone to explain basics of the Christian faith.

Young adults and the future of the church

Let me share a few things about young adults, since that age group is so essential for the future of the church. One observation is that, if they have faith, they are not only interested in being involved with service—they also want to know the deeper meaning of their faith. If they don't have any Christian faith, many are hungry for it. And it is critical for us as Catholics to be able to explain the faith to both types of people.

In our work with young adults ages 18 to 30, we have found that if the Gospel is shared in a relevant manner (not changing the content, but making it understandable and applicable to their lives), it continues to have profound power to change lives. We offer a seven-week series called *Discovering Christ*. During each session we share a meal—with no other goal during dinner than building relationships. Next, we present a basic teaching that explains an aspect of the Gospel. Some of the topics include: What is the meaning of life? Why does Jesus matter? What did Jesus come to reveal to us? Why did he die for us? Why is the resurrection so important? Who is the Holy Spirit? Why do we need the

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church? After the teaching there is a small group discussion, during which our guests can share what they think and feel about what they just heard.

The goal of this course is not catechesis but evangelization, so during the group discussion time we don't tell people that they are wrong if they share something that is not a correct understanding of the faith. Rather, we see each session as an opportunity of grace and a process of conversion over seven weeks. Allowing relationships to develop, relationships that are safe and friendship-based, has yielded the exceptional fruit of transformed lives for many of our guests. It is incredible to see what happens when the basics of the Gospel message are presented in the context of the relational dynamics of the evening.

Discovering Christ is an example of how to incorporate a number of the elements that are crucial for responding to the new evangelization. There is a clear presentation of the person Jesus Christ and a clear explanation of how to respond to the Good News in either initial conversion for the unbaptized or renewal of baptismal commitment for those already baptized.

These are very simple ways of responding practically to our mission to bring many to authentic personal conversion. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, defined conversion this way, "Conversion means accepting by personal decision the saving sovereignty of Jesus Christ and becoming his disciple" (46). This is the essential calling that Christ gave to his church to go and make disciples. Amid our challenges today he calls us to return to this essential mission. ■

Immigrant religious communities have to cope with language barriers, financial pressures and cultural adaptation. How do they fit into the U.S. church? What does their presence mean for vocation ministers?

The gifts and challenges of immigrant religious communities

BY SISTER REBECCA BURKE, OSF

Most religious communities in the U.S. today were established in other countries and arrived here as immigrants. That process continues. Here are insights for vocation ministers about who today's immigrant communities are, why they've come and how they fit into church and religious life networks. We present this article in preparation for the global theme of the November 2010 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference: "Casting the Net: Vocation Ministry in a Global Church and World." (See www.nrv.net for details about the convocation.)

S EVEN YEARS AGO when I became the delegate for consecrated life for the Archdiocese of Washington, one of the first challenges I faced had to do with immigrant religious communities. As the new liaison between the bishop and approximately 1,600 women and men religious, nearly all of whom were in active ministry, plus a dozen or so members of secular institutes, I faced a steep learning curve. The Office of Consecrated Life had been unoccupied for more than six

Sister Rebecca Burke, OSF is the delegate for consecrated life for the Archdiocese of Washington. She is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. Before beginning her current ministry in 2003, she worked in special education in St. Coletta Schools in the Midwest and Massachusetts for 15 years and as an education specialist in a medical school.



months, and a file folder labeled "Issues for Immediate Follow-Up" lay on the desk. The first three issues concerned visas for sisters invited to the archdiocese to serve in various capacities—a phenomenon with which I had no experience.

A quick calculation indicated that roughly 18 percent of the 800-plus sisters in the archdiocese were from countries other than the U.S. (We do not have any immigrant religious communities of men.) This high proportion of immigrant religious is not surprising given the tremendous ethnic and racial diversity of the area. The Archdiocese of Washington is home to 580,000 Catholics, with liturgies celebrated in four rites other than the Latin Rite and Sunday Masses celebrated in more than 20 languages. Nearly half the Catholics are of Hispanic ancestry, a mix of over a dozen ethnic and cultural backgrounds sharing a common language. Thirty parishes have at least one Sunday Mass in Spanish, and one parish has all the Masses and parish activities in Spanish. In addition Mass is celebrated in several other languages, including Tagalog [Filipino], Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, German, Italian and Portuguese. Beyond that the Croatian, Maronite, Syriac and Ge'ez rites are celebrated in their accompanying languages.

Upon beginning my ministry as delegate, I knew immediately that I needed help to find resources and to learn immigration regulations regarding visas, green cards, and much more. I would soon learn that U.S. immigration regulations evolved slowly prior to September 11, 2001, but have since become a moving target, changing sometimes with a few months' lead time, and at other times seeming to change

overnight. Religious worker (R-1) visas have come under particular scrutiny by the Department of Homeland Security because of the high level of fraud among applicants. Coming into a diocese on an R-1 visa is a lengthy and complicated process, and maintaining R-1 status once here requires vigilance, adding layers of stress for those trying to adjust to life, language and customs in a new country.

Challenges: from visas to culture shock

With all these complications on the legal side of immigration, I didn't realize when I began this ministry that in the long run, this aspect would be the easy part of working with immigrant religious. Without immigrant sisters, the Archdiocese of

These immigrant communities bring with them a unique set of challenges—personal and community issues which are far more complex than visa and immigration-status issues.

Washington would be much the poorer and its ministry inadequate to meet the needs of its diverse Catholic population. These immigrant communities bring with them, however, a unique set of challenges—personal and community issues which are far more complex than visa and immigration-status issues. My thoughts in

this article represent the experience of just one archdiocese with immigrant religious communities. I don't presume to speak for the whole country, but I do hope that our experience here in the Archdiocese of Washington sheds light on immigrant communities in other parts of the country.

Most of the religious communities that entered the Archdiocese of Washington in the last decade came at the invitation of Cardinals James Hickey and Theodore McCarrick, who served all or part of their tenure before the major changes in U.S. immigration regulations. Some sisters were invited for a specific ministry, while others were given an open invitation when one of the cardinals encountered them in the course of his travels.

Overall most immigrant sisters came to minister to immigrants with whom they share a common home country or a common language. Others entered the archdiocese as students and remained for ministry. At least three communities came to serve in ways that few American



To help newly arrived religious integrate into the larger church community, the Archdiocese of Washington has hosted annual picnics. Religious from Korea, Puerto Rico, the U.S. and Spain share a table indoors one year, thanks to inclement weather.

sisters still do, for instance cooking and performing domestic work at religious order seminaries and serving as sacristans at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Two communities came to do ministry in the U.S., while also studying for degrees or certifications that will help them advance in ministries much needed here, nursing in particular. In one of these communities the sisters were burdened with a very strong expectation that they send their earnings home to their community in India.

More preparation needed

Community by community and person by person, each of these immigrant sisters brings her community charism and personal gifts to the archdiocese. In addition they bring youth, energy and a desire to serve. Many also have come with ingenuity to meet situations for which they were completely unprepared. But some, unfortunately, lack resilience and have found their situation too difficult for their coping skills. Without a doubt, lack of preparation, personal or ministerial, has been a key factor in limiting the effectiveness of these sisters in the ministry that brought them to the U.S.

The *Guidelines of Receiving Pastoral Ministers in the United States*, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), suggest that a “pre-departure orientation program of several days” take place in the person's country of origin¹. It should present basic information on the multicultural nature of American society, along with specifics of the area where the person will minister on arrival, emphasizing some of the similarities and differences to expect

here. No immigrant sister who has come to the Archdiocese of Washington on an R-1 visa—whether at the archbishop's invitation to serve or at a community or employer's request—has received this type of orientation in her home country.

The guidelines further call for a two- to three-month transition and adjustment period on arrival in the diocese, during which individuals can build a personal support network and enroll in English classes. Typically, however, the immigrant sisters here have begun work almost immediately, learning on the job, taking English courses on the side, and generally undergoing trial by fire. Most do not even have the opportunity to meet other immigrant sisters with whom they share so much.

Good early socialization helps

The immigrant sisters who have fared the best in the Archdiocese of Washington are those who came to work with immigrants with whom they share a home country, language and culture. In what is a foreign environment for both the sisters and those they serve, the two groups offer each other a reminder of home. In addition the sisters who have come to serve their own people tend to come to the U.S. trained for the ministries in which they engage. Furthermore there is an element in the community formation of these sisters which has prepared them for mission work away from home. Very likely missionary service was a part of their vocational call from the start.

These sisters make friends in their parish community and maintain friendships in their religious community at home. In the case of Hispanic sisters, over time they meet other Hispanic sisters also serving in the archdiocese and often form friendships with them as well.

Sisters who have come to serve in ways that American sisters no longer do also have the rewarding experience of meeting an unmet need. They enjoy clearly articulated appreciation by the sponsoring community or employer. They can begin work very soon after their arrival in the U.S. and cope fairly well on the job because what they do is related primarily to skills rather than relationships. At least one sponsoring community that has brought sisters to the U.S. makes a concerted effort to assure that the sisters' needs are met, e.g., that they learn English, have access to spiritual direction and are encouraged to participate in meetings where they are likely to meet other sisters.

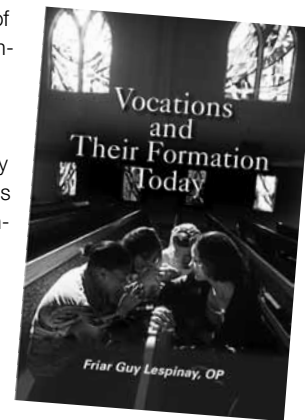
In contrast, sisters who have come to work as nurses in U.S. hospitals or as teachers in diocesan schools have not

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adjusted as quickly or as well. The majority of them require additional training before being hired or must accept a lower level position than they held in their home country. If they do not live in a convent that puts them, geographically at least, at the center of their parish, they miss out on an important source for meeting potential friends. In addition if the parish where they attend Mass does not have other parishioners from their country of origin, they might not have an immediate sense of home and may, in fact, feel marginalized.

In two such communities that have come to Washington—one from India and one from Nigeria—members became isolated in their own houses within two or three years after their arrival. In both communities, the sisters came to the U.S. already speaking English and did not take classes in American English. All but one sister experienced difficulty communicating at work because they did not sufficiently understand the language and terminology associated with their positions. This difficulty transferred into a lack of confidence communicating with co-workers.

When the Indian sisters were at home, they watched TV news from India. Not one of them ever walked to the park next to their house to see Fort Stevens or walked around the block in the neighborhood. Lacking an informative orientation to Washington, DC, the sisters fully internalized the one thing they knew from TV news about the city—it's a dangerous place to be. Their isolation at work was compounded at home.

The Nigerian sisters worked in an assisted living facility

The archdiocese re-learned an old lesson—that religion has long been a facilitator in the adaptation process for those new to the U.S., including new religious.

and attended class in their off-hours so they could become certified in the State of Maryland. They worked; they studied; they went to class. And they were homesick. The sisters weren't aware that they lived quite close to the archdiocese's Nigerian parish. American teaching and testing styles were different

enough that all had difficulty in school, and two failed their class. They were too ashamed to tell their U.S. superior.

Not surprisingly depression became a factor for a sister in the Nigerian community, as well as for a sister in the Indian congregation. Their depression affected their entire household. A pastoral minister from the hospital where one of the Indian sisters worked called my office one day wondering which to do first—hospitalize the sister or call her major superior in another state.

Neither community had ever heard of depression, could recognize its signs and symptoms or knew help was available. The two major superiors in the U.S. worked hard to support their sisters in Washington and the local communities of which they were a part. Each superior paid a visit to her sisters and followed through on concrete suggestions. For example, they encouraged their sisters to enroll in classes to learn American English, to participate actively in parish life, to take driver's education courses, to get library cards, and, with an occasional exception, to watch American national and local news.

The Indian sister who had been suffering from depression returned to India two years later. Both Nigerian sisters are now certified in nursing, and another is certified to teach computer skills.

Helping the process of socialization

Faced with the need to do something to better meet the needs of immigrant sisters, my colleagues and I sought help for some concerns and improvised for others. With the help of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), visa problems became easily manageable. The overwhelming scale of personal and a few ministerial concerns seemed more intractable. Early in my second year, following a suggestion from the USCCB guidelines to gather newly arrived immigrants for a social event,² our Office of Consecrated Life hosted a picnic to which all the international sisters were invited. It proved surprisingly effective and became an annual event until the immigrant sisters were no longer new to the Archdiocese of Washington, to each other, or to the larger group of religious in ministry here.

Eighteen sisters came the first year, 88 the second. After the first one, word got around from sisters who attended that "it's OK if your English isn't good. Everyone there sounds just like us." The program was simple—an opening prayer, a picnic with plenty of food, and time for people to meet each other and begin telling their stories. We had one rule—the sisters could not sit with members of their own community. At the end we distributed CLINIC's new publication, *Frequently Asked Questions on R-1 Visas*³ and indicated new or significant information.

A few archdiocesan staff members also attended the picnic. To this day our chancellor vividly recalls how she felt when, during prayer, each of the sisters said the "Our Father" in her native language. At that moment the immigration issue became imbued with life, with flesh-and-blood people.

The picnics now over, today we can count on the sisters who participated to be at other archdiocesan events where they can interact with more confidence with other religious and take advantage of opportunities for ongoing formation or enhanced community prayer. The archdiocese re-learned an old lesson—that religion has long been a facilitator in the adaptation process for those new to the U.S., including new religious. Finding a home somewhere can be the bridge to inclusion, particularly when complemented by other orientation activities.

Members of every immigrant community in the Archdiocese of Washington have begun to apply for and receive green cards. They are here for the long haul, just as the communities entering the U.S. from the 17th through the mid-20th centuries have been here for the long haul. With members now permanent residents, the new communities



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are filing for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, so as not to be dependent on the archdiocese for validation or community identity. One community has begun the process of requesting its own four-digit identification number in the Official Catholic Directory.

Implications for vocation ministry

What, then, do these experiences with immigrant communities mean for vocation ministry? If, as Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*, "... what's past is prologue... and what's to come is yours and mine..." then U.S. religious have an opportunity to play an active role in helping new communities find their way in vocation ministry in their new country.

One by one, and very slowly because of limited finances and Washington's high cost of living, our immigrant religious communities are beginning to look for houses large enough to invite women interested in religious life to visit for a few days at a time. Too small to have an assigned vocation director,

they are in the enviable position of having every sister see herself in vocation ministry, particularly those working with populations from home. They attend diocesan and parish vocation events in proportionally high numbers and enter into conversation with many young women. Generally, though, these communities are not members of national organizations (such as NRVC, Leadership Conference for Women Religious and so on) which give access to education, publicity for communities and ready access to supportive peers from other communities. It's not simply that the immigrant communities never heard of our organizations. It's more a case of not having money to become members or to travel to meetings.

New as they may be to the U.S., the communities entering the Archdiocese of Washington in the last few decades, with one exception, have histories as religious institutes ranging from 90 to more than 300 years. Their numbers here, though, are too small for a U.S. province or novitiate. Some come from countries where they administer and staff national novitiates for communities with too few novices to have their own. Unlike U.S. common novitiates,

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theirs include novices from a large number of small communities with different charisms and different tribal languages but a common national language.

The Archdiocese of Washington's experience indicates that immigrant communities consistently respond to invitations to be included, educated and made to feel welcome. The opportunities for American religious orders to extend invitations to immigrant communities are limited only by our imagination. Possibilities include:

- Partnering with an immigrant community and sharing the story of our community's immigration and early growth in the U.S.
- Sharing the fruits of some of our hard-learned lessons, such as preventing burnout.
- Inviting immigrant religious to regional vocation meetings.
- Teaching the skill of networking.

- Beginning to consider, for when the time comes, opening our common novitiates to smaller immigrant communities with whom we share a common charism.

Some of these suggestions involve concerted time and effort, but some are simple, and all begin with awareness. These are our sisters and brothers in religious life who have come here from other countries to serve the church. They come with both gifts and burdens to be shared by all. ■

1. *Guidelines of Receiving Pastoral Ministers in the United States*, Revised Edition, Publication #5-530, USCCB Publishing, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
3. *Frequently Asked Questions: Visas for Non-immigrant Religious Workers*, Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), Division of Religious Immigration Services, Published by CLINIC, 2005.

A parish with an active Vocation Council provides a model for raising vocation awareness at a grassroots level.

Parish outreach builds vocation awareness

BY ETHEL AND TONY LAPITAN

Vocation ministers for religious communities are always seeking opportunities to work with parishes to promote vocations.

Following is an example of an active vocation committee in a Florida parish that works closely both with the local diocese and with the religious order with which it is affiliated.

IN MANY PARISHES TODAY laypeople are talking about the urgent need to focus on vocations—for men and women to enter religious orders and for a new generation to enter the priesthood. These laity are not only talking, they are doing. Organizations such as the Serra Club and the Knights of Columbus have long supported and fostered vocations, and their members are often in the forefront of parish work with this aim. The American bishops have actively encouraged parishes to establish vocation committees or councils to encourage the laity to focus on this urgent need.

To illustrate the kind of vocation promotion and outreach that is possible in parishes, we would like to focus on our own parish of St. Vincent de Paul in Holiday, FL. We are part of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL, and the men's community

Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, Province of St. Ann, staffs our parish.

Our efforts take place in an encouraging environment. Our diocese has a very active Office of Vocations which has directly encouraged all the parishes in the diocese to establish vocation committees to support the 29 current seminarians and to bring the need for vowed and ordained vocations to the front and center of parish life. The diocese sponsors workshops for vocation committees each year and regularly communicates with the committees. In addition, the director of vocations for the diocese helps support this vital effort by making personal visits to the parishes.

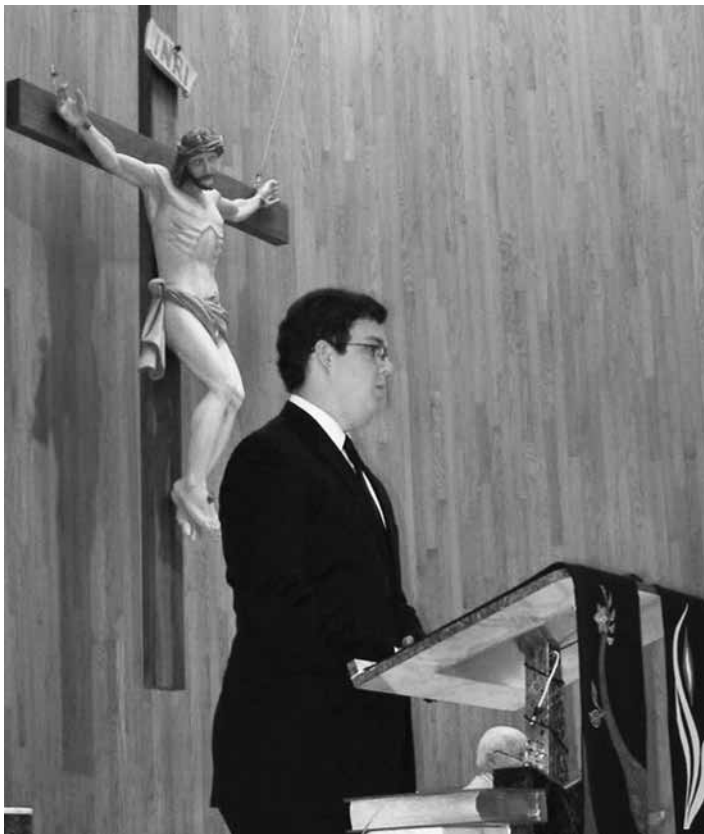
At our parish, St. Vincent de Paul, a Vocation Council was established in 2006. We have 12 members, including a spiritual director (our pastor), our two religious education directors, the head of our Faith Formation Council, the grandmother of one of the diocesan seminarians, a member of the Knights of Columbus, and a teen member. We meet once a month and have a specific agenda each time, gathering ideas from parishioners on ways to foster vocations in our parish.

Variety of activities

Our activities are aimed at many levels: from prayer to education to support for those in formation or already in a church vocation. First, a look at prayer. Wednesdays have been designated in our diocese as a **day to pray for vocations**, and our parishioners do so at the two daily Masses, using a prayer from the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament praying to St. Peter Julian Eymard, the founder.

Ethel and Tony Lapitan are parishioners at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Holiday, FL and founding members of the parish's Vocation Council.





Anthony Ustick, a seminarian from the parish, spoke after the family Mass one weekend and met with the youth group for an informal discussion.

We also have **Eucharistic Adoration** from 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. each Wednesday, and on the third Wednesday of each month, the last hour is devoted to special litanies and prayers for priests, religious and vocations. We use recorded Gregorian chant to set the mood, and each month different members of the community lead the rosary and litanies. Because this is the Year of the Priest, we are using a special litany in honor of St. Jean Marie Vianney as part of this vocation-focused Eucharistic Adoration. One other way that prayer for vocations is offered is through the homebound. They pray continually for vocations and are supported in this by our Eucharistic ministers.

At St. Vincent de Paul Parish we also keep a sharp **focus on our diocesan seminarians and the seminarians** for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament since that is the religious order to which our priests belong. We have their photographs and biographical detail on poster boards in the narthex of our church. When the parish celebrated its 40th anniversary, we displayed these posters at the festivities, and



The Vocation Council for St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Holiday, FL meets once a month to coordinate activities aimed at educating and inspiring parishioners to support and consider vowed and ordained vocations. Pictured here, from left to right, are four of the 12 members: Anita McMahon, Ethel Lapitan, Barbara Gardiner and Tony Lapitan.

we also put them on display at a special gathering to honor the ordination anniversaries of two of our priests.

Many parishes in the St. Petersburg diocese have a “**vocation chalice**” which families take home for the week, to pray specifically for vocations. Our parish offers a statue of St. Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. Included in the carrying bag for the statue is the DVD *Fishers of Men*, for the family to watch, and many special prayers for vocations. This is an outstanding DVD on vocations and was shown after all the Masses one weekend by our acting pastor.

Education outreach is another of our focuses. We have **invited seminarians and members of nearby religious orders to speak** about their personal religious calls and about vocations to religious life in general. They have spoken after our 9 a.m. family Mass on Sundays and to our religious education students, particularly to those aged 11 or older. One of our most well-received speakers was the director of vocations from the a local order of Benedictine women. Many of the students said they had never spoken to a religious sister prior to her visit.

Our **church bulletin** is an excellent tool for bringing information and ideas about vocations to our parishioners. We put vocation-related messages in our bulletin each week, often

drawing on the Vatican Web site or other Catholic Web sites for content. We have a section titled “Focus on Vocations,” in which we publish vocation-oriented commentary from the Serra Club, our diocesan publications or other sources. In addition we sometimes run a little section called “Did You Know?” that consists of interesting facts and notes about St. Jean Marie Vianney.

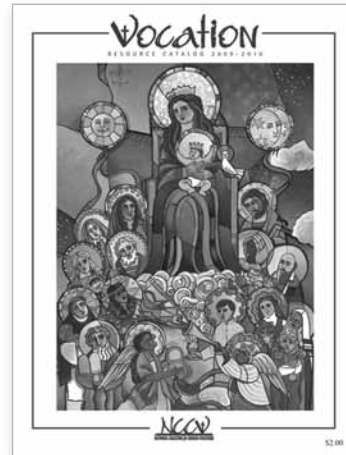
Another program our parishioners enjoy involves communicating with the diocesan and congregation seminarians and novices. Many people have volunteered to become “**vocation buddies**” to these special young men, sending them birthday and holiday cards and notes of support. Last year members of our parish Vocation Council made a point to **attend the ordination** of one of these seminarians at the Cathedral of St. Jude in St. Petersburg, making the event particularly meaningful to all.

Strengthening ties to religious order

Because we are privileged to have the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in charge of our parish, our laity has developed strong ties to the priests and brothers who serve here in Holiday, as well as to those serving throughout the province. Twice a year the chair of our parish Vocation Council **attends the Provincialate Vocation Council** in Cleveland, Ohio. In a recent meeting the provincial superior of the congregation emphasized that vocations to the community are going to come from the parishes where its members serve. He encouraged the laity working with the congregation to focus on the youth in our parishes, to support our youth ministers in every way possible and to radiate a sense of spirituality as living examples of Eucharistic evangelization. The congregation has approval from the Vatican and is in the process of **forming a Canonical Association of the Blessed Sacrament for lay members**. This group has the potential to further widen the congregation’s outreach among the laity.

Stepping back from this look at our specific activities, it is clear to us that prayer is the essential ingredient in encouraging vocations of all types—vowed, ordained and lay. We find it essential to develop a strong sense of spirituality and thankfulness for the guidance of our current priests. As we pray the rosary to Mary, the mother of vocations, and give thanks to Jesus Christ, our first priest, we remember that for the church to continue to grow, we laypeople must commit ourselves to bring the vocational values of spirituality and service into our families, parishes, country and world. ■

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BOOK NOTES

Connecting the dots to find a hopeful future

BY SISTER LINDA BECHEN, RSM

AS YOUNG CHILDREN, many of us spent hours entertaining ourselves with a simple puzzle activity called “dot-to-dot.” In this activity pencil lines connected one number to the next, until all were joined, creating a clear image from a blur of numbers scattered about the page.

“Dot to dot” is precisely the image that comes to mind when considering what Tim Muldoon accomplishes in his book about the contemporary American Catholic Church, *Seeds of Hope: Young Adults and the Catholic Church* (Paulist Press, 2008). Muldoon has been able to connect some of the significant “dots” of our life as a church and to be hopeful for our future. Because of his background as a systemic theologian, Muldoon has been able to reach into the richness of our church and tradition, claim this anew, and raise it as a blessing for the future, which is being shaped in our midst through young adults. Muldoon’s message is relevant to all Catholics who care about the future of the church, and since vocation ministers are closely connected to

Sister Linda Bechen, RSM is a Sister of Mercy of the Americas. She served as a vocation minister for her community from 1996 to 2002 and now ministers as a pastoral associate at St. Patrick Church in Cedar Rapids, IA.

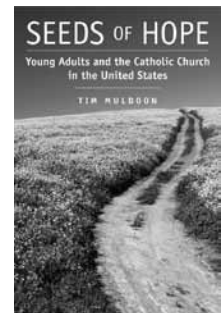


youth and young adults, his words may have particular significance for them. By and large, they are among the groups within the church that are already acting on his advice for connecting with young adults.

Muldoon maintains a sense of hope throughout the connections he makes in his book. He is able to do this through a theological lens steeped in today’s culture, mindful of the real challenges before young adults as they seek to integrate culture, globalization, their lives, and faith. What Muldoon presents is not a new methodology, but a new way of being that integrates the best the church has to offer while being a critical voice regarding the inconsistencies that surround our lives in the church.

In his introduction Muldoon presents a fundamental insight: “Being a Catholic today is not historical... when generations shared faith the way they shared a family name.... [Rather] it is a deliberate choice to look at the world in a particular way, based not only on the teachings of Jesus, but also on the development of that uniquely ‘Catholic imagination.’” It is the development of this imagination and its impact which is the heart of his book.

Muldoon begins his exploration by asking whether anyone “is telling young adults why they should be Catholic” or asking them, “Why are you





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proud to be Catholic?" Unfortunately I would venture that these questions are rarely the focus of most conversations involving the Catholic Church. Often conversations center on diminishment or polarities of theological viewpoints. The result has been eroded spirits, which have hampered us from having the encouraging and sustaining conversations that are our very lifeblood as communities of faith.

One of Muldoon's greatest disappointments in the Catholic Church is a "lack of courage," a disparity between the proclaimed word of the Gospel and how our church and society act. He invites a contemplative stance to ponder more deeply how our actions reflect (or do not reflect) the intention of the Gospels.

With all of this Muldoon presents a daunting challenge: how do we give young adults the tools to reclaim the church as their own within the context of our contemporary culture? In the succeeding chapters, he explores five areas—theology,

ecumenism, liturgy, spirituality and morality. As formative areas in our Catholic tradition, he presents the richness and best of each, and in doing so he sees glimmers of transformation and hope.

Muldoon says the framework for allowing young adults to claim their Catholic tradition will be the mentoring and supportive presence of adults who are willing to journey with young people. Vocation ministers and every baptized adult are invited to be the mentors. This mentoring means being attentive to, promoting and supporting young adult opportunities for growth. How do we create spaces that invite reflection, encourage dialogue, deepen commitment and inspire greatness and possibility?

As one who works in a parish setting with young adults, two of his chapters were especially poignant with possibility. The first is the chapter that highlights the importance and role of Catholic social teaching in the ongoing formation of our Catholic imagination. Even though Catholic social teaching is a diadem of our tradition, much of it is virtually unknown by the Catholic majority. Muldoon invites us to highlight, teach, study and preach on this theme. Many vocation directors already tap into this deep wellspring with events that allow youth and young adults to take part in social ministries and reflect on them.

The second hope-filled chapter is on liturgy. Muldoon raises hospitality as an essential element. Muldoon widens the lens of welcome by critiquing a couple assumptions that have woven themselves into our Catholic psyche. He poses significant questions regarding the Catholic school and family models that so many parishes are built on. How do we foster a sense of belonging and community for young adults through our gatherings, worship, programs and activities? A second assumption is that a welcoming environment is not a "given"—that it needs to be shaped and developed over time with intent and commitment. Again, how do we create spaces in which we can welcome and be welcoming in our churches? Are young adults among those we intentionally welcome? Certainly vocation directors work mightily to invite young adults to their events and retreats, but before young people will walk through the door of a vocation minister's office, they will need to have been welcomed first in a parish setting.

Muldoon's book is a worthwhile read for anyone who ministers with young adults. It stirred my own "Catholic imagination," and it invites all readers to reflect on how they are nurturing the seeds that have been sown for the future. This book is a piece of the hope which Muldoon holds out to us if we are willing to respond. ■

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