

# HORIZON



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE

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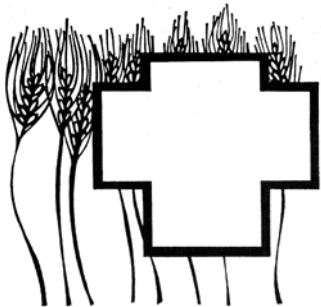
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# HORIZON

*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, 5420 S. Cornell Ave., Suite 105, Chicago, IL. 60615-5604. E-mail: [nrvc@nrvc.net](mailto:nrvc@nrvc.net). Web: [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net).

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

## Strong relationships help build strong communities

**H**AVE YOU EVER SEEN the bumper sticker: “I take orders from a Jewish carpenter”? That cuts right to the chase about our ultimate source of leadership. Everything about religious communities should reflect a profound desire to follow Jesus, our Alpha and Omega.

While that’s the big picture of who’s at the helm, most endeavors involve a human leader to move the effort forward. Families have parents; schools have principals; companies have CEOs; cities have mayors, and so on. While religious communities answer to a “Jewish carpenter” in a broad way, they rely on elected leaders and appointed ministers day-to-day.

Vocation ministers learn quickly that they need to work closely with leadership for their ministry to be effective. The theme for this edition—Leadership and Vocation Ministers Working Together—came from vocation ministers themselves. They asked *HORIZON* to consider several questions. What do leaders expect from us? What do we want from them? How can we effectively work together? What models can we use to carry out

vocation ministry? How do leaders select and support vocation ministers? The articles on the following pages tackle these questions and more.

All of us involved with *HORIZON* hope that the reflections and wisdom contained in this edition give leaders and vocation ministers an opportunity to step back and consider their relationship and the structures they’ve put in place. Like all human relationships, the one between vocation ministers and leaders works best when they have a shared vision, when they communicate, when they respect each other’s role in the community, when they support each other.

Sure every Christian is “taking orders” from a Jewish carpenter, but Jesus is also depending on us to forge the working relationships we need carry out our responsibilities. Founded on a close, positive relationship, both leaders and vocation ministers can do their part to create a future for religious life.

*Carol Schuck Scheiber, editor*  
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Three keys to a positive, effective relationship between vocation ministers and leadership are shared vision, strong communication and plenty of resource support.

# What vocation ministers want from leadership

BY FATHER STEVE PAWELK

**M**Y EXPERIENCES OF RELIGIOUS in apostolic communities tell me that what we want from leadership is often unrealistic. Sometimes the list of qualities presented during leadership discernment is even beyond Jesus who, after all, went to the mountain to pray, ate with his friends and took time out to relax, even in the midst of saving the world. These unrealistic expectations of leadership may come from the same part of the community that expects the vocation director to double the number of new recruits annually, visit each house and mission and handle a few extra duties on behalf of the community because, “Well, you aren’t that busy, are you?” I hope to outline here realistic expectations of leadership in their collaboration with vocation directors.

As a Glenmary Home Missioner, I have been blessed with a very supportive leadership team, which has been a strong asset to our vocational efforts. In my current term as vocation director, I have worked with two different leadership teams; and in the past I served in vocations for two years under yet another leadership team. Based on this experience, I identify three key contributions of leadership: a shared vision, frequent communication and resource support.

## Shared vision

The vocation office and its promotion efforts need to flow from a vision shared with leadership. When a common vision

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*Father Steve Pawelk, a Glenmary Home Missioner, has served as vocation director for his community since 2000. A native of Minnesota, he has served in missions in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. He now lives in a Glenmary mission in Eastern Kentucky.*



is clearly articulated and agreed upon, the community is served well. When it is not, many problems can occur.

One of the worst things that can happen, for example, is for the vocation director to paint an exciting picture of the future, set up expectations of what might happen for a candidate, then for the new candidate’s dreams to be dashed within the first months of formation. One reason this may happen is because the vocation director has simply tried to please the candidate by promising almost everything. But another reason is that the vocation director is sharing with the candidate his or her own genuine vision of a potential future and how the candidate can be part of it when, in reality, leadership does not share this same vision.

This vision gap can occur when leadership has not articulated a strong vision for the future. Vocation directors, who are usually very enthusiastic about the future of their communities, can be a bit more optimistic (and, in my case, not always realistic) about what is possible. Then, when we find a wonderful, Spirit-filled person, we sometimes err in our efforts to expand our community’s vision and mission so he or she will fit in.

One of the most important tasks of religious community leadership is to clearly outline the vision for the community—not only for the present but also for years to come. In doing this, leadership tells us the limits of what is possible for an individual within the community now and in the near future.

Leaders have access to important information that influences their understanding of the future. They know more clearly the limitations of membership, what needs to change to improve the holistic health of membership, and the financial realities about various community institutions or missions. If the vocation director is not kept in the loop, there can be a serious disconnect between the future painted by the vocation office and the future projected by leadership.

Here’s an example: I belong to a rural home mission society that focuses its work in Appalachia, the South and the

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Southwest. Certainly, home mission needs exist beyond these three areas that Glenmary calls “Mission Land, USA,” namely in Alaska and Utah. But at present my community does not work there. If a candidate is really attracted to working with the indigenous population, especially in Alaska, it would be wrong for me to suggest that Glenmary may expand into this area in the future—particularly since my leadership has been focusing on concentrating our mission efforts geographically for the sake of community.

Another example: our founder envisioned home mission societies in many nations, not just the United States. We currently accept men from Nigeria, Kenya and Mexico, and I personally envision a time when Glenmary could facilitate the development of home mission societies within these countries. While my leadership agrees that this is within the charism of Glenmary, this is not a part of the immediate vision of the community’s future as it is now defined. If I simply promote my personal vision outside the boundaries drawn by leadership, I do a huge injustice not only to current membership but also to potential candidates.

These examples show why it is so important for leadership to clearly outline a vision for the community.

## Frequent communication

But a clear vision must then be communicated. How much communication and what type depends on the style of a community. A monastery’s needs will vary greatly from a mission society. An international community will have very different communication needs than a diocesan order working only in one or two dioceses. But open communication between leadership and the vocation director—as well as the vocation team, if there is one—is essential.

Several areas are important for mutual communication. The vocation director needs to communicate on a personal level in order to build support. Communication about goals

and projects is important. As a prospect moves toward application, communication should increase, especially if the person considering application is outside the norm in one or more ways. The communication should not just be informal; rather, set structures are important.

For example, our leadership—the executive council—meets monthly. I present a written report for every meeting, which includes potential prospects; the latest visits, programs or fairs we’ve attended; and what we may be doing in the future. Sometimes I use this monthly report to address questions to the council for clarification. Besides these written monthly reports, I sometimes request time to speak to them in person at their meetings. And they have sometimes called me in to share their hopes or concerns.

In addition to these monthly opportunities to communicate with each other, we regularly schedule two meetings a year that include leadership, our education/formation team and our vocation team. These one-day meetings are very helpful in keeping us all on the same page, ironing out differences and articulating shared expectations.

Communication is facilitated in one more important way in my situation. Under our Glenmary structure, I am accountable directly to the president (our name for superior). He keeps himself extremely available to me by phone, e-mail and in person. He calls not only when he has a particular agenda but sometimes just to see how I am doing. These personal calls really help me feel supported, and they demonstrate that the challenge of my vocation ministry is understood. Our president also has said thank you to me both privately and before the entire community. This

One of the most important tasks of religious community leadership is to clearly outline the vision for the community—not only for the present but also for years to come.

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type of communication is also very welcome and extremely encouraging.

The two other men on our leadership council have also been very supportive, even though, technically, it is not their job to provide me support. The concern they regularly demonstrate increases the joy of my job, even on a day when a favorite prospect calls to say he has found the love of his life, and her name is Sue, not Glenmary.

## Resource support

The third important contribution leadership makes to the vocation effort is to provide the necessary financial and personnel resources. How much a particular community can invest of either in vocation ministry will vary, but here is some

Two years ago I was called in to discuss a problem with my budget. Leadership did not feel I was budgeting enough. They actually raised my budget. Now that is support from leadership!

idea of what it takes to be active in the vocation marketplace.

First is the issue of vocation advertising. There are several national vocation resources where it helps to be visible. I think these three are key: *VISION* magazine, *Oye* and *Guide to Religious Ministry*. Second is the question of exhibiting at various conventions. That also takes resources—both human and financial. For example, the upcoming National Catholic Youth

Conference in Columbus, OH in the fall requires funds for booth rental, travel and hotel. And it means someone must commit four-to-five days to this event, depending on the distance to be traveled.

Then there are additional costs for producing ads, posters, print materials, convention displays and a Web site, which is extremely important. If the vocation director does not have the skills to create these resources, outside professionals, hired on a contract basis, can be very helpful.

Probably the most expensive budget item, however, is for a realistically-sized vocation staff. Today that may mean a lay vocation director or counselor, as well as clerical staff.

When I entered Glenmary in 1983, four Glenmary men worked full time in vocations and one worked part time. Three additional people helped with clerical and budget

concerns. By 1990 when I first served in our vocation office, there were three Glenmarians and two clerical support staff. When I returned for a second stint in vocations beginning in 2001, I was the only Glenmarian, along with a half-time support person.

Since then our leadership has made it a priority to increase those personnel resources. We now have a full-time support person, and funds have been found for a full-time lay vocation counselor. This is a huge expense but a very worthwhile investment. It has provided me with a team to work with, allowed us to expand our presence at conventions and fairs and increased communication with prospects. And there are tangible results. We have greatly increased our number of prospects, our number of applicants and our number of students.

This is my favorite story about leadership providing adequate resources for vocation ministry. Every year each Glenmary department presents an annual budget to leadership for review. Two years ago I was called in to discuss a problem with my budget. Leadership did not feel I was budgeting enough. They actually raised my budget. Now that is support from leadership!

## Helping God's call be heard

Without new candidates we have no future. Everyone—leadership, vocation staff, community members—agrees with this. Yet we sometimes struggle to give vocation ministry the proper priority in terms of vision, communications and resources.

It is true that, in the end, only God calls. But if no one knows we are alive, it is hard for the person God is calling to find us. When leadership and vocation ministers have a close collaboration, God's plan for the future of our communities has a greater chance of becoming reality. ■



Vocation directors and community leaders should agree on two foundations of vocation ministry: what they hope to achieve and how much authority the vocation minister has.

# Vocation ministry thrives with clear expectations, real authority

BY DIANA RAWLINGS, ASC

I'M COMING TO THE CLOSE of a decade in vocation ministry that has been packed with challenges and rewards, growth and grace. I've had the amazing opportunity of working closely with five leadership teams, totaling 25 sisters, who have served in a formal leadership capacity as my colleagues and my friends. The vision shared by these leaders helped re-image vocation ministry for my community. These comments are offered from my experience with hope that the next generation of vocation ministers and leaders might take our ministry a step further.

Let's get started with instruction from management writer Stephen Covey, "Begin with the end in mind." Why does a congregation want a vocation director? Or better yet, why does a congregation need a vocation ministry? Try to write a summary statement of the needs that vocation ministry satisfies for your congregation. Struggling to answer these questions, wrestling with the ideas and the words, is essential for clarity.

## Openness to mutual influence

One key to success in this ministry is willingness from both leadership and the vocation director to be mutually influenced

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*Diana Rawlings, ASC, a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, United States Region, began vocation ministry in 1997 when the Adorers merged three provinces into one. A major thrust of her work has been to move the congregation to develop LifeChoices®, a ministry of spiritual discernment which has helped more than 2,000 young adults to make life decisions.*



by the other. Communications and relationships will then reflect a circular, rather than a top-down model.

This circular communications model was foundational to the Adorers vocation ministry. I remember reading and sharing with leadership a challenging article by Sean Sammon, FMS: "Last Call for Religious Life" (*Human Development*, Spring 1999). His bold thinking helped shape the Adorers' vocation ministry. He wrote:

- Any religious institute that plans to seriously promote vocations must also believe that it has a future.
- Any congregation that wants a future for its mission needs to make vocation promotion its number one priority—not a sideline activity—for at least the next 10 years.
- Members will need to rearrange other commitments so as to free up 20 percent of their best time to devote directly to the work of vocation promotion.

These are staggering assumptions for any community. Whether or not you agree with these particular statements, it is crucial that leadership and the vocation director identify their own assumptions and concur. This maintains a clear focus for the years ahead.

## Leader first, manager second

Naming assumptions will lead to naming expectations. This is the lynchpin for success in vocation ministry. Here's my expectation: recognize the vocation director as predominantly a leader with leadership, who is also a manager. Putting the focus on leadership helps me set priorities about how to use my time and energy.

Let me explain. The leadership prong pertains to the human dimension of work. A leader with leadership

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empowers the community. She carries out various roles:

- shaping the vision for vocation ministry in collaboration with leadership,
- developing membership growth and viability with leadership,

Leaders can give responsibility but little or no authority. There is a big difference—the difference between asking for permission and informing.

- advocating religious life as a viable lifestyle in the 21st century,
- strategizing how vocation ministry will achieve its most important objective, and
- developing specific responses to the current needs of those seeking God and a life of service.

The managerial prong, meanwhile, pertains to the technical side of our job. Managing the vocation ministry involves many tasks:

- handling the myriad requests directed to the vocation office,
- planning and directing various retreats, weekends and invitations to visit,
- designing effective marketing, public relations and communications approaches, and
- providing a stable person for contact between inquirers and the community.

## Sufficient time

Reflecting on my work with leadership, I think about two components: relationship and job function. Remember that relationships are built on time. As a vocation director, I expect sufficient time with the leadership's vocation liaison and the entire leadership team as needed. I want us to stay connected in thought and spirit. Even when schedules fill up, we need to be available to each other.

## See it as a ministry

In "Last Call for Religious Life," Sammon also wrote, "Vocation promotion is always rightly undertaken for the sake of mission—never, it is hoped, for reasons of survival."

On good days and long days of this ministry, I count on leadership to remind me (and the rest of the community) that I'm engaging in a church ministry. I want leaders to remind me that whether or not someone joins the community, this ministry is successful whenever people are assisted in coming to a deeper personal understanding or a deeper relationship with God. Moreover, knowing that I'm involved in a church ministry that has value in and of itself helps make me a more vibrant sister, which is going to make me a more effective vocation minister.

## Have a job description and evaluations

A thorough job description is critical. Such a description can state priorities, helping me focus in the face of time constraints and competing demands. Hand in hand with a written description, I expect leadership to acknowledge what's working well in the ministry, what they affirm about my job performance and what they wonder about or question. These conversations must be steeped in honesty and compassion, just as a vocation director's conversation must be with inquirers. This is an imperative—and underestimated—piece in the complex vocations puzzle.

## Agree on entrance criteria

Entrance guidelines must be developed as soon as possible and reviewed occasionally. Some of the toughest discussions I've had as a vocation director involved telling women in discernment that they didn't in some way reflect the community's charism, or they didn't meet the established criteria for age, indebtedness or health (both physical and psychological). These guidelines are necessary as part of the community's discernment with the inquirer.

## Professional with insights

I expect leadership to see me as a professional, valuing what I have to say just as they value the opinions of a CEO or a director of any other ministry. A vocation minister is trying to wrap his or her mind around many factors—for instance, examining contemporary theology, appreciating diverse expressions of spirituality, striving to be attentive to the impact culture, race and ethnicity could have on membership. Vocation directors are communicating these observations to leadership and to membership. We're also studying the needs of young adults and 30-somethings as they become

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new members. Remember, newer members are not newer versions of existing members. They are new in every possible way. These aren't simple issues, which is why we depend on the opportunities for ongoing education, mentoring and preparation offered by the National Religious Vocation Conference.

### Appropriate authority

Here's a key element vocation directors expect from leadership: appropriate authority to perform our ministry. Leaders can give responsibility but little or no authority. There is a big difference—the difference between asking for permission and informing. I expect them to trust my judgment on a variety of issues, such as spending on advertising or requesting help from sisters. By determining together the perimeters of this authority, I am able to be an effective minister. By delegating authority to me, leaders treat me as the professional that I am.

### Sufficient funding

Negotiating finances calls for a delicate dance. Let the question, "What is the value of one sister?" guide thinking about adequate funds and resources, including adequate staff. No doubt this is a sobering task, but remember Sammon's challenge of vocation ministry as the number one community priority.

### Connect with discerners

Finally I expect leaders to make time throughout the vocation process to connect with the women who are discerning. I can't be everywhere at every point for everyone—nor should I. Leaders meet with inquirers differently than I do, helping to make leadership's discernment full and meaningful when the decision for acceptance into the community is reached.

### Hold high the vocation torch

Vocation ministers need consistent support from leadership. Whenever possible, get specific, asking, "What will leadership commit to when it comes to engaging others to promote vocations? Will leaders include some statement in every talk or presentation they make?" Spell it out. And stick to it.

These suggestions are not the final word or the ultimate formula for vocation success. They do, however, represent the wisdom culled from nearly a decade in this ministry. These

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past 10 years have been a gift to me—driving me to my knees on many occasions and helping both my community and me to grow. May we all continue to work together to build what the U.S. bishops call “a future full of hope.” ■

Clear roles and responsibilities are crucial for vocation ministers. Yet all this must rest on the solid ground of a well-developed interior life and disposition.

# What I expect from a vocation minister

BY CATHERINE BERTRAND, SSND

**W**HEN I WAS ASKED to write this article, I was moved to say yes, not just because I am presently in leadership, but because of my many years of vocation ministry. “What do I expect of a vocation minister?” The opportunity to respond to such a question was too good to pass up, especially as I now view it from the perspective of leadership.

In my first attempt to respond I found myself thinking, “Now don’t make this so long and involved and ambitious that all the current vocation ministers would want to resign by sundown, and anyone considering the ministry would quickly conclude, ‘This certainly isn’t for me.’”

Writing this invited me, as a leader, to do some soul-searching as well. I was tempted to dig out all sorts of books and articles, including some that I’ve written myself over the years, and start quoting from all kinds of people and sources. I resisted that temptation and tried to allow myself the time and space that any attempt at answering this question deserves.

I concluded that I don’t need to articulate one more time the challenges that are integral to religious life today. I will not take up the space naming them, though there is no denying their impact. I also don’t want to waste another breath trying to decide whose “fault” it might be that these challenges exist, and whose “responsibility” it is to “fix” things. But it did occur to me that to invite someone to be a vocation minister within this community of apostolic women religious in today’s church and world is nothing less than a profound profession of faith.

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*Catherine Bertrand, SSND is a long-time vocation director, former executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference and currently is provincial leader of the Mankato Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.*



Releasing someone for full-time vocation ministry has long been the tradition in the Mankato province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Writing this article prompted me to take a closer look at what we as a community are saying when we name someone for this ministry at this point in time. I don’t think that we can take this lightly. As I see it, the community is saying that we believe that this is a life worth living, and we want others to join us. We are saying that we care deeply about the future of our newer and younger members, that we believe in them and we want them to have peers for the long-haul. We are proclaiming that our founding purpose still has relevance in the world today and that we are passionate about mission and our educational vision. We are saying that we believe that our charism needs to be carried into the future by vowed members, as well as by our colleagues and associates. This is indeed an act of faith, inviting someone to participate in a ministry, the sole purpose of which focuses on the future, unknown as that future may be.

With that as the backdrop, what do I expect of a vocation minister? Having been a part of vocation ministry for so many years and having the chance to work with new vocation ministers along the way, another temptation creeps in—to define the ministry and perhaps the minister solely according to roles and responsibilities. And the fact of the matter is there are many hats that a vocation minister is asked to wear. Try out this list. A vocation minister is an assessor, a discerner, an animator, an educator, an awareness raiser, an evangelizer, a mentor, a model, a witness, a companion...to name just a few. And yes, I do expect anyone engaged in vocation ministry to look for ways to address these areas of responsibility.

However, I believe it is of key importance that vocation ministers realize they cannot do it all or be it all. And I find it nearly impossible to comment on what I believe a leader

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has a right to expect of a vocation minister without noting that we as leaders need to expect something from members as well. Each of us and all of us as community members need to be held accountable for how we help to shape the future life and mission of the congregation. That said, I can appreciate the old adage that “when everyone is responsible, no one is.” While all of us are asked to be a part of this effort, we do need a person with the skills, as well as the responsibility, for particular aspects of vocation ministry.

My list of vocation minister roles addresses the many aspects of the “doing” part of this ministry—and I am, indeed, all for the doing. As much as vocation ministers dislike the question, “How many are coming?” the fact is we do want to welcome new members. On the other hand, it is an effective vocation minister who is willing and able to say “no” to someone for whom the fit would not be good for the person or for the community, even when this means some members will not understand the decision. The role and responsibilities of the vocation minister need to be clearly articulated, understood, carried out and supported. But as I see it, that is only part of the picture.

The development of the interior life of the vocation minister is a critical dimension that needs to go hand-in-hand with the “doing” of this ministry. It doesn’t necessarily answer the question regarding what I expect of a vocation minister, but it certainly describes what my hope would be for anyone in this ministry. I realize that an interior life is critical in any ministry or way of life, but the very nature of vocation ministry positions one to be faced time and again with the very questions and concerns that are front and center for the discerners with whom she is journeying.

So what are some elements of that interior life or disposition that I would hope for and look for in a vocation minister? I would name them as following fashion.

The development of the interior life of the vocation minister is a critical dimension that needs to go hand-in-hand with the “doing” of this ministry.

### **Live!**

I expect to see a manifestation of energy and life from a vocation minister, the kind that can only come from a deeper place than what naïve optimism allows. I would expect a vocation director to have life and to have a life, providing a clear indication that she is striving to be integrated, whole and healthy—physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, with an ability to relate to and be at home with a variety of people and situations. To choose life and religious life assumes a deep commitment to the future, as well as to the present.

### **Laugh!**

Without a sense of humor and the ability to laugh and take things less seriously, a vocation minister cannot thrive or maybe even survive. But what is needed goes beyond laughter. It is about deep-seated joy that no external circumstances can diminish or destroy. This quality allows a vocation minister to look in the face of adversity and admit that the ministry is not all about her nor all up to her.

### **Lead!**

A vocation minister needs to trust herself as well as her skills, so as to initiate and assess a response in others, those who are considering religious life, as well as the members of the community and others with whom she comes in contact. She serves as the conscience of the community at times by reminding members what it is that potential candidates seek in us, from us and with us. I expect a vocation minister

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to constantly explore ways to connect with members and others, to engage them in the ongoing efforts of vocation ministry, constantly broadening the base of participation and involvement, tapping into the creativity of others.

There is no manual or blue print that provides you with the answers you most need or want. Vocation ministry involves a leap of faith time and again.

### **Learn!**

To hunger for knowledge is a given, but to be open to learning is essential, recognizing that truth and wisdom can be experienced in some unexpected ways and places. It involves facing your limitations, embracing ambiguity and uncertainty, especially when it means helping

other people make life-changing decisions about their future. It involves understanding the culture from which today's candidates are coming and gleaning what it is that they have to teach and share. And it can mean acknowledging mistakes or disappointments and having the willingness to try again.

### **Leap!**

Unfortunately even with all of the available resources for vocation ministers, there is no manual or blue print that provides you with the answers you most need or want. Vocation ministry involves a leap of faith time and again. Reliance on God, fidelity to prayer and contemplation, ongoing dialogue with others, study and courageous creativity are some of the best tools of the trade and serve as the foundation for risk-taking. But in the end it means moving forward with courage and confidence and inviting others to do the same. It is a matter of stepping out of the boat without knowing if you will sink or not.

### **Linger!**

Timing is a critical element in making a vocation choice. Vocation ministers at times need to know when to provide a bit of a push, but they also need to know when to wait, to pause, to linger. It means being faithful to the process, the journey, as well as the response of another. Above all it means being respectful of and honest with the persons engaged in discernment. To wait, to be patient, to ponder with another is

a great art, especially in the context of a society that expects everything to move quickly to a definitive answer or response.

### **Limp!**

This is a critical time for religious life as well as for the church as a whole. To promote a way of life that is not understood or appreciated by many is no small challenge. It demands fidelity to the founding charism and purpose of your congregation, as well as to the church. It means being willing to be one with the broken and the imperfect and attempting to stay at the table of dialogue, even when the legs of the table are wobbling or broken. It invites a willingness to accept your own fragility and brokenness, trusting that you are still enough. And at times it means daring to ask the tough questions.

### **Love!**

Above all, I expect a vocation minister to be a person of passion and compassion, someone who is consistently in touch with her own younger heart's desire. If she is truly convinced of God's love and action in her life, it can fuel the ongoing God-quest for the long haul. In turn, I expect an openness to being transformed, to having her world-view stretched and changed daily. I expect that her awareness and response to the urgent needs of the earth and its people will be the driving force in how she invites others to respond with the one life they've been given to share.

"What do I expect of a vocation minister?" To say it simply, my prayer, my hope and, yes, my expectation of a vocation minister would be that she live, laugh, lead, learn, leap, linger, limp and love. Our constitution states, "The congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame came to life when God's call found an answer in the hearts of people strong in faith, farseeing in vision and courageous in action." That is what was needed then and these are the ingredients that are needed now more than ever, in the hearts of members, as well as our vocation ministers, and certainly in the hearts of those who join us now and in the future. ■

By ourselves we are incomplete. Leaders, members and vocation ministers must work in cooperation to invite the next generation into religious life.

# My expectations of vocation ministers: expertise and collaboration

By MARY WASKOWIAK, RSM

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**A**LL OF US WHO SERVE as leaders of religious congregations are entrusted by our members with a particular role in carrying out the hopes and dreams of the community, especially as those hopes and dreams are articulated in our constitutions, direction or vision statements and chapter acts. No religious congregation can meaningfully carry out its life and mission without the engagement and collaboration of all. And no religious congregation will be able to look to a future full of hope without the collaboration of those who invite women and men to join the community.

In developing a clear set of expectations for leaders and vocation ministers, what might leaders lend to the endeavor? Perhaps a few assumptions are in order. As a leader I assume the following:

- No single leader or leadership team has the capacity to meet all the intellectual, relational, administrative, visionary and strategic needs of the community in its presence and service to church and society.
- Without active members who are willing to be called forward to serve in particular ways, the community is threatened with less than vital realization of its dreams and commitments.
- Vocation ministry is a critical ministry, especially in this time of massive and sometimes chaotic change.
- Vocation ministry is a matter of life, relationship and future.
- No vocation minister or vocation plan has the capacity to

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Mary Waskowiak, RSM is the president of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. She has served in secondary and seminary education, in the areas of spiritual direction, vocation, incorporation, facilitation and leadership.



meet all the dreams and hopes of a community.

- Members must be willing to be invited to serve in vocation ministry and to lend the best of themselves in creative, planned and varied activities.
- By ourselves all of us leaders, ministers, members and prospective candidates are incomplete and need the assistance and support of one another to achieve our hopes for the future.
- The incompleteness of the vocation ministers, the leaders, the members and the prospective candidates has the potential to invite wholeness that is greater than any one person or entity. While I believe we need clear distinctions of roles and responsibilities, we can no longer afford to “silo” ourselves. The cooperation and collaboration of all in vocation ministry could create a contagious energy and enthusiasm for life and mission that transforms all of us.

Because this article is focused on leadership expectations of vocation ministers, what might be some expectations that leaders could reasonably have of their vocation ministers? I submit the following in an effort to begin the conversation.

I expect vocation ministers to be persons:

- who believe their vocation is an unfolding call and gift;
- whose familiarity with their own gifts and wounds will enable them to be perceptive, compassionate and helpful to prospective candidates who also carry gifts and wounds;
- who are committed to the ongoing integration of their lives and vocations by their engagement in appropriate accompaniment; e.g., spiritual direction, supervision, therapy;
- whose lives demonstrate active engagement in the life of the community, its spirituality and its ministries; and
- who are familiar with their own authority and power

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issues, especially as those might get activated in working with leaders, members and prospective candidates. Unless each of us delves into these two issues honestly, the potential increases for a misuse of power and authority. What does power mean for each of us? Who has power? What are particular aspects of personal power and shared power? What

It is not enough that the potential vocation minister be a good person with recognizable success in ministry. He or she needs a multi-disciplinary preparation.

is the relation between power and authority? How does an individual comfortably express her or his own sense of personal power and authority? How do a leader and minister appropriately use their own power and authority while honoring the personal power and authority of a prospective candidate?

In general I believe that not everyone has the talents and capabilities to

do all ministries of her or his congregation. Leaders carry the responsibility of assuring their members are adequately prepared for the ministry to which the community missions them. In my experience as a vocation minister and as a leader, I know it is not enough that the potential vocation minister be a good person with recognizable success in ministry. He or she needs a multi-disciplinary preparation that, hopefully, enhances present skills while developing new and necessary skills for this particular ministry. In light of this I expect that vocation ministers will be prepared for their ministry by a plan or program that has the support of leadership. I also expect that vocation ministers will work with leadership (either the entire team or with an identified leadership liaison) and other appropriate personnel in the following areas:

- developing a vocation program that identifies the roles and responsibilities of leaders, vocation ministers, incorporation ministers, members and prospective candidates;
- helping leadership to familiarize themselves with the terrain of vocation ministry; e.g., the social-psychological-spiritual reality in which prospective candidates live, the appropriate types of communications plans needed to attract prospective candidates, and the type of involvement needed of members;
- collaborating with leaders and communicators in the

development of a compelling vision and message for members and prospective candidates;

- inviting other community members to join vocation ministers in getting to know prospective candidates through participation in a variety of activities (e.g., campus ministry events, retreats, volunteer opportunities, etc.); and
- assisting members of the community in welcoming prospective candidates to their local settings.

No one vocation minister will excel in meeting all of these expectations. No one leader or leadership team, no community will be able to invite, welcome and keep 50 perfect prospective candidates. As a leader, however, I would like to expect that our vocation ministers could serve all of us, members and prospective members, in building an attractive and strong bridge into the future.

As a leader I want to know the human face and daily reality of prospective candidates. I want to engage other community members in the task and struggle of naming and claiming anew our identity as a religious congregation barely into the 21st century. I can best do this with the capable assistance and, at times, leadership of vocation ministers who know the value of good collaboration.

Finally I want to say to vocation ministers that I expect you to expect many of the same qualities from me. Each one of us, leader and vocation minister, has been called first by God to the community and, in the name of the community, to our particular ministry of service. We carry the history, the gifts and the wounds that make us who we are. Let us expect to walk together, to help one another in reading the signs of the times and to co-create a vision that enables us to attract and invite prospective members. With our members let us re-commit ourselves to the courageous and compassionate mission of Jesus without fearing the cost.

All of us can expect that our God, who began this work in us, will bring it to completion. Who could ask for more? ■



A seasoned vocation strategist reflects on the expectations of leaders and vocation ministers. An open, strong relationship is the stepping-stone to success.

# The way forward for leaders and vocation ministers

BY ANITA LOUISE LOWE, OSB

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*Our first four articles in this edition spell out expectations that leaders and vocation ministers have of each other. To draw some conclusions from their voices, we asked Anita Louise Lowe, OSB—an experienced leader in vocations—to reflect on what each had to say and point toward practices and approaches that can create strong vocation programs.*

**A**N OPEN AND STRONG RELATIONSHIP between a vocation minister and his or her institute's leadership is imperative for a healthy vocation program. As I read and reflected on the four preceding articles, this was the common thread that ran through all the authors' comments. It is a belief that rings true for me as I, also, reflect on my own 10 years in vocation ministry.

To develop successful programs for prospective members and to invite people to join our religious institutes, vocation ministers and leaders must be on the same page. It is vital that both hold a common vision for the future of their institute, as well as for the future of consecrated life in general. Without a common vision for the future, the vocation minister and leader may face numerous disagreements, resulting in a sense of disunity among members and prospective members.

Father Steve Pawelk and Diana Rawlings, ASC both comment on the need for frequent communications. Pawelk outlines several areas about which it is important to communicate, including goals, projects, and information about potential candidates. Rawlings states the importance of a circular communication model in which both the vocation

director and the leader share their vision, thoughts, and goals with one another. For both Pawelk and Rawlings, open communication is an essential component of the relationship between vocation minister and leadership.

From my own experience, I agree wholeheartedly. My community has offered an annual vocation workshop for 14 years on the premise that those serving in the areas of vocations, leadership, communications and development need to work together and share a common vision for vocation ministry to be effective. We encourage communities to send a team of people from those various ministries to the workshop. We then lead each group to develop or enhance its own vision and goals. The comments I have heard over the past 10 years, from both vocation ministers and leaders, center on how important it was to come together to hear the same input and then reflect together on the direction to take in vocation ministry. Many vocation ministers who have attended our workshop in the past attend again when new leadership is elected. They note the importance of new leaders sharing the vision that the vocation ministers and others have formed so the community can continue to move forward together.

In addition to sharing a common vision and having a solid foundation of communication, the other common thread I found in the four previous articles is that vocation ministers need the support of their leadership. Anyone who has served in vocation ministry for even a short length of time realizes that this ministry is filled with unique challenges. For some this challenge is in the form of their own members expecting them to be the miracle workers, to save the congregation or community! At such times we need leadership to stand behind us, to encourage us, and to encourage our community members to do their part in promoting vocations. As Rawlings stated, "Vocation ministers need consistent support from leadership."

This idea is echoed by Pawelk in his call for leadership

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to “provide the necessary financial and personnel resources,” and to “give vocation ministry the proper priority in terms of vision, communications and resources.” Such proper priority can include Rawlings’ desire that the vocation minister be seen as a leader, focusing on his or her role of animating and empowering community members. This sentiment is seen also in the reflections given by those currently serving in leadership positions for their religious institutes. In her article Catherine Bertrand, SSND notes that “community members need to be held accountable for how we participate in helping to shape the future life and mission” of the institute.

Mary Waskowiak, RSM, puts forth her vision that “the cooperation and collaboration of all in vocation ministry could create a contagious energy and enthusiasm for life and mission that transforms all of us.” It is in working together and in supporting one another and the efforts made by leadership, vocation personnel and the membership as a whole that a religious institute can move forward into the future with a strong sense of purpose, mission and an ability to grow.

## Inner qualities of the vocation minister

In reading the articles written by Bertrand and Waskowiak, I was struck that both of these leaders concentrated more on the qualities of the person selected to be a vocation minister than on the particular tasks which they expect their vocation ministers to accomplish. While the tasks of vocation ministry are myriad and need to be addressed, it seems more important for the vocation minister to embody faith and enthusiasm for the future.

Those of us who have responded to the call of vocation ministry are often the torch bearers in our religious communities and institutes. We are called to lead and to enliven our community members, while also inviting others to consider joining us. As such we need to embody the elements put forth by Bertrand: that we have energy and life, a sense of humor, an ability to lead, a hunger to learn, a faithfulness to prayer and our relationship with God, a fidelity to our institute’s charism or purpose. We must be people of passion and compassion, open to being transformed.

I am inspired that both Bertrand and Waskowiak focus on the internal qualities of vocation ministry as opposed to the external tasks to be accomplished. Such a focus emphasizes that those of us working in vocations are called to be true to our own continual journey of discernment. We are called to be faithful to the life we profess in order to be

authentic witnesses of that life for those who are discerning. In her article Waskowiak sets forth her expectation that vocation ministers believe in their own vocation as an “unfolding call and gift.” They must be familiar enough with their own journey to be helpful to candidates as they deal with their own calling, facing their own gifts and limitations.

Waskowiak touches on another important factor, the issue of authority and power. She calls for both those serving in leadership and in vocation ministry to delve honestly into their own views of power and authority, so as to work together well and to honor one another’s power and authority. While dealing with these issues may not be the most pleasant task in vocation ministry or leadership, it is important to do so if the relationship between the vocation minister and the leader is to be one of mutual respect, support, openness and honesty.

Through my own 10 years in vocation ministry, working with three different leadership teams, I concur with Waskowiak on the importance of this issue. With each new leader, it has been important to meet, to talk about the philosophy of our vocation program, and to look to leadership to provide guidance and support, especially in the areas of admissions and the involvement of the entire community in our vocation efforts. When questions brought up in an admissions committee meeting cause a strong reaction from either the vocation minister or the leader, or when disagreements flare, then I believe it is important to step back and to have a candid conversation about the source of such emotions. To make some of the difficult decisions that face us in this ministry, it is imperative that there be a strong sense of trust between the leader and the vocation minister. That trust can only come about through open and honest dialogue.

We continue to live in a time that poses many challenges for religious institutes, especially in regard to our futures, our growth, and our ability to attract and retain new members. It is, therefore, important that the men and women who serve our institutes as vocation ministers and as leaders work together as a team. Each person in this relationship may hold a particular view or aspire to a particular dream for the future, but it is only in working together, in offering one another support, that we can move forward for the sake of our futures and for the sake of those who are discerning membership with us. Together we can assist our members to take hold of their roles in creating our future and in inviting new members. Together we can give our common vision shape and direction as we move into that future, a future that is truly one filled with hope and promise. ■

In this model of vocation ministry the vocation director leads many people who contribute their talents in order to welcome a new generation into the community.

# One model for vocation ministry: the Conventual Franciscans

BY JIM KENT, OFM CONV.

I HAVE BEEN QUITE AWARE of an intentional and concerted commitment to vocation promotion throughout the 23 years I've belonged to the Conventual Franciscans, Province of Our Lady of Consolation. To describe how we carry out such a vital ministry, I must begin with that long-term commitment. Vocation promotion has been made a priority by provincial chapters; local friaries have been mandated to develop vocation action plans; and new membership is a point of discussion when leadership does visitation. Vocation ministry has consistently been crucial to our way of life, as witnessed by unqualified support in financial, programmatic and especially human resources.

## Continuity and involvement

The fact that the province has had only three vocation directors in the last 25 years is a testament to this commitment. While other friars have served as associate directors and in support roles, having just three directors in a quarter century has led to continuity and consistency in our vocation promotion. This has not been by accident. As I was recruited and, in part, trained to come into the ministry in 1994, I helped recruit and mentor a successor in 2000. When after working together for a year it became apparent this was not the best fit for this person, I agreed to stay in the vocation

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*Jim Kent, OFM Conv. served in vocation ministry from 1994-2007. He is a former member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the National Religious Vocation Conference and past president of the Conventual Franciscan Vocation Directors. He serves his province as vicar provincial and in fall 2007 will become director of Franciscan Retreats in the Twin Cities area.*



office. It took another three years to identify someone who was not only willing to take on the ministry but had the skills needed to be successful. It then took three more years for this person to become available. While I never planned to be in vocations for thirteen years, I believe it has been worth the wait as this new director takes over during summer 2007. Knowing the ministry will be in capable, dedicated hands has made the last few years even more exciting. And having an energized friar to take on the ministry has also given the province members confidence and added momentum.

In our model of vocation work, the vocation director is the nucleus. He is the primary animator, events coordinator, communications flash point, and PR person for the friars of the province. In addition he does the bulk of the discernment work. The membership, however, is extremely important in making the ministry effective. First, they are the ones who recommend contacts to the vocation team. These “Friar Contacts” have proven to be our best contacts; in the last 27 years they are the ones most likely to join the order and then to remain. Second, the members are often closer in physical proximity to these contacts and can invite them for prayer and dinner and can further mentor them. Third, it is our friars—especially those in formation—who help facilitate our vocation weekend events. They give formal presentations, lead our prayer, preach homilies, talk at table, take walks, etc., all of which really put a face on our Franciscan life. Often this means I have to fly these student-friars in for the event, but it is well worth the financial investment. It also means I count on the friars who live near the location of these weekends to come and share about their communal and ministerial life. They do this through individual presentations and as panels and by their presence at meals, prayer and socials. And I don’t have to beg them to come; they do this readily, underscoring the province’s commitment to this ministry.

The vocation office sets an annual goal for these Friar Contacts. Monthly updates go out through our province

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newsletter telling members where we stand for the month and year-to-date. Sometimes a push is needed in November

It's worth noting that collaboration takes time and effort and is not without disagreement.

Patience and flexibility are certainly essential elements in any joint venture.

and December to reach this goal. We establish the goal by averaging the Friar Contacts over the last five years. Having reasonable goals is important to sustain long-term interest and success.

As we are a jurisdiction that is aging and diminishing in number, we have also had to cultivate contacts through means other

than our friars and their current ministries. We have focused this effort on the Internet, where we have relied on experts to help us expand our base of vocation inquirers.

## Professional consultants bring talents

Through the years we have hired various professionals to evaluate our vocation strategies and to develop print and electronic resources. This has been especially true in the ever-expanding world of cyberspace, a world in which we live and where young people seemingly thrive. An important step in this was finding a communications group capable in all the facets of mass communications: word and image; design and layout; information technology and technical expertise; public relations and advertising. It was also important to make sure people in the communications group had an understanding of religious life. Some projects are easier to develop—such as Web site, blogs, or brochures—but others, like getting an entire province to “buy into” and use a common “brand” and image, can be a challenge. (I am only beginning to see the latter happen now after 13 years and two previous attempts.)

Another resource that my associate directors and I have found helpful has been attending professional workshops and conferences to augment our knowledge and expertise. These run the range from technical matters, such as how to develop a newsletter or Web site, to how to better walk with those in discernment or how to stay motivated and keep the province motivated. There are lots of excellent resources available, and I've found them worth the investment.

## Collaboration strengthens our efforts

Being one of five Conventual Franciscan jurisdictions in North America, I've learned it's essential to work in collaboration with them and others. The Conventual vocation directors have been meeting at least twice annually for 25 years and have produced a common newsletter and vocation petition cards for use at the Liturgy of Hours. During that time we have also shared common ads in publications such as *VISION*. Our combined dollars have allowed us to have bigger and better ads. For some years we have shared a Web site ([www.franciscans.org](http://www.franciscans.org)), and beginning in 2005 we took that collaboration to a higher level. We hired a Toronto firm, S13 Marketing Inc., to oversee an entire communications initiative that included branding and logo, education of our combined membership, a greatly enhanced Web site, and most recently an online store. What we could not do or afford on our own, we can do together. This effort has not only helped increase the number of Web visitors and contacts but has provided a means to deepen relationships with those already discerning their call with us by making them regular visitors to our site to access podcasts, Scriptural reflections and other new postings. Some have even linked our site to their personal MySpace.com and Facebook.com pages. The initiative has also gotten our membership more involved by recording podcasts and other reflections for the Web site. All of this has led to positive energy for our friars and inquirers alike.

It's worth noting that collaboration takes time and effort and is not without disagreement. Our current communications initiative has two levels of participation by the various jurisdictions. Due to different levels of interest and available resources, three of the provinces contribute most of the content and financing, and three others have chosen to act as minority partners. Patience and flexibility are certainly essential elements in any joint venture.

## Successes and setbacks

Involving membership in vocation recruitment has dos and don'ts, depending on many variables. Some years ago our province had many regional vocation associates to assist the vocation director. With the province spread throughout the Midwest and Southwest U.S. and beyond, this was an attempt to help shorten the distance between inquirer and the community. All these regional associates accepted this role in addition to their full-time ministry, which perhaps made it ineffective. With so many people involved while

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committed to other ministries, it was easy to assume someone else would put forth the effort in vocations. And, if not, there was always the vocation director who would do it. We found it worked better to have a vocation director and a part-time regional associate director. This was a formal, half-time position with the associate responsible for a particular region of the province. This enabled him to visit inquirers and put a personal face on the order—something the director was unable to do well due to time and distance. The director and associate director functioned as a team and could more easily set goals and accountability measures for the vocation office.

Although this became our best structure, it doesn't mean that a large pool of members should not be directly involved in vocations. They should just be involved in very specific ways: to invite inquirers to prayer and a meal, to serve as spiritual directors or mentors, to encourage participation in service opportunities or parish ministries. These more limited activities are easier to follow up on and more realistically manageable for the members with full-time ministries.

All of the work in communications and events eventually should lead to some men joining the community. Here is the process we use for those who decide to apply for admission. A person begins the application process once he and the vocation director feel this is warranted. By this stage in the discernment process, the inquirer has attended at least one weekend event, has met a number of friars and has visited our initial house of formation. The application process includes: a behavioral assessment conducted by the vocation director; an application form and a three-to-five page autobiography; baptism and confirmation forms; parents' marriage record; a letter of recommendation by a religious or priest; high school and college transcripts; release forms; criminal, financial and driving background checks; references: two professional, two personal; an interview conducted by a designated lay person; psychological testing; and physical and dental exams.

Once the packet is complete, the application is presented to our Admissions Board, comprised of: the minister provincial (or someone on the provincial team), the president of our Initial Formation Commission, a formator, and the vocation director presenting the applicant. Most often three and sometimes all four board members have met and gotten to know the applicant prior to considering his application.

## Vocation and formation are linked

The vocation directors are active and integral members of our province's Initial Formation Commission. The link between

the vocation office and formation program is crucial. Both ministries need to make sure they are on the same page and that the vocation directors are accurately presenting the formation program to the inquirer. Our "Directory of Initial Formation" is approved by our provincial chapter and serves as a document that formally ties vocation and formation ministries together. While documents give a concrete guide to follow, it's also important for the vocation ministers and formation directors to agree how these directives are put into practice. The spirit of the law is just as important as the letter, and the Initial Formation Commission is a place to meld the two.

In all phases of our vocation promotion, many people come into contact with an inquirer. These include the vocation team, formation directors, commission members, pastors and pastoral ministers, and those within our formation program. Getting feedback from these groups is essential in order to get a feel if this person is a good fit for our Conventual Franciscan life. As vocation director I ultimately go with my gut instinct, but that only comes with and through the entire discernment process and all the resources it encompasses.

I'm completing this article as I prepare to hand the reins of vocation ministry over to my community's new vocation director. I have no doubt that the processes and structures I've spelled out here will continue to develop and change as the world around us changes and as we invite new generations to consider Conventual Franciscan life. ■

The link between the vocation office and formation program is crucial. Both ministries need to make sure they are on the same page and that the vocation directors are accurately presenting the formation program.

A long-time vocation minister shares the strategies and techniques he has developed over 16 years.

# How the New Orleans Jesuits conduct vocation ministry

By MARVIN KITTEN, SJ

**W**HEN I BEGAN VOCATION MINISTRY 16 years ago, I certainly didn't know what would be happening now. For starters I surely didn't think I'd still be involved with vocation ministry! Nor did I ever imagine that there would be so many changes in the way this ministry would be carried out.

Things were quite different then. My first contact with inquirers was usually by a letter that I dictated on tape to be typed by a secretary. Requests for such information came to me via postcards or phone calls. It would take some time for enough letters to go back and forth between us for me to get a reasonable take on the inquirer and him on the Jesuits.

## Generating contacts

Fast forward to the present when at least 80 percent of my inquiries come via online requests for vocation information. These come to me through our own vocation Web site, [www.norprov.org/vocations](http://www.norprov.org/vocations), or the general Jesuit site, [www.jesuit.org](http://www.jesuit.org). The inquiring minds are cruising cyberspace these days.

Others will e-mail me because they've met me through my participation in Busy Student Retreats sponsored by Catholic campus ministries at several state colleges and universities in the region. These retreats have proven an effective way to meet possible candidates.

I've also found the Internet social networking site Facebook.com to be a good way to meet prospective contacts. Many Jesuits as well as inquirers have

invited me to be "friends" on their Facebook entries, which means I post a bio and photo about myself, and I can send out notices to all their other Facebook friends, inviting them to activities and events of the Jesuits. Observing the posts on Facebook by or about inquirers gives me additional insights about them, sometimes very interesting ones!

Community members also do their part to generate vocation contacts. Some of the local Jesuit communities are very good at inviting young men to pray with them and join them for meals. This is so very important. When a community has a more structured gathering, such as Mass, a meal and discussion, I do not attend. We have found that it is better that the vocation director not be present, as the conversation flows much more freely. I can later meet the more serious contacts at our province gatherings.

When it comes to staying in touch with contacts, I've found that an online vocation discussion group has been a good way to do that. In addition it encourages positive discussions among them as they consider their life options. Since January 2001 I've hosted a discussion group which now consists of more than 120 men. I use it to post notices of general interest, and the men sometimes have some interesting exchanges. As the manager of the group, all posts come through me, so I can stay on top of what is happening and, if necessary, screen posts before they get sent to everyone in the group.

## Responding to, working with inquirers

Whether it's a Web site or a personal encounter that prompts a man to contact me, I've learned that it is very important to be prompt in answering e-mails and voice mails. Consequently, I find myself writing around 30-40 e-mails a day. My approach has always been that it's easier to keep up than to catch up.

When I receive an online request, I e-mail a note to the

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*Marvin Kitten, SJ has been vocation director of the New Orleans Province of the Jesuits for 16 years. He has also served as co-chair of region 5 of the National Religious Vocation Conference.*



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inquirer and usually ask several questions before mailing out a packet of Jesuit information. I ask the person to comment on his family, education, work, involvement in the church and community, knowledge of and interest in the Jesuits, and his personal relationships and interests. If the inquirer is 30 or older, I ask if he's ever been married. Since I am visually oriented, I ask the person to send any sort of photo.

This usually gets the conversation going. If he doesn't reply, then I do not mail a packet. If he replies and appears to have possibilities, I'll put a packet of Jesuit information in the mail, consisting of a nationally-produced folder of information about all aspects of Jesuit life, as well as articles on Ignatian spirituality and discernment. The packet also contains a DVD about the Jesuits that was produced at the national level<sup>1</sup> a few years ago and still packs a good punch. I ask the person to let me know when the packet arrives.

Sometimes this is the end of the contact. If the inquirer responds, the conversation will continue. This period can be quite intense in some situations, with three or four exchanges in a day. Our conversation may end up with me realizing that this man would not fit in our model as a Jesuit novice. Or the individual may realize that he could not see himself as a Jesuit. We then part on good terms, each thanking the other.

In some cases, the leave-taking is not so simple. It takes some time, many e-mails and some phone calls to get the full picture. Some inquirers find it difficult to accept that they are not seen as suitable candidates. I assure them that this is not a comment on their goodness or lack thereof. They just don't fit. I sometimes tell the person that I may really want to join the New Orleans Saints football team (especially now that they are getting good!), but they tell me that I just don't fit. If the individual in question has ever met me, he can well understand this comparison!

On the other hand, if things are going well with a contact, it's important for us to meet face-to-face. The way

this happens varies with each person. I may invite him to come to New Orleans to meet me and the local community. I'll also invite serious inquirers to take part in some of our Jesuit gatherings, such as ordinations, jubilee celebrations, entrance day Masses or vow Masses. We always provide housing and meals for the guests. These events provide a great opportunity for contacts to meet each other, as well as to meet new or familiar Jesuits.

Some of the local Jesuit communities are very good at inviting young men to pray with them and join them for meals. This is so very important.

## Discernment retreats are key

I make a special point of inviting serious contacts to one of our two fall discernment retreats which are held at our novitiate in Grand Coteau, LA. The novices are the hosts of these five-day gatherings, which are a key part of the discernment process. More than 90 percent of applicants to the New Orleans Province of the Jesuits have taken part in one or more of these retreats. Some 45-55 young men usually attend the two fall retreats. Everyone profits by this gathering because all of us learn a great deal about one another.

Prior to giving approval to a young man to initiate the application process, I always run by him a series of questions concerning diversity. First of all, I assure him that God is an equal-opportunity inviter. God does not consult me about whom to invite. I then ask the inquirer if he would feel comfortable among fellow novices who are different from him ethnically, socio-economically, theologically, etc. I also probe a great number of other areas, including the motivation of the inquirer. Is he backing away from some unpleasant situation, or is he moving toward an invitation and challenge from God? Shortly before he died, Ignatius Loyola observed: "He who is

not good for the world, is not good for the Society of Jesus.”

After there has been sufficient time for mutual discernment, I will give the individual permission to initiate the application process. His first step is to write a 10-page autobiography and fill out data sheets with detailed personal and family information. Some men have found that just attempting to write their spiritual autobiographies is a great aid in their discernment. The applicant will then be interviewed by a psychologist, and he will meet individually

with three Jesuits, including one in formation. The Jesuits and psychologist all receive the autobiography and data sheets. Each will make recommendations and observations about the candidate.

Barring any serious issues at this stage, the discernor continues with the application process. He must provide six references from a variety of people. He undergoes a criminal background check, a dental exam and a medical exam, including HIV testing. He must provide proof of baptism and

## ***Overview of the North American Felician vocation model***

**I**n Fall 2003 the Felician Franciscan Sisters established a North American Felician Vocation Team to consolidate and enhance the efforts of the vocation ministers of our eight North American provinces. Currently we have 10 team members: two full-time coordinators and eight other vocation ministers in each of the provinces (most of whom are not full-time).

Team members vision, dream, set direction and make decisions at meetings held two or three times a year. Team coordinators follow up on plans and decisions of the team. Their role is to keep abreast of current trends in vocation ministry; coordinate team efforts; create and print brochures and ads; schedule and plan “Come and See” experiences; and coordinate team participation at regional, national and college campus events. (The Felician Sisters in North America are currently engaged in a reconfiguration process, so the team may change as provinces reconfigure.)

Here’s an example of a project carried out by the North American Felician Vocation Team. In 2005-2006 the team planned and facilitated “Vocation Animation Days” in each of the eight provinces. The purpose of these days was to share information from the North American Pastoral Plan for Vocations, to heighten awareness of each sisters’ role in vocation ministry, to affirm what the sisters are already doing and to encourage them to do even more. During morning prayer, each sister shared her vocation story with another sister. Five brief presentations by team members spelled out how the Felician vocation

efforts are geared toward the creation of a vocation culture in response to the North American Pastoral Plan for Vocations. After this the sisters processed this information in small groups. A panel of people who know us shared their experience of the Felician Sisters and what they see as our role in the contemporary church. At the close of the day, the sisters felt empowered and motivated to do their part in vocation ministry—especially as inviters.

The North American team structure has streamlined the work of vocation ministers as ads, flyers and handouts are prepared by the team coordinators and made available to all vocation ministers. This arrangement has made the part-time vocation ministers in provinces more available to visit schools and parishes, communicate with inquirers and be present when young people gather for conferences and retreats.

We believe in the witness of two or three Felician sisters gathered in one place—so we minister together, when possible, at national, regional and diocesan gatherings of young people and college retreats. When planning “Come and See” experiences, a service component has been added in places where Felician Sisters minister, and several vocation directors serve as team members for these events.

The North American team approach has been a good vehicle for supporting vocation ministers. It is also a vehicle to reflect together on blessings and continue to dream for the future.

—*Mary Therese Chmura, CSSF*



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*Those in charge of formation must be very familiar with the path of seeking God to accompany others on this journey...But above all they will disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished.*

— Vita Consecrata, 1996

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confirmation, college transcripts and—if applicable—military discharge papers and marriage annulment papers. Our Admissions Committee reviews the full application and makes a recommendation. The formation director, the provincial, the novice director and the vocation director all belong to the Admissions Committee, but the provincial alone makes the final decision.

One thing that I've certainly learned over my 16 years in this ministry is that it never falls into a predictable pattern. Rarely have I had two identical cases. The variety is, I must admit, part of the excitement of the ministry.

I do know that some vocation directors find the ministry quite challenging. Some tell me that what really bothers them is to have members ask them: "How many do you have for this year?" My way of dealing with this question, often asked in great sincerity, but nevertheless somewhat bothersome, has been to reply: "You tell me. You should be the first to know since I assume that you are journeying with these young men. I process those that you send my way!"

Although no one has asked, I'm pleased to announce that as *HORIZON* goes to press eight fine young men are expected to join the novice class of August, 2007. They, along with the

many people I have met over my 16 years, have helped make my time in this ministry a blessed journey. For that I am most thankful. ■

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1. In the U.S., Jesuit vocation ministry takes place mostly at the province level. With 10 U.S. provinces, however, the congregation has pooled resources to produce communications resources, such as combined advertising, a national Web site and print materials. The 10 province vocation directors meet twice a year, and a national staff person produces the materials agreed on by the group.

How does a community choose its vocation ministers? What qualities do they need? How do they prepare for the job? The Sisters of Mercy share their thoughts on these questions and more.

# The selection, care and feeding of vocation ministers

By CAROL MUCHA, RSM

**B**ecause vocation ministry has tremendous impact on a congregation's future, its mission and its ministry, it deserves great attention from leadership. Consequently the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas are taking a broad and deep look at all aspects of the personnel side of the ministry. This re-examination is yet in progress, so what I present here are merely ideas that might work for any congregation and would be subject to adjustment. The important thing is for congregations to have some procedures and criteria for the selection of ministers and a plan for their preparation, orientation, supervision, evaluation and ongoing education. May these ideas inspire both leaders and vocation ministers to think creatively about who is involved in vocation ministry and how they are being both nurtured and held accountable.

## Procedures for selecting vocation ministers

The challenging and necessary responsibility of identifying vocation ministers for a congregation can be a daunting experience for leadership. Following are suggested procedures that might ease the task for leaders who also have many other obligations.

- Take a proactive approach. That is, plan to identify ministers well in advance of actual need.
- Send a letter of invitation to those who show interest, abilities and desired qualities and who are willing to begin preparations.

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*Carol Mucha, RSM is a Sister of Mercy of the Chicago Regional Community who has been in new membership ministry for 12 years. Currently she is a co-minister in the Institute New Membership Office, founded in 2005 in St. Louis, MO.*



- Consider inviting those who have recently made final vows and are not too far from having experienced the process of formation.
- Consider those who are leaving a particular ministry, including leadership, who might build preparations into their sabbatical time. The preparation is a time of spiritual growth.
- Be willing to invite those in significant ministries to ensure that those ministries will continue through the formation of new members.
- Be mindful of the impact a change of minister will have on men or women in the process of discernment.
- Be aware of the current minister's time-line for departure.
- Discuss with the current minister a definite date for leaving vocation ministry.
- Create a smooth transition between the minister who is leaving and the one who is to begin the ministry; overlap time can be helpful to both.
- Invite more than one person to consider the ministry a year in advance to allow for preparation time.
- Plan to budget for a year's orientation and preparation for the new minister.
- Engage in a discernment process with potential new ministers.
- Secure necessary information and resources from the National Religious Vocation Conference regarding assistance for a new minister.

## Criteria for selecting vocation ministers

Once leaders know *how* they'll go about choosing a vocation minister, they must contemplate what it is they're looking for.

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What skills and personal qualities does the vocation minister need? Following are some ideas on the subject from the Sisters of Mercy. Ideally, the vocation minister:

- is able to appreciate and use skills for discerning his or her own call to the ministry;
- is familiar with and faithful to the policies, programs, and processes of the congregation pertaining to new membership;
- manifests a love for religious life and a belief in its future;
- is a person of prayer and fidelity in his or her own commitment to religious life, the community and its mission;
- has a current knowledge of theology, spirituality and pastoral studies as required by the congregation (or is willing to update);
- has experienced living in several community situations that have been primarily vibrant, prayerful and nurturing, while containing challenging moments;
- has skills for conflict management and problem solving;
- has a deep desire to serve in the ministry and responds to the invitation.

### **Vocation minister's role in job preparation and orientation**

Vocation ministry draws upon a variety of knowledge and skills. It's helpful to spend some time consciously preparing for the ministry. During this time, the prospective vocation minister ideally:

- becomes familiar with the congregation's vocation and formation programs, processes and policies;
- attends the National Religious Vocation Conference's Orientation for New Vocation Ministers workshop;

- seeks out and meets regularly with a mentor in the community or from the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC);
- reads pertinent materials, such as *HORIZON*, *InFormation*, books about discernment, young adults, etc.;
- seeks out workshops on relevant topics, such as multiculturalism, spirituality, psychosexuality, ethical issues, medical topics, canon, civil and immigration law;
- responds to other suggestions from leadership about ways to become familiar with the ministry and gain confidence and competence.

The important thing is for congregations to have procedures and criteria for the selection of ministers and a plan for their preparation, orientation, supervision, evaluation and ongoing education.

### **The vocation minister's role in supervision**

Accountability is important in every job, and that's no less true for vocation ministry. Here are suggestions for what the vocation minister can do to ensure adequate supervision. He or she ideally:

- engages an approved supervisor who is experienced and knowledgeable regarding contemporary religious life;
- is accountable and meets with leadership regularly;
- remains in dialogue with vocation ministry colleagues through diocesan, NRVC, or congregational gatherings for the purpose of ongoing learning and skill competence.

### **The vocation minister's role in evaluation**

A job evaluation provides a chance to reflect on and assess

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what is happening day to day. Ideally the vocation minister:

- is a participating member in a yearly evaluation process under the direction of leadership;
- engages in self-evaluation using a process designed for this purpose.

## The vocation minister's role in ongoing growth and education

A thorough preparation is important for vocation ministry, and it should be followed by ongoing growth and education. Ideally, the vocation minister:

- follows through on opportunities to grow spiritually, professionally and theologically that are recommended at the annual evaluation conference;
- attends the biennial convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference;
- participates in the NRVC offerings regarding psycho-sexual development, behavioral assessments, candidate issues, ethics, critical issues, multi-cultural understanding, young adult and generational issues, etc.;
- reads professionally and spiritually;
- is an active member of the regional meetings of NRVC;
- engages in self-care and maintains balance with regard to all aspects of good health.

## Vocation ministry performance review

Every vocation minister deserves feedback on how she or he is carrying out this privileged and challenging ministry. Leadership's role in calling forth ministers also carries with it the responsibility to support them, to assist in identifying areas of potential growth and understanding, and to affirm their ministry on behalf of the congregation.

Whatever tool is used to assess the minister should be based on the congregation's program, procedures, and guidelines as written and affirmed by leadership. It should also take into consideration the role and responsibilities of the minister that are clearly articulated and understood by the minister and the leadership reviewer.

The following tool is a draft developed for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, representing just one approach to evaluation. It is designed for dialogue between minister and

leader, rather than a report card on performance, hence no rating scale is used. The idea is to ultimately help the minister to grow in confidence and competence.

### EVALUATION TOOL FOR VOCATION MINISTERS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Review period: \_\_\_\_\_

Review date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Summary of role

Vocation ministry is a service rendered on behalf of the congregation and the church. Three areas best describe this ministry: invitation, accompaniment and animation. *Invitation* is the process of identifying others to share in the life of the congregation, particularly through vowed membership. *Accompaniment* is the assistance given those who are discerning a call to religious life as members of the congregation. *Animation* is instilling an active consciousness of religious life and the congregation in young adults primarily, but also in parents, educators and the wider community.

Following are areas that both the vocation minister and leader can reflect on, assess and discuss together.

#### Relationship with discerners and inquirers

- Meets regularly with each person in discernment.
- Provides each discerner with necessary information and orientation to the congregation's process for new membership.
- Understands and engages the discerners and inquirers with appropriate discernment processes and tools.
- Effectively guides people through the application process according to requirements.
- Ensures that each person secures a spiritual director during the process of discernment.
- Prepares for each person to interact with community members in a variety of ways.
- Is prompt and helpful in responding to requests for information from vocational inquirers.

#### Relationship to community leadership

- Gives evidence of supporting and following the congregation's vocation program.
- Shares appropriately and frequently essential information regarding each person's progress in discernment.

- Introduces women in discernment to leadership when appropriate.
- Presents all application materials in an organized and complete manner prior to presenting the person for entrance.
- Arranges for each potential candidate to be interviewed by leadership prior to acceptance.
- Cooperates with requests made by leadership relative to new membership.
- Contributes ideas and recognizes the need to change, based on reflection and evaluation of the vocation program.

**Relationship to the congregation**

- Maintains ongoing communications with members regarding new membership.
- Engages a variety of community members in programs involving inquirers and explorers.
- Educates the community in multiple ways about the vocation program and processes for new membership.
- Makes requests of the community to provide hospitality for those in discernment.
- Invites and animates members to actively invest in new membership projects.
- Provides needed materials and resources for sisters to assist in vocation awareness and promotion.
- Prepares local communities to receive discerners in a live-in experience and facilitates the community's evaluation of the experience.

**Relationship to responsibilities of the ministry**

- Understands accountability to leadership in regard to potential new members.
- Is aware that he or she acts on behalf of the community in the role.
- Follows an appropriate code of ethics.
- Has been trained prior to assuming the ministry.
- Utilizes the expertise of a mentor and supervisor.
- Engages in spiritual direction.
- Prayerfully reflects on and articulates his or her own lived experience.

- Participates in ongoing education in the required areas pertinent to the ministry.
- Manifests appropriate organizational skills.
- Keeps current regarding religious life, spirituality, theology, sexuality, discernment and other areas that support the ministry.
- Is balanced in terms of the spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of his or her own health.
- Works collaboratively with ministers in the congregation and others.
- Has the ability to work with the formation minister to facilitate the inquirer's transition to candidacy.
- Gives evidence of the values and charism of the congregation.
- Is creative in approach, developing ways to enhance the ministry.

*Comments regarding previous year's goals*

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*Agreed-upon goals for next year*

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*Signature of vocation minister*

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*Signature of leadership reviewer*

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*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

The automaker Toyota may have something to teach religious communities about passing on a way of life to a new generation. Leaders and vocation ministers can glean lessons from the Toyota model.

# Translating the religious way of life to a new generation

By DEBBIE DRAGO, RGS

NOT LONG AGO I came across a *New York Times* article about the Toyota company which caught my attention: “Translating The Toyota Way: As the Automaker Goes Global, It Strives to Share Its Values With the Wider World of Managers.” I believe Toyota’s efforts have much to say to congregational leaders and vocation ministers as we strive to invite and transmit our religious way of life to a new generation. What can we learn from Toyota’s plan to effectively pass down its founding dream and philosophy to a new generation of workers spanning the globe? Perhaps the car company’s model can offer religious congregations some insight for developing a model for leadership and vocation ministers to work together. I was intrigued and encouraged by what I read.

First some background. Today Toyota is dealing with the challenge of maintaining and communicating its core values, philosophy and mission to a growing number of managers, line factory workers and plants outside of Japan and the Japanese culture that shaped the “Toyota Way.”<sup>1</sup> Does this sound familiar? Many of our congregations are dealing with succession planning, mission development and effectiveness training as we turn over our corporately sponsored programs and agencies to lay leadership and boards. We, too, desire to ensure that the original mission and intent of our charisms and founders be kept alive.

As a vocation minister for the past nine years, I am excited and hopeful as I experience a huge growth in the number of referrals sent to me from *VISION* magazine.

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*Debbie Drago, RGS is a Sister of the Good Shepherd, New York Province, living in Wickatunk, NJ. She has been involved in vocation ministry since 1997 and is a former Board member of the National Religious Vocation Conference.*



From August, 2006, through February, 2007, I received over 150 referrals, with the majority of the inquirers between the ages of 20-29. And the referrals keep coming weekly. What is happening? What is this saying to us? How might we respond?

How do we communicate and translate our “Religious Life Way”—and specifically our Good Shepherd or Franciscan or Dominican or Jesuit Way—to a new generation? Young adults are exploring religious life because they desire to be about something bigger than themselves. They seek Gospel values, prayer, community living, corporate ministry. This description may make a segment of current religious nervous. They may think, “Oh no. What does this mean, they want to live, pray and work together? Do they want us to go back to a pre-Vatican II way of living? Not in my lifetime.”

## New enthusiasm about religious life

I believe that this is not what young people want, nor would they last very long in a pre-Vatican II mentality and environment. We religious have been talking for years about the religious life of tomorrow looking very different than what it has looked like in the past or even now. I believe that something new is happening. I have been receiving far too many inquiries from young women to deny this recent resurgence. I’m reminded of Revelations 21:5: “Now I am making the whole of creation new.” What is this new reality?

I fear that we will miss the opportunity before us by putting our interpretations onto the responses that we are receiving from these 20-to-30-year-old inquirers, who have no experience of religious life or the pre-Vatican II church. That would be a grave mistake. We need to be open to their dreams and see how they intersect with our way of life and founding missions. We need to engage in honest dialogue with these young adults. What do they have to offer and teach us?

It is not atypical for me to receive inquiries from young

women who are interested in religious life because of our commitment to social justice issues: our care for the earth and involvement in working to raise consciousness around issues of global warming, unjust war, trafficking of women and children, domestic violence, poverty, health care and education. These young women wish to live in community and work together with other sisters (even if it is just one other sister). They are drawn to a variety of prayer forms, such as liturgy of the hours, daily Mass, faith sharing, *lectio divina*, centering prayer and, yes, even common rosary and Eucharistic adoration. They come to us with a variety of educational backgrounds, the majority of inquiries being from college students and graduates with majors in nursing, education, social work, peace and justice, human rights, theology, Central and Latin American studies, languages, music and the arts. Many speak more than one language and have traveled abroad, engaging in volunteer work through the Peace Corps or religiously sponsored volunteer programs. They are comfortable with and sensitive to cultural diversity and possess a certain amount of cultural competence, not necessarily from formal training but due to their lived experience. Their interests are broad and diverse: sports, animals, dancing, reading, writing poetry, talking and hanging out with friends, music, traveling, meditating, learning about justice, laughing, enjoying nature, painting, fixing things and doing yard work. They have piercings and tattoos.

And—you may want to sit down for this one—many are interested in wearing a habit! This is where I need to urge all of us, including myself, not to panic and especially not to automatically dismiss them. We are doing young men and women and ourselves a great injustice if we insist on putting our interpretations onto their desires. It is imperative that we ask inquirers what prayer, community living, the habit and ministry mean to them. We need to do that in an open and non-judgmental atmosphere. Were not many religious denied a hearing in the late 60s and early 70s when their desire for

a new expression of religious life included shedding the habit, moving out of the big institutions and creating new forms of community and prayer?

So this new generation desires to live, work and pray together. Perhaps this is the new reality that we have been awaiting. And, because it resembles something of the old reality, it can trigger trace memories of oppressive structures, and we can fail to recognize, appreciate and welcome the new reality being presented.

By the time they actually speak with a vocation director, young adults are well informed about the various elements of religious life and formation, thanks to their Web surfing and participation in blog discussions. Their questions are quite specific. They often ask about the length and process of formation. Do you have a formation program, and what is it like? What kinds of choices will I have regarding community and ministry? What are the options regarding geographic location and the ability to move about or stay within certain boundaries? How much collaboration takes place between leadership and the general population of sisters? They desire an established program, as well as the ability to give their input. Their approach really is not pre-Vatican II. Would that it were that easy!

## Toyota's plan for perpetuating the mission

With these shifts in religious life in mind, let's look more closely at how Toyota is coping with the need to spread its vision and mission. Toyota has a plan. Perhaps we can learn from it. Toyota's corporate culture is famous for creating quality circles and giving workers control over

We are doing young men and women and ourselves a great injustice if we insist on putting our interpretations onto their desires. It is imperative that we ask inquirers what prayer, community living, the habit and ministry mean to them.

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their production lines. Its executives are consciously and systematically training 30 “missionaries” of sorts for the Toyota Way. They are putting their best foot forward to avoid corporate short-sightedness and to keep the company true to its original mission.<sup>2</sup>

Are we willing to take the time to reflect together, to problem-solve and to collectively plan the way we will translate our way of life to the next generation?

The whole company prizes a sense of shared responsibility on every level of employment, from line workers, to managers and board members, right on up to the executive committee and president. Toyota has established an academy to train its executives in their mission, philosophy and

core values. They have a vision that continues to be relevant and necessary in today’s world and is grounded in their communal, Japanese culture.

Latondra Newton, one of Toyota’s American executives based in Erlanger, KY, attended the training academy in Mikkabi, Japan last September. She was plunged into a week-long program starting with a presentation by the company president, Katsuaki Watanabe, and other top Toyota executives and board members. Those attending the program studied the core tenets of the company and sought out one another to solve problems together. They spent 12-14 hour days as they looked at drive and dedication, as well as effective consensus-building and respect for people. Newton explains that she has become a convert to the Toyota Way, learning mostly from the people who have lived it their entire professional lives.<sup>3</sup>

Is there something in this scenario that we religious can take away and use as we struggle to shape our futures? What can we learn from Toyota as we look at our own reality of aging, limited resources and diminishment on the one hand, while experiencing a renewed interest in religious life from young adults on the other? How will we articulate and translate our way of life in words and actions that are congruent with the original vision of our founders and foundresses? Can we do this while we stay open to new ways or traditional ways desired by those seeking to join us? Religious life continues to be relevant and needed in our world and church today. Do we continue to possess a drive and motivation about it? Are we willing to take the time to reflect together, to problem-solve and to collectively plan the

way we will translate our way of life to the next generation? Will we make the same effort to authentically live our way of life? How open are we to this next generation and its gifts?

Sandra Schneiders, IHM, in her book *Finding the Treasure* asks some very challenging questions:

Do we believe in Religious Life; do we find it life-giving for ourselves; do we think it is vital for the Church and the world; do we want to continue to live it? If the answer to these questions is no, that is, if we do not have the vital energy for the project, then we should actively end it and either enter a new life-form that already exists or found something new for which we do have the energy and commitment. It seems to me that the ultimate tragedy would not be to arrive at the conclusion that our life-form has served its purpose and the time has come for something new. The ultimate tragedy would be to allow something we do believe in to disappear by default because we have not exerted the necessary energy to analyze the problems and face the challenges that confront us.<sup>4</sup>

## Single sister is path to future

Translating our way of life is not necessarily a matter of numbers or age. It is more a matter of heart, attitude, dedication, belief and the willingness to commit to the time and demands that new members will require from us. I am forever amazed by the vocation story of my own foundress, Rose Virginie Pelletier, later known as St. Mary Euphrasia, who entered the congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge founded by St. Jean Eudes in 1641.

One biography of her life<sup>5</sup> notes that in 1812, when Rose Virginie was in high school, the community of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge seemed destined to die out. One attempt was made to open a small boarding school (not typical of their founding vision and work) but the sisters could not carry out the work. So the boarding school did not make it. However in 1813 there was a specific sister who was very able and enterprising. She succeeded in buying a good house, situated on a good piece of property, to provide a home for young girls in need of care. This was the original vision and mission of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge. From that moment the establishment seemed to thrive.

It was to this monastery, blossoming in a renewal of life, that Rose Virginie came in the autumn of 1814. She was 18-years-old at the time. It is said that she had immense joy and overflowing enthusiasm and was ready to buoyantly overlook



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any difficulties that might appear in the way. Isn't this how we all came to our congregations—full of joy and enthusiasm, ready to do anything for God and God's people, hopeful, as well as a bit naïve? Isn't this the demeanor and spirit of most young adults and especially those who are currently connecting with us? They want to make a difference. They are eager, hopeful, energetic and full of passion. This is very hopeful.

St. Mary Euphrasia knew the sorrowful story of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Refuge's dispersion, of their hidings and wanderings, and how the majority had been imprisoned during the French revolution.

They all bore the marks of the sufferings they had endured and were tired and worn-out. They stood in their stalls, day by day, like gnarled ancient trees that the storms have beaten overmuch, and their uncertain voices, with now a tremor and now a break, intoned as in the days of their youth the divine praises, an echo, even if the accents trembled, of the deathless song which was in their heart. To Rose Virginie they seemed like angels. She realized immediately how much she was going to love their life, their Rule, their customs, everything about them.<sup>6</sup>

Rose Virginie entered a community of nine elderly sisters. Despite their age, their limits, and their personal and collective struggles, there was a powerful echo from the days of their youth that refused to die. They continued to possess within their hearts the deathless song and dream of their original mission. They refused to let it die out. They were alive and open to this young woman who would forever change the future of the congregation while staying faithful to its original mission.

Just as Latondra Newton learned the Toyota Way from those who had lived it, so, too, did Rose Virginie learn from the people who had lived the Good Shepherd way of life their entire religious lives. These nine elderly sisters were committed to passing on the vision and mission to a new generation.

Our task as women and men religious, like the task that Toyota has set for itself, is to reintroduce ourselves and, more importantly, our mission to a new generation of Catholics. St. Mary Euphrasia stated, "If only eight fervent religious of the congregation were left, they would be sufficient to propagate it and cause it to flourish."<sup>7</sup>

If we believe it, we will see it.<sup>8</sup> We know the results will not happen overnight. Yet the work of re-introducing religious

life and our specific congregations to a new generation of Catholics, is worth our every effort. Latondra Newton reflects, "When I saw folks in high ranks, like Mr. Watanabe, the company's president, and how consistent and dedicated they were, I knew they were true believers. Now, I'm a true believer, too."<sup>9</sup> Although it would be ideal if every member of our respective congregations possessed the spirit, dedication, openness and desire to invite a new generation to carry on the mission, the responsibility lies particularly within the hearts and hands of leadership and vocation ministers working together. ■

Our task as women and men religious, like the task that Toyota has set for itself, is to reintroduce ourselves and, more importantly, our mission to a new generation of Catholics.

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1. Martin Fackler. "Translating The Toyota Way," *The New York Times* (February 15, 2007), C1 and 4.
  2. *Ibid.*, C4.
  3. *Ibid.*, C4.
  4. Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM. *Finding the Treasure* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 91.
  5. Gabriel Frances Powers, RGS. *Redemption* (Manilla, Philippines: Good Shepherd Press, 1940), 75-76.
  6. *Ibid.*, 76-77.
  7. Conferences of St. Mary Euphrasia, *On Our Vocation*, 56-57.
  8. Dewitt Jones, *Celebrate What's Right with the World*, DVD (St. Paul, MN: Star Thrower Distribution).
  9. Fackler, *The New York Times*, C4.

Baby Boomers may have been the first navel-gazing Western generation, but the Millennials are showing an even stronger orientation toward the self.

# Generation me: the young adult focus on self

BY JEAN TWENGE

*While Christianity calls its followers to selfless love, and most who seek out religious life exhibit a genuine concern for others, cultural critics have long noted a self-centeredness in Western culture. Author Jean Twenge contends that today's young adults have pushed self-focus to new heights, a trend that cannot help but affect the whole culture, including those who arrive at the doorstep of vocation directors.*

ONE DAY WHEN MY MOTHER was driving me to school in 1986, Whitney Houston's hit song "The Greatest Love of All" was warbling out of the weak speakers of our Buick station wagon with wood trim. I asked my mother what she thought the song was about. "The greatest love of all—it has to be about children," she said.

My mother was sweet, but wrong. The song does say that children are the future (always good to begin with a strikingly original thought) and that we should teach them well. About world peace, maybe? Or great literature? Nope. Children should be educated about the beauty "inside," the song declares. We all need heroes, Whitney sings, but she never found "anyone to fulfill my needs," so she learned to depend on (wait for it) "me." The chorus then declares, "learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all."

This is a stunning reversal in attitude from previous generations. Back then, respect for others was more important than respect for yourself. The term "self-esteem" wasn't widely

used until the late 1960s, and didn't become talk-show and dinner-table conversation until the 1980s. By the 1990s, it was everywhere.

Take, for example, the band Offspring's rockingly irreverent 1994 riff "Self-Esteem." The song describes a guy whose girlfriend "says she wants only me ... Then I wonder why she sleeps with my friends." (Hmmm.) But he's blasé about it—it's OK, really, since he's "just a sucker with no self-esteem."

By the mid-1990s, Offspring could take it for granted that most people knew the term "self-esteem," and knew they were supposed to have it. They also knew how to diagnose themselves when they didn't have it. Offspring's ironic self-parody demonstrates a high level of understanding of the concept, the satire suggesting that this psychological self-examination is rote and can thus be performed with tongue planted firmly in cheek.

In the years since, attention to the topic of self-esteem has rapidly expanded. A search for "self-esteem" in the books section of Amazon.com yielded 105,438 entries in July 2005 (sample titles: *The Self-Esteem Workbook*, *Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem*, *Ten Days to Self-Esteem*, *200 Ways to Raise a Girl's Self-Esteem*). Magazine articles on self-esteem are as common as e-mail spam for Viagra. *Ladies' Home Journal* told readers to "Learn to Love Yourself!" in March 2005, while *Parenting* offered "Proud to Be Me!" (apparently the exclamation point is required) in April, listing "5 simple ways to help your child love who he is." TV and radio talk shows would be immediately shut down by the FCC if "self-esteem" were on the list of banned words. The American Academy of Pediatrics guide to caring for babies and young children uses the word self-esteem 10 times in the space of seven pages in the first chapter, and that doesn't even count the numerous mentions of self-respect, confidence, and belief in oneself.

How did self-esteem transform from an obscure academic term to a familiar phrase that pops up in everything from

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women's magazines to song lyrics to celebrity interviews? The story actually begins centuries ago, when humans barely had a concept of a self at all: your marriage was arranged, your profession determined by your parents, your actions dictated by strict religious standards. Slowly over the centuries, social strictures began to loosen, and people started to make more choices for themselves. Eventually we arrived at the modern concept of the individual as an autonomous, free person.

Then came the 1970s, when the ascendance of the self truly exploded into the American consciousness. In contrast to previous ethics of honor and duty, Baby Boomer ideals focused instead on meaning and self-fulfillment. In his 1976 bestseller, *Your Erroneous Zones*, Wayne Dyer suggests that the popular song "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" be retitled "I Am the Sunshine of My Life." Your love for yourself, he says, should be your "first love." The 1970 allegory, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, describes a bird bored with going "from shore to food and back again." Instead, he wants to enjoy flying, swooping through the air to follow "a higher meaning, a higher purpose for life," even though his actions get him exiled from his flock. The book, originally rejected by nearly every major publishing house, became a runaway bestseller as Americans came to agree with the idea that life should be fulfilling and focused on the needs of the self. The seagulls in the animated movie *Finding Nemo* were still on message almost 25 years later: all that comes out of their beaks is the word "Mine."

## Boomers and their "journey" into the self

But this is not about Baby Boomers, and it's not about the 1970s. Because the Boomers dominate our culture so much, however, we have to understand them first so we can see how they differ from the younger Generation Me. Why aren't the Boomers—the Me Generation in the 1970s—the real Generation Me? It's about what you explore as a young adult

versus what you're born to and take for granted.

For the Boomers, who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, self-focus was a new concept, individualism an uncharted territory. In his 1981 book *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World*

*Turned Upside Down*, Daniel Yankelovich describes young Boomers struggling with new questions: How do you make decisions in a marriage with two equal partners? How do you focus on yourself when your parents don't even know what that means? The Boomers in the book sound like people driving around in circles in the dark, desperately searching for something. The world was so new that there were no road signs, no maps to point the way to this new fulfillment and individuality.

That's probably why many Boomers talk about the self using language full of abstraction, introspection, and "growth." New things call for this kind of meticulous thought, and require the idea that the process will take time. Thus Boomers talk about "my journey," "my need to keep growing," or "my unfulfilled potentials." Sixties activist Todd Gitlin called the Boomer quest the "voyage to the interior." Icky as they are to today's young people, these phrases drum with motion and time, portraying self-focus as a continuous project that keeps evolving as Boomers look around for true meaning. In a 1976 *New York Magazine* article, Tom Wolfe described the "new dream" as "remaking, remodeling, elevating and polishing one's very self . . . and observing, studying, and doting on it." Sixties radical Jerry Rubin wrote that he tried just about every fad of the 1970s (rolfing, est, yoga, sex therapy, finding his inner child); one of the chapters in his

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book *Growing (Up) at Thirty-Seven* is called “Searching for Myself.”

Such introspection primarily surfaces today in the speech of New Agers, therapists who have read too

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much Maslow, and over-45 Boomers. When asked what’s next in her life, Kim Basinger (born in 1953) replies, “Watching what the rest of my journey is going to be about.” In answer to the same question, Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York (born in 1959) says: “My coming to stay in America for a few months is like my blossoming into my true Sarah, into my true self. And I’m just coming

to learn about her myself.” Not all Boomers talk this way, of course, but enough do that it’s an immediately recognizable generational tic. It’s also a guaranteed way to get a young person to roll her eyes. She might also then tell you to lighten up.

Many authors, from William Strauss and Neil Howe in *Generations* to Steve Gillon in *Boomer Nation*, have noted that abstraction and spirituality are the primary hallmarks of the Boomer generation. Gillon describes Boomers as having a “moralistic style” and devotes a chapter to Boomers’ “New Fundamentalism.” Whether joining traditional churches or exploring meditation or yoga, Boomers have been fascinated with the spiritual for four decades.

Even Boomers who don’t adopt New Age language seek higher meaning in the new religion of consumer products—thus the yuppie revolution. In *Bobos in Paradise*, David Brooks demonstrates that upper-class Boomers have poured their wealth into things like cooking equipment, which somehow feels more moral and meaningful than previous money sinks like jewelry or furs. Even food becomes “a barometer of virtue,” Brooks says, as 1960s values are “selectively updated....

Gone are the 60s-era things that were fun and of interest to teenagers, like Free Love, and retained are all the things that might be of interest to middle-aged hypochondriacs, like whole grains.”

The Boomers’ interest in the abstract and spiritual shows up in many different sources. In 1973, 46 percent of Boomers said they “focused on internal cues.” Only 26 percent of 1990s young people agreed. Thirty percent of Boomers said that “creativity comes from within,” versus 18 percent of young people in the 1990s. Even stronger evidence comes from a national survey of more than 300,000 college freshmen. In 1967, a whopping 86 percent of incoming college students said that “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” was an essential life goal. Only 42 percent of GenMe freshmen in 2004 agreed, cutting the Boomer number in half. I’m definitely a member of my generation in this way; despite being an academic, I’m not sure I know what a “meaningful philosophy of life” even is. Jerry Rubin does—if you can understand him. “Instead of seeking with the expectation of finding, I experience my seeking as an end in itself,” he writes. “I become one with my seeking, and merge with the moment.” OK, Jerry. Let us know when you’ve reentered the Earth’s atmosphere.

### The self across the generations

BABY BOOMERS	GENERATION ME
Self-fulfillment	Fun
Journey, potentials, searching	Already there
Change the world	Follow your dreams
Protests and group sessions	Watching TV and surfing the Web
Abstraction	Practicality
Spirituality	Things
Philosophy of life	Feeling good about yourself

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While up there, maybe Jerry met Aleta St. James, a 57-year-old woman who gave birth to twins in 2004. She explained her unusual action by saying, “My whole world is about manifesting, so I decided to manifest children.” It’s not surprising that an enterprising GenMe member put together a list of books on Amazon.com titled “Tired of Baby Boomer Self-Righteousness?”

Boomers display another unique and somewhat ironic trait: a strong emphasis on group meetings. Boomers followed in the footsteps of their community-minded elders—they just joined the Weathermen instead of the Elks Lodge. This is one of the many reasons why Boomers are not the true Generation Me—almost everything they did happened in groups: Vietnam protests, marches for feminism, consciousness raising, assertiveness training, discos, even seminars like est. Maybe it felt safer to explore the self within a group—perhaps it felt less radical. No one seemed to catch the irony that it might be difficult to find your own unique direction in a group of other people. Even Boomers’ trends and sayings belied their reliance on groups: “Don’t trust anyone over 30” groups people by age, as did the long hair many Boomer men adopted in the late 1960s and early 1970s to distinguish themselves from older folks. In a 1970 song, David Crosby says he decided not to cut his hair so he could “let my freak flag fly.” If you’ve got a flag, you’re probably a group. Boomers may have thought they invented individualism, but like any inventor, they were followed by those who truly perfected the art.

Boomers took only the first tentative steps in the direction of self-focus rather than swallowing it whole at birth. Most Boomers never absorbed it at all and settled down early to marry and raise families. Those who adopted the ways of the self as young adults speak the language with an accent: the accent of abstraction and “journeys.” They had to reinvent their way of thinking when already grown, and thus see self-focus as a “process.” In his book, Rubin quotes a friend who says, “We are the first generation to reincarnate ourselves in our own lifetime.”

## Matter of fact self-focus

Generation Me had no need to reincarnate ourselves; we were born into a world that already celebrated the individual. The self-focus that blossomed in the 1970s became mundane and commonplace over the next two decades, and GenMe accepts it like a fish accepts water. If Boomers were making their way in the uncharted world of the self, GenMe has printed step-by-step directions from Yahoo! Maps—and most of the time

we don’t even need them, since the culture of the self is our hometown. We don’t have to join groups or talk of journeys, because we’re already there. We don’t need to “polish” the self, as Wolfe said, because we take for granted that it’s already shiny. We don’t need to look inward; we already know what we will find. Since we were small children, we were taught to put ourselves first. That’s just the way the world works—why dwell on it? Let’s go to the mall.

GenMe’s focus on the needs of the individual is not necessarily self-absorbed or isolationist; instead, it’s a way of moving through the world beholden to few social rules and with the unshakable belief that you’re important. It’s also not the same as being “spoiled,”

which implies that we always get what we want; though this probably does describe some kids, it’s not the essence of the trend. (GenMe’s expectations are so great and our reality so challenging that we will probably get less of what we want than any previous generation.) We simply take it for granted that we should all feel good about ourselves, we are all special, and we all deserve to follow our dreams. GenMe is straightforward and unapologetic about our self-focus. In 2004’s *Conquering Your Quarterlife Crisis*, Jason, 25, relates how he went through some tough times and decided he needed to change things in his life. His new motto was “Do what’s best for Jason. I had to make me happy; I had to do what was best for myself in every situation.”

Our practical orientation toward the self sometimes leaves us with a distaste for Boomer abstraction. When a character in the 2004 novel *Something Borrowed* watched the 1980s show *thirtysomething* as a teen, she wished the Boomer characters would “stop pondering the meaning of life and start making grocery lists.” The matter-of-fact attitude of GenMe appears in everyday language as well—a language that still includes the abstract concept of self, but uses it in a very simple way, perhaps because we learned the language as children. We speak the language of the self as our native tongue. So much of the “common sense” advice that’s given

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these days includes some variation on “self.” Worried about how to act in a social situation? “Just be yourself.” What’s the good thing about your alcoholism/drug addiction/murder conviction? “I learned a lot about myself.” Concerned about your performance? “Believe in yourself.” (Often followed by “and anything is possible.”) Should you buy the new pair of shoes, or get the nose ring? “Yes, express yourself.” Why should you leave the unfulfilling relationship/quit the boring job/tell off your mother-in-law? “You have to respect yourself.” Trying to get rid of a bad habit? “Be honest with yourself.” Confused about the best time to date or get married? “You have to love yourself before you can love someone else.” Should you express your opinion? “Yes, stand up for yourself.”

Americans use these phrases so often that we don’t even notice them anymore. Dr. Phil, the ultimate in plainspoken, no-nonsense advice, uttered both “respect yourself” and “stop lying to yourself” within seconds of each other on a “Today” show segment on New Year’s resolutions. One of

his bestselling books is entitled *Self Matters*. We take these phrases and ideas so much for granted, it’s as if we learned them in our sleep as children, like the perfectly conditioned citizens in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

These aphorisms don’t seem absurd to us even when, sometimes, they are. We talk about self-improvement as if the self could be given better drywall or a new coat of paint. We read self-help books as if the self could receive tax-deductible donations. The self even has its own magazine. Psychologist Martin Seligman says that the traditional self—responsible, hardworking, stern—has been replaced with the “California self,” “a self that chooses, feels pleasure and pain, dictates action and even has things like esteem, efficacy and confidence.” Media outlets promote the self relentlessly; I was amazed at how often I heard the word “self” used in the popular media once I started looking for it. A careful study of news stories published or aired between 1980 and 1999 found a large increase in self-reference words (I, me, mine and myself) and a marked decrease in collective words (humanity, country or crowd).

Young people have learned these self-lessons very well. Twenty-year-old Maria says her mother often reminds her to consider what other people will think. “It doesn’t matter what other people think,” Maria insists. “What really matters is how I perceive myself. The real person I need to please is myself.”

Smart marketers have figured this out, too. In the late 1990s, Prudential replaced its longtime insurance slogan “Get a Piece of the Rock” with the nakedly individualistic “Be Your Own Rock.” The United States Army, perhaps the last organization one might expect to focus on the individual instead of the group, has followed suit. Their standard slogan, adopted in 2001, is “An Army of One.” ■



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**OF SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS**  
The parable of the Good Shepherd is one of the most comforting in the Bible—God will find us when we're lost—and also one of the most challenging—God will not allow one of us to be lost. "To leave the 99 in favor of the one," writes Sister Helene Hayes on the Sisters of the Good Shepherd website, "is to understand our universal kinship with all human beings. It is to understand that our salvation and liberation are intertwined in a profound way with the salvation and liberation of the 'stray ones,' the poor, the ostracized." Listen to the Good Shepherd's voice and you will know unconditional love; follow in the Good Shepherd's footsteps and you will share that unconditional love with others. That is the vocation of every Christian: to listen and follow.

TODAY'S READINGS: Acts of the Apostles 13:14, 43-52; Revelation 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30  
"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

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**POOR IN SPIRIT**  
Even though the man who was to be Pope Pius V (1504-1572) would become a university professor, head of several houses of the Dominican order, a bishop and cardinal, a grand inquisitor, and eventually pope who had to implement the reforms of the Council of Trent, it seems he never forget where he came from. Born of impoverished Italian nobility, as a boy he worked as a shepherd. After becoming pope he lived a simple and prayerful lifestyle, built hospitals, and opened the papal treasury to care for the poor, with whom he was personally involved. He kept wearing his Dominican habit, establishing the custom of popes wearing white. Prayer and service, worship and works of mercy will keep you close to God and the gospel, whatever else you do.

TODAY'S READINGS: Acts of the Apostles 11:1-18; John 10:1-10  
"The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us."

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