



## 25 years in the vineyard of the Lord

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# Editor's Note

## Twenty five years . . .

**I**T'S OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY! The publisher of HORIZON, the National Religious Vocation Conference, is proud to be truly celebrating this jubilee year. And there is much to celebrate. Most of us have met those couples who make it to 25 or 50 years, but who project more of a spirit of endurance than a spirit of love. Well, if organizations can celebrate passion versus endurance, then I think NRVC has definitely kept its passion and has a great deal to give thanks for and to celebrate this year.

What better time of year to begin our celebration than the fall? The time of harvest and Thanksgiving. Throughout the coming year, we at NRVC will be reminding our HORIZON readers and our members of how far we have come and all that we have to be thankful for.

In keeping with our 25th jubilee, our articles in this edition have a theme of 25, as you can see from the titles. We hope they inspire, inform and uplift. We hope they kick off our year long commemoration of who we are and what we're about.

Certainly this edition is a tribute to the unflagging creativity of our members, starting with the cover. When Brother James Joost approached me to offer his excellent photography for our cover this edition, I didn't realize that his reflection upon the photo would be so apropos to our theme. But I want to give the last word to him since his reflection on the meaning of a mature grape vine could not be more relevant. Thank you, Brother James, for your beautiful photography and your thoughtful words that seem to be a metaphor not only for aging as a human being but also for aging as an organization and a religious community.

—Carol Schuck Scheiber, editor

## In the vineyard . . .

*I am the vine, you are the branches (John 15:5).*

**T**HE SEASONS OF A WINE VINE tell a story similar to that of religious formation as one grows in understanding of God and initial impressions peel away, revealing deeper layers of beauty.

Grapes sweeten more the longer they are on the vine, and grapes deepen in complexity with the passing of each season. Those who work in the field know the vines the best, nurturing, pruning and cultivating them to enhance the God-given gifts they have. Vines that grow in adverse conditions produce more complex grapes that in turn produce a deeper wine that mellows well with age.

—Brother James Joost, FSC



Carol Schuck Scheiber, editor,  
cscheiber@nrvc.net

Vines that grow in adverse conditions produce more complex grapes that in turn produce a deeper wine that mellows well with age.

COVER PHOTO  
BY BROTHER  
JAMES JOOST, FSC  
*(Photo taken at Mont  
La Salle, regional  
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## Advent Days of Renewal & Reflection



Father Joseph Nassal, CPPS

From December 10-13, 2013 the National Religious Vocation Conference is sponsoring “Advent Days of Renewal and Reflection” with a theme of *Rest Stops for the Soul: Transformation for Vocation Ministers*. Father Joseph Nassal, CPPS will lead the experience, which will take place at the Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ.

Learn more and register at [nrvc.net](http://nrvc.net).

## “Bro” film highlights religious brothers

Brother Nich Perez, CSC—a college film instructor, musician and contributor to *VISION* vocation magazine—has turned his creative talent to showcasing Catholic brothers in the soon-to-be-released documentary *Bro: Men with Hope to Bring*. The fast-paced, professional film has already garnered news coverage from a *San Francisco Examiner* blog. See a trailer about the movie at <https://vimeo.com/74494918>

## NRVC anniversary year begins; culminates in convocation

In November 2013 the National Religious Vocation Conference begins a year-long commemoration of the organization’s 25th anniversary, which will culminate at



The keynote speakers at the NRVC convocation in November 2014 will be Father Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, OSB; Sister Colleen Mary Mallon, OP and Sister Theresa Rickard, OP.

its November 6-10, 2014 convocation in Chicago.

The convocation will take place at the Marriott Hotel at O’Hare, Chicago, IL. The keynote speakers will be Father Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, OSB, director of vocations, novice master and formation director for the Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria; Sister Colleen Mary Mallon, OP, faculty member of Aquinas Institute of Theology, Berkley, CA; and Sister Theresa Rickard, OP, former vocation director and current executive director of Renew International.

Three day-long pre-convocation workshops will be offered on November 6:

- “Building Intercultural Competence for Vocation Ministers,” by Sister Teresa Maya, CCVI.
- “Canon, Civil and Immigration Law,” by Father Daniel J. Ward, OSB and Mr. Miguel Naranjo
- “Life Questions: Screening for Candidates,” by Brother John Mark Falkenhain, OSB



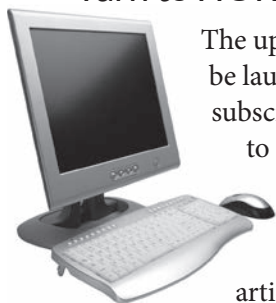
Members from Region 1 celebrate NRVC’s 25th anniversary.

On November 7 of the convocation, a panel discussion with newly professed men and women religious will examine the NRVC/CARA study “Integration of Multicultural and Multiethnic Candidates in Religious Life.”

Workshops to be held during the convocation on Saturday, November 8 include:

- “Beauty Ever Ancient, Ever New” and “This Little Light: A Celebration of Sister Thea Bowman,” by Brother Michael McGrath, OSFS
- “Discernment in Male Spirituality,” by Father Dennis Billy, CSSR
- “Peer Supervision,” by Sister Beth Saner, FSPA
- “Ramifications of Reconfiguration for Vocation Offices,” by Father Chuck Frederico, SJ; Sister Pat Twohill, OP and Brother Tom Wendorf, SM
- “Self-Care: Achieving Balance and Avoiding Burnout,” by Dr. Timone Davis
- “Ten Effective Ways to Use Media in Vocation Ministry,” by Deacon Pedro Guevara-Mann

## Turn to HORIZON online for answers



The updated NRVC website ([nrvc.net](http://nrvc.net))—to be launched in late fall—gives HORIZON subscribers better access than ever before to useful, problem-solving articles. Subscribers and NRVC members can log in and find archives of more than 10 years of HORIZON editions. Many articles are now accessible by searching a topic. For instance, if a reader is seeking information about how to do a psychological assessment of a candidate, the reader can log in and type in keywords to find all articles on the subject.

## “Moving Forward” and “Keys to Future” projects spur further conversation

The final report on the four gatherings of “Women Religious Moving Forward in Hope” has been posted on the NRVC website at [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net).

“I would encourage all women religious to read and to reflect on this document’s encouraging contents, its spirit and its hope for women’s religious life in the future. Please feel free to share it with your membership as well,” said Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC, executive director of

the National Religious Vocation Conference.

Sister Lorraine Reaume, OP and Sister Anne Walsh, ASCJ, collated materials from the four workshops and co-authored the report. In response to the success of these workshops, as well as its additionally sponsored “Keys to the Future” project, the GHR Foundation has given NRVC an additional \$40,300 grant to convene a select group of sisters who participated in at least one of the two projects. Participation will be by invitation only. The purpose of this convening, to take place in November 2013, will be to glean the wisdom of these participants and to surface concrete ideas and projects to help NRVC and its members foster new vocations to religious life.

## Multicultural study advances

This winter, 2014, the National Religious Vocation Conference will begin formally surveying the major superiors of U.S. religious communities on the topic of integrating candidates of non-Caucasian, non-Anglo descent. The study will be conducted for NRVC by the Center for Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown (CARA), with senior research associate Dr. Mary Gautier leading it.

The study will examine how communities welcome and retain non-Caucasian candidates during formation. NRVC hopes to identify what is helpful and eventually to develop resources that can help communities successfully welcome candidates from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds.



## Men religious to look at vocation culture

Sixty-four men’s religious communities have signed up to take part in an inter-community vocation gathering to be held twice, in December 2013 and in January 2014. Sponsored by the National Religious Vocation Conference, the gatherings are aimed at learning about contemporary social and demographic conditions affecting men’s communities and receiving a tool to assess the vocation culture within a given men’s institute.

The gatherings will take place at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana and at Holy Name Retreat House in Houston, TX. The proceedings will be recorded, and a final report will be made public. The gatherings are being underwritten by an anonymous donor.



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The National Religious Vocation Conference is entering its 25th anniversary year. It's a good time to look back and to look forward.

The 1989 Board meeting for the newly formed National Religious Vocation Conference.

Thank you to those who provided photos and information: Sister Kathleen Bryant, RSC and Sister Mary Ann Hamer, OSF, former administrative assistant for NRVC.

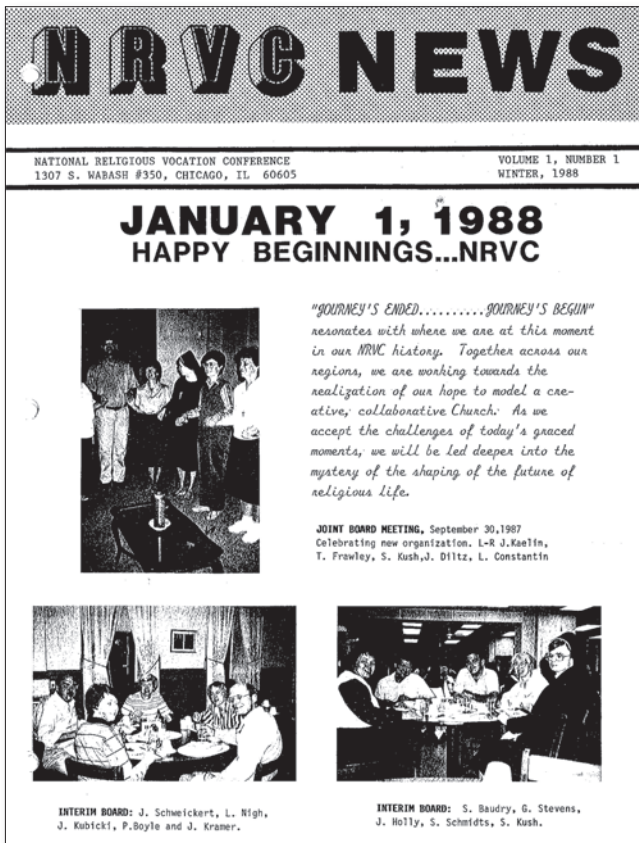
## How it all began

**T**HE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE was born the way many organizations are: in response to a need. The organization began organically as vocation ministry began to take shape and professionalize in the 1980s. However, vocation ministry as a profession began taking shape well before then.

According to former NRVC administrative assistant, Sister Mary Ann Hamer, OSF—who worked at the national level of vocation ministry for nearly 21 years—religious communities began appointing vocation ministers in the 1960s. These ministers started to form local chapters to share ideas. Eventually the National Sisters Vocation Conference arose as an umbrella group for women. Religious men formed the National Conference of Religious Vocation Directors of Men (NCRVDM). The men's group put on workshops that the women began to attend. By 1982 so many women religious had become involved with NCRVDM that it dropped the word “men” from its name and was simply the National Conference of Religious Vocation Directors (NCRVD).

Over time it became clear that only one religious vocation conference





The first NRVC newsletter, long before the days of e-newsletters.

was needed. Thus NRVC came into being in 1988 with the formal merger of the National Sisters Vocation Conference and the National Conference of Religious Vocation Directors. Much like today, albeit on a smaller scale, the NRVC offered professional development workshops, vocation ministry resources, opportunities for networking and a national voice for religious vocations.

*HORIZON's* roots go back even further than 1988 when NRVC was formally established. Father Jim Vedro, OCS (then the leader of the NCRVDM) began publishing *Called to Growth/Ministry* in 1975. NRVC later renamed the publication *HORIZON*. “I’d type it up; we’d run it off and staple it together,” said Sister Mary Ann. “I’m sure he never knew it was going to last; he was just responding to a need. He’d get writers to contribute, and the articles were on the same types of topics as today—the concerns of vocation ministers.”

Collaboration with other groups in the church has been a reality from the very beginning. For a number of years in the 1980s several national organizations representing religious life and vocations shared office space in Chicago, allowing for easy cross-fertilization and collaboration. The various vocation-related groups represented



The NRVC staff in the 1990s. Left to right are Sister Mary Ann Hamer, OSF, administrative assistant ; Sister Cathy Bertrand, SSND, executive director; Sister Charlene Herinckx, SSMO, coordinator of programs and projects; and Maureen O’Meara, administrative assistant.



At the 2004 Convocation, Father Timothy Radcliffe, OP and Father Andrew Carl Wisdom, OP.



Sister Charlene Diorka, SSJ completes the Orientation to Vocation Ministry program.

different branches of the church, including the diocesan vocation directors, the Knights of Columbus, Serra, Secular Institutes, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. These collaborations continue today.

As vocation director for his own congregation from 1991, and as executive director of NRVC since 2002, Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC, has witnessed much development in NRVC. “We’ve been serving the needs of our member vocation directors for 25 years: providing resources, training, camaraderie, and support,” he says. “But we’re not resting on our laurels. Just the opposite. We’re looking at the shifts in religious life, the new needs of vocation ministers, and we’re working together to build a vibrant future for religious life.” ■



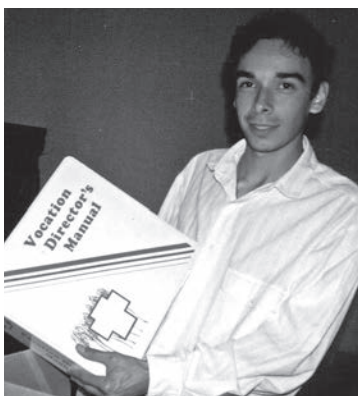
The 1991 NRVC Board.



Current NRVC executive director Brother Paul Bednarczyk, CSC during his early days in NRVC.



Some NRVC members enjoy time together at a convocation.



Saul Garcia, former HORIZON circulation coordinator, shows off the Vocation Director's Manual, (now on CD).



A speaker addresses vocation directors.



Forming friendships at a convocation.



Regional gatherings provide support and professional development.



Exchanging ideas at a convocation.



Listening during a workshop.



Former NRVC executive director Sister Cathy Bertrand, SSND and former board member Father Clemente Barron, CP.



Taking a lunch break during an NRVC gathering.



Staffing an NRVC table at an event.



We asked. You responded. HORIZON readers share their best vocation innovations.

Volunteers repaint a home during a service trip sponsored by the IHM Sisters of Scranton, PA. Service experiences were named by many vocation directors as one of their top vocation outreach efforts. The time together builds relationships, and the combination of service, prayer, reflection and communal activity exposes young people to key components of religious life.

BY MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE

HORIZON recently asked readers for feedback on the best things they've ever tried as vocation ministers. Thank you to the many respondents for creative, compelling stories. Read on for a little inspiration of your own.

## 25 ideas that worked

1) SERVICE TRIP One of the best things we do is our annual service trip, which brings together young women and our sisters for a week of prayer, community and service. The girls love staying with the sisters, and the feeling is mutual. This year 18 of us were in a poor rural town where we painted and repaired homes and yards, worked with Catholic Social Services and spent time in a residence for developmentally disabled adults. We stayed with our sisters in two convents. It was a good week, especially because it incorporated three main elements of our lives: prayer, service and community.

*Sister Kathryn Kurdziel IHM*

2) IMPROVED RESPONSE TO INQUIRIES Just now, after all these years, we are having success after enhancing our response to women using VocationMatch.com [NRVC's match service for those seeking the right community "fit" in religious life]. We now do a five-to-six-contact outreach starting the same day I get their names and using e-mail, phone calls, mail and sometimes Skype. One month in to this new system, we have heard back from at least four women. Using our former method of

reaching out only once or twice, and not very quickly, would have yielded no responses.

I have added one staff member working on this with me. This lay woman, Melissa, changed the vocation work she was doing with us to include this new approach to inquiries. Some inquirers seem to prefer responding to her, rather than me, the vocation director. Interesting. Another innovation is that we now personalize our response by picking out something from their profiles to comment on in our first e-mail to them.

*Sister Katherine Mullin, VHM*

### 3) POSTERS FOR THE FAMILY FRIDGE

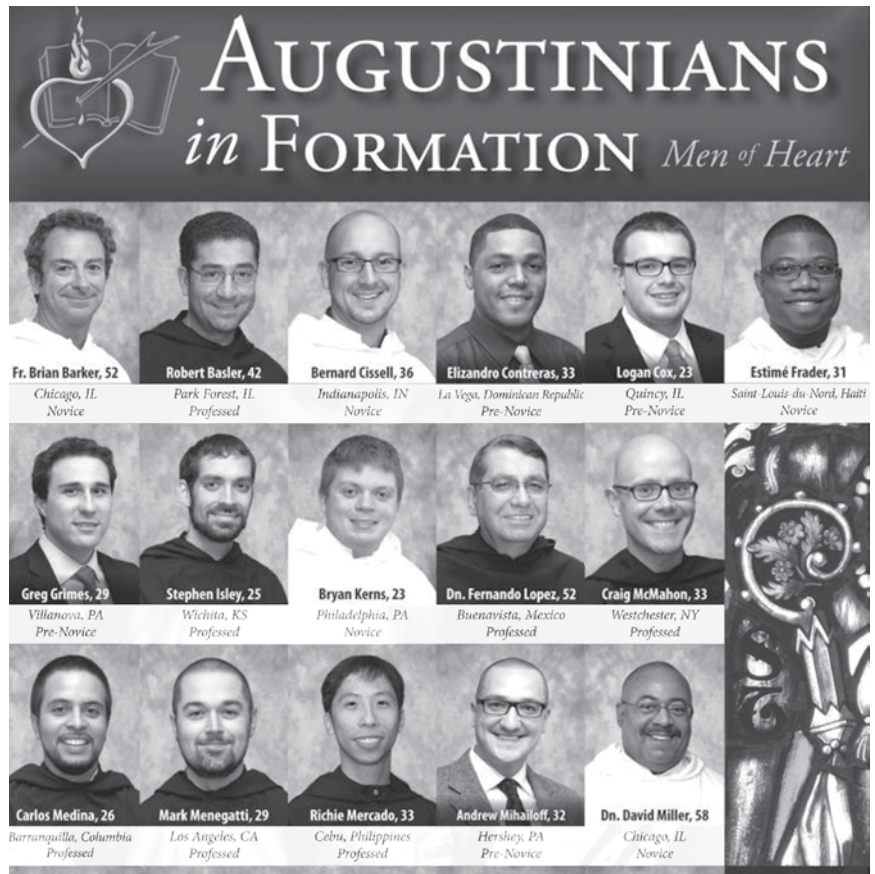
Last year we launched a “Vocation Culture Project” for our American provinces. We created a poster with pictures, names, ages, hometowns and level of formation for the 33 men in formation in the USA. We sent our poster to our parishes and schools and gave them out on a particular Sunday in our 33 parishes. We provided a recorded homily in English and Spanish to be used with the poster distribution. Alternatively, we asked the friars to listen to the recorded homilies and give their own similar message. We ask people to take home the poster and put it on the refrigerator or some other place where it will be seen every day. We then asked them to pray for our 33 men in formation and for all young people in their parishes and families and among their friends—that they be open to a religious vocation. We also did this at our eight high schools and two colleges. I gave posters out at 19 parish missions. In total we distributed 39,000 posters.

From this, two men have already come forward saying this poster and project was the “push” they needed. One is now a pre-novice and one is starting application for next year. We are almost done with this year’s poster and will do the exact same thing. If we keep creating a culture of vocation, imagine the fruits!

*Father Tom McCarthy, OSA*

4) MEET ON THEIR OWN TURF One of the best things I’ve done as vocation minister is to meet with young women on their own turf—sometimes at their homes, and sometimes at a local restaurant. Young people are candid in these meetings, and it has been a wealth for me personally, as well as for our community.

*Sister Colleen Clair, FMA*



A section of the poster that the Augustinian priests have successfully used.

5) LAITY ISSUED SERIOUS INVITATION One program that really worked: I adapted NRVC’s “Keys to the Future” program to a day-long workshop/recollection for brothers and our lay partners in mission. Over 100 people attended, mostly laity.

I was overwhelmed by the positive response of our lay partners. They were touched by the invitation to join us in vocation ministry. They have never been formally asked before. With brothers decreasing and those who are left having such little contact with kids, we need their help—concretely! Part of the day gave them time to come up with concrete plans. They did!

*Brother Ronnie Hingle, SC*

6) HOME VISITS During my years as a vocation minister, I would visit inquirers in their family homes and get acquainted with the families. I tried lots of things, but that one approach was invaluable whether a person entered or not. Developing relationships with the family—even when the woman lived on her own—still was helpful, especially when a person chose to enter.

*Sister Geraldine Wodarczyk, CSFN*



Christine Gabriel from Hicksville, New York (left) and Sister Lila Sciabica, IHM from Carbondale, PA take a break from their duties. Service programs are a popular way for vocation ministers to build relationships with young people and expose them to the service dimension of religious life.

#### 7) GET TO KNOW DIOCESAN COUNTERPARTS

I like to develop good relationships with staff in diocesan vocation offices. Even if they focus on vocations to the priesthood, it's still worth getting to know them and help out when possible. I have received several great referrals because people know how I approach others and they have had an opportunity to learn about my congregation.

*Sister Nancy Gerth, SCN*

#### 8) SHIFTING FROM SERVICE TO SPIRITUAL

GROWTH Listening to young adults and shifting from service to spiritual growth has been helpful. Several years ago, we began offering a week-long summer immersion, "Walk the Extra Mile," as an experience of praying, sharing, living in community and serving. Thanks to feedback, particularly from a core group of "regulars," we have adapted the program a little more each year. Most of these young women have been involved with service since high school. Most of them have even had third world mission experiences in college. What they were needing, and craving, was not so much service opportunities as *spiritual* opportunities. They needed guided exercises and reflection time, solitude, and prayer experiences. So we got the message. We adapted the week last year, and this year offered, from the start, a different kind of week. We called it "Walk the Extra Mile: Going Deeper." Another new learning, however, emerged from

our "regulars." "Could we have a little less meeting time together and more time on our own with God?" Who can argue with that? So I scrapped some of my lovely sessions.

Next year we hope to offer more of a guided/directed retreat, perhaps with morning prayer and night sharing and prayer. This process of listening and responding to my regular attendees has reinforced for me something I learned early on: that I need to respect where the young people are, listen to what they need, and be confident that "God gives the growth."

*Sister Cheryl Rose HM*

9) LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT A young woman from California came to a Come-N-See we had in the fall of 2011. Something kept telling me to reciprocate. We are a small, local community, primarily in south Louisiana. So this was a response to grace. I flew out to spend a few days with her last summer and have kept in touch. She plans on entering in the spring. I know larger communities have multiple vocation directors flying all over the country. That's not us. But something clicked with this young woman, and you never know!

*Sister Alice Abate, O.Carm.*

#### 10) WEEKEND VOCATION DISCERNMENT RE-

TREAT The work I did on this retreat with other vocation personnel was a great experience, and the retreatants commented on how well we, religious men and women, worked together. *Sister Lucy Regalado, OLVM*

11) NEW VOCABULARY I found using key words like "nudge" or "tug" were helpful for a gentle call. These words resonated with young adults. When responding to the call seems overwhelming, I've said "God only asks you to take the next step, no matter how small." I got feedback later that this enabled them to move forward.

*Sister Kathleen Bryant, RSC*

12) PARISH VOCATION CONTACT DAY Our Joliet Area Vocation Association (JAVA) had a Parish Vocation Contact Day in February of this year. This was my first time taking part in an outreach to people who have been designated as parish vocation contacts. Three of us sisters closed our presentations with the message that we religious can be valuable resources for parish vocation programs, along with the diocesan vocation director. Our message was well received, including by our diocesan vocation director. Offering ourselves as resources opened us up to a number of invitations to present at re-

religious education programs, as well as at parish vocation fairs. I believe letting people know we're still around and willing to participate in their parishes made an impression.

*Sister Maria Brizuela, OSF*

13) PRAYER, YOUTH IN THEOLOGY The two best things I have done with vocations are daily prayer and working with Youth in Theology and Ministry with Dr. Jeff Kaster and the team at St. John's Collegeville, MN. I helped with the summer program and taught the class "Meeting Yourself and Jesus at the Movies." I love using movies as a departure point for prayer in vocation work.

*Sister Eileen O'Connor, OSB*

14) NEVER WITHOUT A BUSINESS CARD I consider myself a vocation minister 24/7, so every pocket (sweater, jacket, vest, blazer) and purse has my business cards. I never leave home without them! I never know when I will meet someone who is interested in my life, my community, or the church itself. If I am able to strike up a conversation, I am always quick to hand a person my business card—even if it is simply to ask for prayers for more vocations to our community. My business cards have been distributed at vocation events, restaurants, social gatherings and even a few major league baseball games. You may ask, "Has anyone ever called you?" Yes, many times.

*Sister Teresa Grace Baillargeon, CR*



Vocation ministers have found that Youth in Theology and Ministry, a program sponsored by St. John's School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, MN, has been valuable. Pictured here are participants taking part in the program.

## WHAT IS BEHIND THE 25 IDEAS? SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Everyone invested

Vocation ministry thrives when done in community. The "it takes a village" principle applies to nurturing new membership, just as it does to raising a child. A religious community does best when it is engaged—from leadership who invest the community's time, talent and treasure to vocations—to shut ins whose prayers and cards to vocation prospects provide spiritual depth and a personal touch. Vocation directors are leading a symphony, not playing a solo.

### Collaboration

Many people reported ideas that they carried out in concert with

others. Regional groups of vocation ministers can pull together events that are much broader and richer for young people than would be the case if only one community were involved. Maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with other religious communities and with the diocesan vocation office can give energy and support to your efforts.

### Use resources

VISION vocation guide and "Keys to the Future" are just two of the resources from National Religious Vocation Conference that were mentioned as ideas that worked. Membership in NRVC provides a wealth of resources and personal

connections that can make all the difference in new membership.

### Relationships, always relationships

When he was running for president the first time, Bill Clinton's campaign office had a homemade poster keeping everyone on task: "The economy, stupid." For religious, a similar poster might read: "Relationships, brother." (Or sister.) That point is obvious in idea after idea in our list of 25. What works is building relationships with people, whether it is through service programs, online outreach, retreats, car rides, selfie-sessions, or a conversation in a coffee shop.

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

15) GRADE SCHOOL VOCATION DAY Parents welcomed us to one particular parish, asked us what we did prior to entering religious life, took us to the classrooms, and had us engage in questions with the students. We did presentations, had lunch and then played a game called "match the religious." There was music and excitement in the gym. A student was picked out of the crowd and was given cards with occupations that the religious had named. The student put the occupation-card under our chairs. Then we agreed or disagreed with the match. We had fun and the students had fun.

*Sister Joanne Marie Schutz, SSCM*

16) CONNECTING WITH EDUCATION Visiting our religious education programs is especially rewarding. I do the same things as in Catholic schools, but in most cases these children do not have contact with religious sisters. For me this presence is very important. I also find that having visited the Catholic schools in our diocese over the past few years has given me a little recognition. I experience this at larger diocesan events when young people run up and give me a big hug. This is also true when I visit schools. They remember. My hope is that the

seeds planted are growing and maturing, ever so slowly. When we have a vocation Mass in the school, I play, and I get to work with students who lead the singing. That's special for them, too. *Sister Mary Gregory Munger, SSJ*

17) DRIVING TO A RETREAT I invited some young women to a "Search Retreat" weekend and ended up driving a whole group down. Thanks to our conversations and our extended time together, I got to know these young people. I then continued follow up with two of the women, both of whom entered our community and are now in leadership.

*Sister Anne Germaine Picard, SMP*

18) KEYS TO THE FUTURE I am a new vocation minister, and I feel the "Keys to the Future" process [available from NRVC], which I led throughout our province, has given new energy and vitality to our vocation efforts.

*Sister Anita Quigley, SHCJ*

19) BONDING OVER FARMWORK I went on an immersion experience with college students. I joined the students from Misericordia University in Dallas, PA during their fall and spring service trips. We went to Mercy Farm in Benson, VT and spent a week working on the farm: cleaning the goat stalls, planting seeds or harvesting crops (depending on the season), and clearing a path for people to be able to go on walks during retreats.

- The students shared cooking responsibilities, using food from the farm or nearby.
- Each morning we would meet as a group to set out the tasks of the day and explain why we were doing them.
- Each evening we would reflect on our work and discuss their ecological context. Students would be led in a theological reflection, even though we didn't call it that. We would also situate their efforts in the context of Care of the Earth, a critical concern of the Sisters of Mercy.

This program is successful because students who go to one of our colleges and know about the Mercy charism are immersed in our ministry and our critical concerns for a week. They are in a relaxed setting and really open to integrating that charism in their lives. This is helpful, too, because it establishes a relationship with the sisters (three of us are present for the experience). It is all about planting seeds!

*Sister Regina Ward, RSM*



20) **SELFIES** One day, following reflection time with a group of volunteers, I really stepped out of myself. Two students came running over to another sister and me and said, “Let’s take selfies!!” “Do what?” I responded. And she repeated, “Selfies. Let me have your iPad.” At that she reversed the camera, held it up, told me to smile, CLICK. Told me to make wide eyes, CLICK. Crunchy nose, CLICK, and this went on for 15 minutes. We laughed ourselves crazy and a crowd grew. That really broke the ice. Later, these same girls came to me during the week with questions about religious life.

*Sister Regina Marie Frommuller, OSU*

21) **MULTI-COMMUNITY “DISCERNMENT DAY”** One of the best collaborative efforts I’ve been part of was a day of discernment for women held in Milwaukee. It included: SSND, SDS, CSA, SSJ, TOSE, SSSE, and SSM.

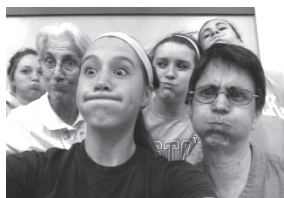
The day was entitled “Threads: Exploring Your Journey of Call.” Vocation directors spoke on: What is a Vocation? What is Religious Life and Discernment? Two newer members in religious life shared their personal stories of discernment. Each participant was given a beautiful reflection booklet to use during the day and then take with her. We also had an Emmaus walk, and an art activity. The day ended with a period of questions and answers and a closing prayer.

*Sister Mary Lee Grady, SDS*

22) **WEEKEND SERVICE RETREAT** A number of things have worked well. One in particular is offering a Weekend Service Retreat. This experience allows us to be where young people are—wanting to serve. We introduce them to service sites

of ours or connected with SSJ’s, and we reflect through a SSJ lens coupled with the Church’s teaching on the Catholic Social Teaching. It fits into busy teens’ and college students’ lives and gives them a taste for service with reflection; leaving them wanting for more!

*Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ*



Bonding over “selfies” are Sisters Regina Frommuller, OSU (far left) and Sister Jean Hopman, OSU (right).



An Archdiocese of Los Angeles vocation outreach brings together high school students and a priest.

23) **ONLINE DISCUSSIONS / SISTER COMPANIONS** The best thing I’ve ever done as a vocation minister is a toss-up. It’s either starting an online discerners book discussion group, or it’s having sisters companion women in discernment.

*Sister Patricia Dowling, CBS*

24) **7-11 MINISTRY DAY** One of the best programs I’ve been involved in was the “7-11 Ministry Day” held in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Young adults could choose a ministry and a religious order (if they wanted to specify one) to be a “sister/brother/priest for a day.” A few hundred young adults and religious started early in the morning with meditation, next we had breakfast, and then everyone spent a day immersed in ministry with members of religious communities. We shared meals inside the convent, rectory or monastery. In the evening we had a liturgy, dinner and a talent show put on by novices, seminarians, priests and religious. The day closed with night prayer. Participants got an inside glimpse of community and ministry, as well as the peer support of a few hundred other young adults.

*Sister Kathleen Bryant, RSC*

25) **HYBRID APPROACH** One of the best things I’ve done is move the Marianite Vocation Office to a college campus. Being a “hybrid” vocation minister-campus minister has ups and downs, but there are many more positives than negatives that have come from it.

*Sister Renée Daigle, MSC* ■



Many vocation ministers travel frequently and have polished the skill of an efficiently packed suitcase. Just for fun, HORIZON asked readers what is on their “must pack” list.

# 25 most likely items in a vocation minister’s suitcase

*Each category lists items from most frequently mentioned to least.*

## HIGH TECH

1. Smartphone
2. iPad
3. GPS
4. iPod
5. Powerpoints
6. Laptop

## LOW TECH

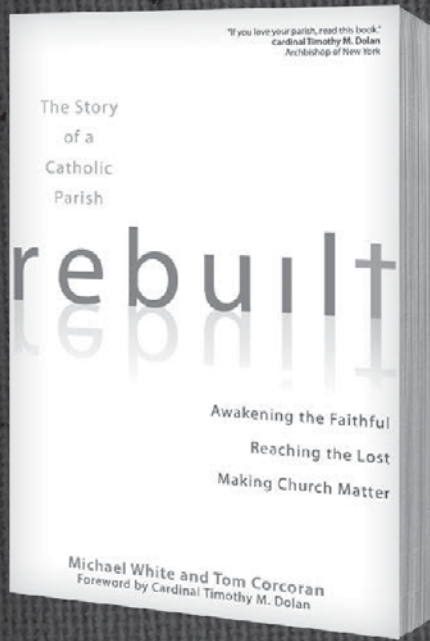
7. Business cards
8. Bookmarks
9. Prayer cards
10. Bible
11. Prayer book
12. Brochures
13. Saint medals
14. Coloring books
15. Pens
16. Pencils

17. Posters
18. Guitar
19. VISION magazines
20. Handmade book of poems

## NO TECH

21. Open heart, ready for possibilities—ready to hear the questions that are being asked
22. Attitude of confidence that God has a future full of hope for each of the young people I will be with—that they want to know what that future is, and that we can help them find the place where they can listen to the desire of God planted in their hearts
23. Sense of humor
24. Hope and belief that God continues to call men and women to religious life
25. Trust that I will respond as God would have me to the people I meet during my travels.

HAVE YOU **READ IT** YET?



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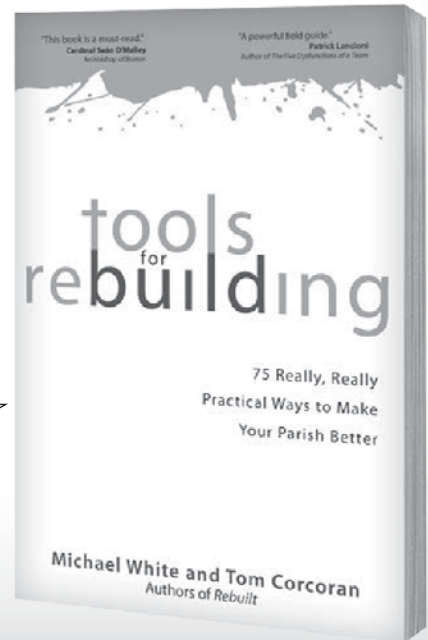
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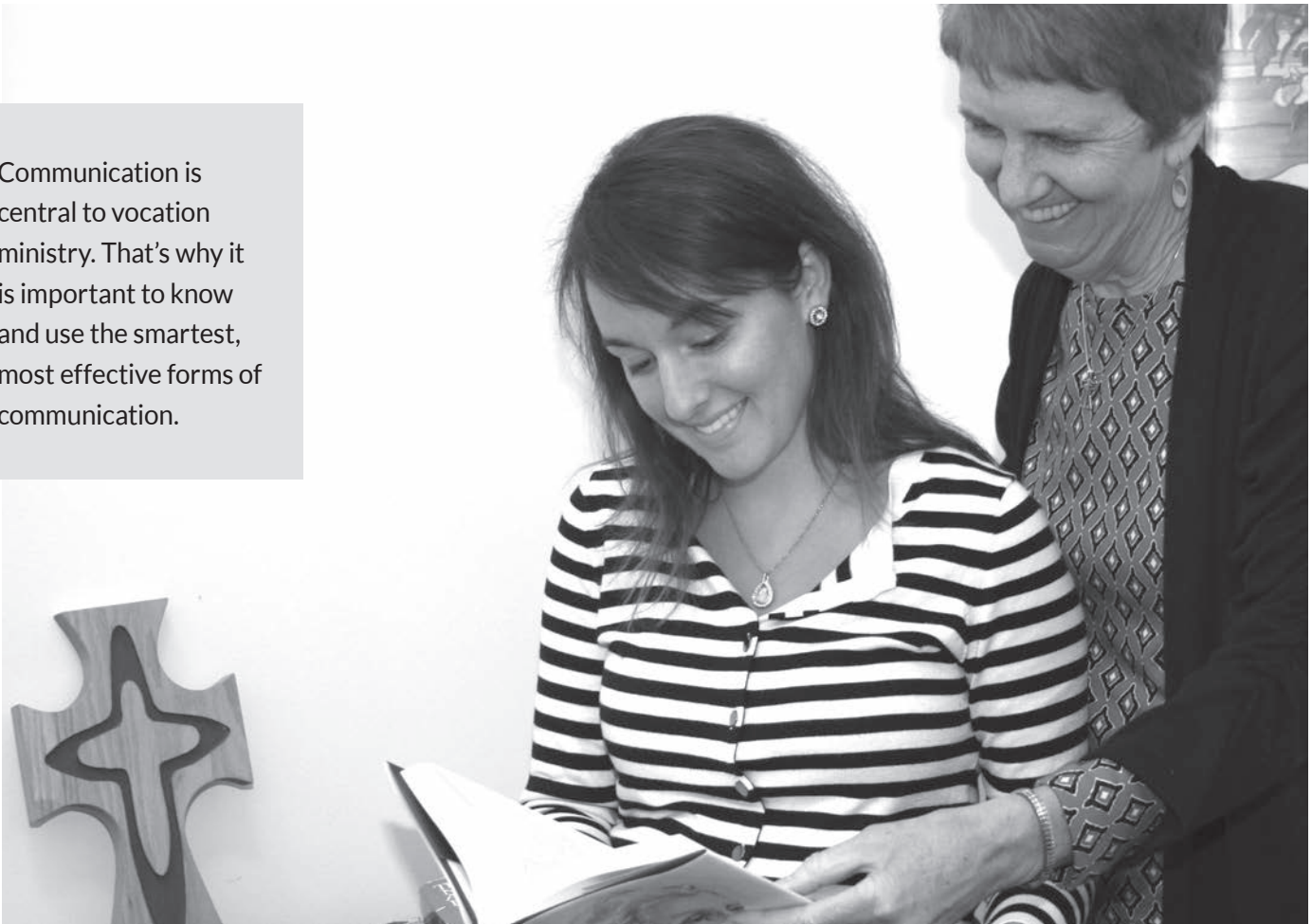
Author of *A Book of Saints for Catholic Moms*



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A Ministry of the United States Province of Holy Cross

Communication is central to vocation ministry. That's why it is important to know and use the smartest, most effective forms of communication.



Religious symbols, such as this Mercy cross, have enduring value. Vocation minister, Sister Anne Kappler, RSM, (right) of the Mid-Atlantic Community of the Sisters of Mercy, explains the book "Praying with Catherine McAuley" and the significance of the Mercy cross to Ann Nallo (left).

BY DEBBI DELLA PORTA

Debbi Della Porta serves as the director of communications for the Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Community, the largest community of Catholic sisters in the U.S. For the past five years, she has served on the board of the National Communicators Network for Women Religious (see [www.ncnwr.com](http://www.ncnwr.com)), for four years in the role of vice-president. She chairs the group's Communications Committee which also contributed to this article. Debbi has received two Best Practices awards from NCNWR. As a mother of two 20-somethings, she has first-hand knowledge about communications with young adults.



## 25 ways to communicate your vocation message

**I**N ONE OF HIS LAST PAPAL ACTS, Pope Benedict XVI urged the faithful to create a new *agora*—an open public square to “share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being” (World Communications Day 2013). He explained that “the development of social networks calls for commitment: people are engaged in building relationships and making friends, in looking for answers to their questions and being entertained, but also in finding intellectual stimulation and sharing knowledge and know-how.” Sounds a lot like vocation ministry, doesn't it?

In vocation ministry, the goal is to communicate and connect with women and men who are open to a call to religious life. Through building relationships and making friends, vocation ministers answer questions and share knowledge and know-how about religious life. In communications, the goal is a meaningful exchange of information. When vocation ministry and communications collaborate, connections to women and men discerning a call to religious life can be enhanced.

But, how do you connect communications and vocations? By working together with your congregation's communications director (if your community has one) or collaborating with a volunteer or someone in your community with communications expertise. If these resources are not available, you can form a focus group of eight to ten people in the age and demographic of your intended audience and create your own informal research network. You can ask this group questions about the techniques listed below and see which ones they think will work best with the people you are trying to reach.

These emerging communications trends and tactics—gathered from professional communicators for women religious—can help you form your own *agora*, a portal for truth and faith for those discerning a call to religious life. As you build your *agora*, consider incorporating the following practices.

1) USE RELIGIOUS ICONS AND SYMBOLS IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS Many young people (and older people) did not grow up seeing crosses in classrooms or using prayer cards. They yearn for these religious symbols of days gone by—it's a tangible piece of spirituality they can keep and hold. So as you develop relationships with people, give them a religious memento, such as a prayer card or a bookmark to keep as they consider a call to religious life.

2) BE VISUAL Don't use a lot of words or verbiage in your communications. A picture really does speak a thousand words! Your communications should be colorful and reflect the personality of your congregation, your charisma and the joy of being a sister, brother or priest. Complex ideas can be effectively conveyed in a single still image. Imagine the impact of a photo of a sister deep

How do you connect communications and vocations? By working together with your congregation's communications director (if your community has one) or collaborating with a volunteer or someone in your community with communications expertise.

in prayer, a brother lovingly on the streets with people who are poor or a priest soulfully celebrating a liturgy.

3) PROVIDE SPIRITUAL RESOURCES People are yearning for a spiritual connection to the church. Invite them to Sunday liturgy. Give them a copy of your community's prayer book. Involve them in a local prayer service, or invite them to be part of a small faith community with other sisters, brothers and priests where you discuss the meaning of

your Catholic faith.

4) DO RESEARCH Effective communications is based on research. You need to know and respect your audiences and their preferred means of communications. You need to know who your audience is, what their interests, needs and best ways to communicate are, where they go for information, when is the best time for communications and why they might be interested in your message. You can use free electronic survey tools such as Google docs, Survey Monkey or Zoomerang or conduct small group meetings with members of your target audience to discover this information.

5) USE TEXTING Sending a text on a cell phone is one of the best ways to keep in touch with young adults—it is often their preferred (and sometimes only effective) mode of communication. It is one of the quickest, easiest ways to stay in touch—that's why people like it so much! Texting might take practice and patience. Consider it an occupational challenge; however if you can type, you can text.

6) HAVE A STRONG ON-LINE PRESENCE What is the first thing you do when you need information on a topic? Google it! People searching for meaning in their life or researching potential congregations do the same. Make sure you have an updated website and Facebook page. Check out other web pages where you might possibly be able to add a link to your congregation—such as the local diocesan website, NRVC's VocationNetwork.org and VocationMatch.com, Wikipedia and LinkedIn.

7) ASK YOUR FAVORITE COLLEGE STUDENT TO HELP SET UP A FACEBOOK PAGE. Most college students can help you develop a Facebook presence, which

## COMMUNICATION AFFECTS VOCATION

Use of new media is a documented best practice for vocation ministry. NRVC's study of new vocations, published in 2009, revealed that religious communities that have invested in a strategic use of media to present an honest, authentic view of the community are more likely to have new members than communities that do not. Learn what the other nine best practices for vocation ministry are at [www.nrvc.net/best\\_practices](http://www.nrvc.net/best_practices).

is a great place to connect with others. It's a virtual community and an effective way to promote community life. But, before you start, make sure you have people who can maintain it. It's better to have no site than a site with outdated information or no recent posts.

8) LEARN ABOUT HASHTAGS Hashtags are becoming commonplace among all social media platforms. Hashtags are a way to identify a conversation you would like to be a part of or read more about. For example, if I were a vocation minister and wanted to learn about conversations that are trending or to engage in a discussion related to vocations, I might search for the following: #vocation or #answerthecall.

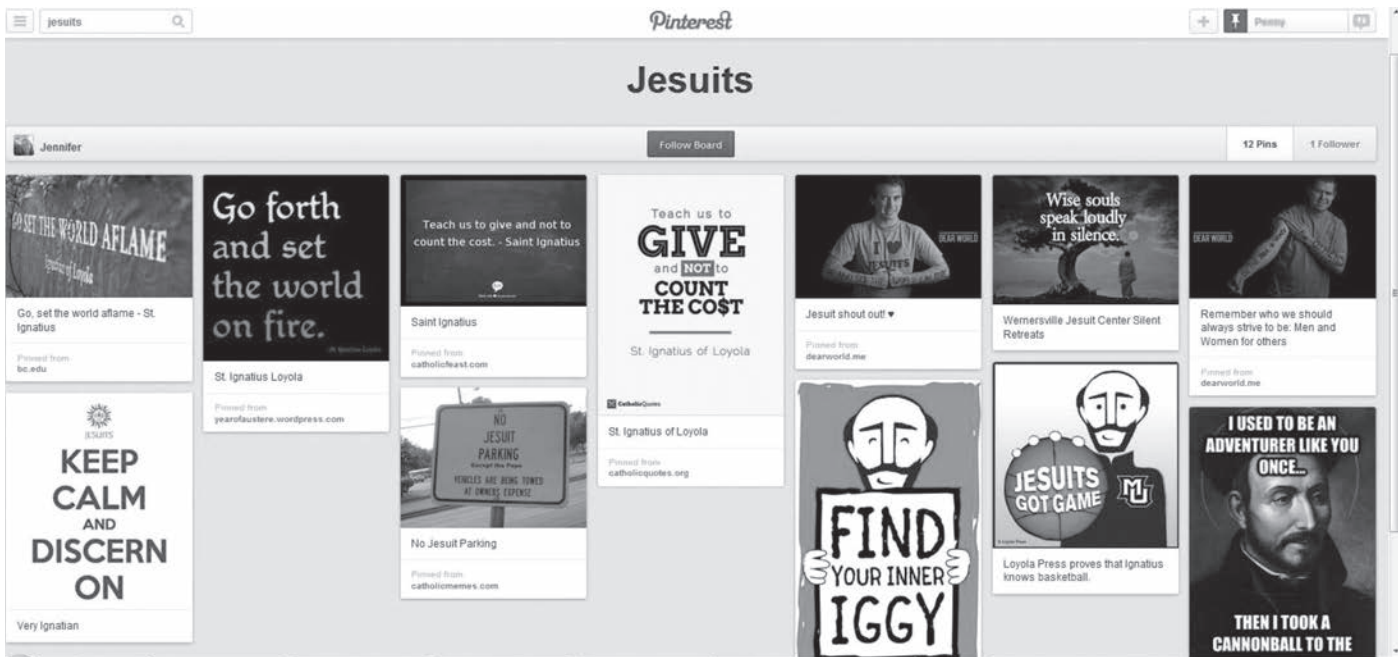
9) SPEAK AND WRITE IN SOUND BYTES AND HEADLINES Read the national newspaper, *USA Today*. Its stories are short and to the point. Keep your con-

versations that way, too, whenever you can. Remember diagramming a sentence in grammar school—subject, object, verb? Try to speak and write in basic terms with strong, simple messages. (You'll have time to explain complexities and subtleties later.)

10) TAKE SHORT VIDEOS OF YOUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN ACTION OR PRAYER Congregations are increasingly using video clips (two minutes maximum) to tell short stories about their mission, ministry and prayer life. Videos make an impact and can inspire people to action. Posting a video online or showing it in a face-to-face meeting increases engagement and interest. You can start a YouTube channel to post your videos or use your existing website or Facebook page.

11) CREATE A BLOG Vocation blogs can be a great tool in connecting with those who might be called to religious life. They should be updated regularly (at least twice a week) with new content to attract followers and be successful. You can start a free blog at [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com) or [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com). Usually you can link it on your existing webpage. Just make sure you can maintain the commitment before you begin. Some vocation ministers do this by recruiting writers from their community.

12) REVISE YOUR WEBSITE Keep it current. Websites have life cycles and need care and cultivation. If you never change it, people will never revisit it. (Do you



A search for "Jesuit" on Pinterest brought up these images.



At a conference session focused on communications techniques to heighten awareness of women religious are Sister Joanne Gallagher, CSJ (left); Sister Madeleine Miller, OSB (center) and Teri Bockstahler (right) They attended the 2011 annual conference of the National Communicators Network for Women Religious (ncnwr.org), open to anyone committed to awareness of Catholic sisters.

go back and read the same newspaper over and over?) Sometimes websites need face lifts, and they always need fresh content.

13) SEND STORIES TO YOUR LOCAL MEDIA Nothing beats good publicity to build support for your community. Share story ideas and updates on what you are doing with your communicator or local reporters so that your congregation's great work can be featured in the news. Don't forget about local cable television stations and radio stations, too, to spread the word!

14) NETWORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE Form a "think tank" or reflection group of young adult men or women. Ask them how to connect with others their age who are interested in spirituality and service. Talk about the passion and mission of your congregation.

15) JOIN LINKEDIN LinkedIn is sometimes referred to as a more formal Facebook for professionals. A unique social networking site, its purpose is to connect people in the working world. LinkedIn allows people to reconnect with classmates and co-workers, to foster career advance-

ment and to use the site as a knowledge base when looking for individuals with certain qualifications. These three specific goals make LinkedIn a more formal medium for social networking. To create a basic LinkedIn group for your congregation, visit [linkedin.com](http://linkedin.com).

16) COMBINE SPIRITUALITY AND SERVICE Many young adults are searching for spirituality and a way to put it into action. They leave college, jobs or years of service with no place to put their passion. Give them the opportunity to volunteer at one of your ministries, to pray together, to experience community life and to reflect on the experience. Young adults are often seeking community.

17) "MEET AND GREET" the public with members of your community. Provide a venue that allows potential candidates to meet a small group of members of your congregation in a casual setting, such as a breakfast after liturgy or an outing to a special event that benefits one of your ministries. These encounters help develop deeper relationships and stronger connections to your community.

18) DESIGN A WEB SITE that can be seen on all plat-

## TRENDS AFFECTING RELIGION & COMMUNICATION

- Rise of Hispanics
- Rise of “nones” (not claiming a religion)
- Rise of singles
- Emergence of cyber intelligence, robots
- Women less dependent on men than in previous centuries
- Increase in social inequality
- Less privacy
- Fewer traditional jobs
- Pope Francis’ new approach
- High profile lay support for religious life (foundations, films, grassroots show of support for sisters)
- Extended adolescence, “emerging adults”
- Increase of social fragmentation
- Rise of “Pluralists/Gen Z” (after Millennials, born near 2000)
- More working senior citizens
- Gender role blurring

—COMPILED FROM TREND REPORTS

directly from any mobile device with texting capabilities. For this reason, most tweets occur in real-time, either during or immediately following an event. You can tweet original ideas using text and links or retweet someone else’s post. The goal of Twitter is to reach as many people as possible, form connections and create interactions. To start using Twitter simply go to [twitter.com](http://twitter.com) and sign up for a free account.

21) **CONNECT BY VIDEO-CONFERENCING** When you can’t meet face-to-face, all you need is a computer, broadband Internet connection and a webcam on your computer or camera on your iPhone or other mobile device.

forms. Learn about responsive web design, a way of crafting websites so that the pages (images, text) adjust to fit the viewing device (desktop computer, tablet, mobile phone) of potential candidates.

19) **USE PINTEREST** Pinterest.com is an electronic bulletin board where you can post your favorite photos or images. Basically, it is an electronic space where you can post graphics that evoke in the viewer a certain feeling or mood. Vocation ministers can post images that evoke prayer, service and community.

20) **TWEET THE BIG STUFF** Twitter is the modern form of the telegram. When you tweet or post a message, you are only allowed to post text 140 characters at a time. You can tweet

Video conferencing helps to bridge the miles between people by replacing a telephone call with a video call in which you can see each other. Free videoconferencing software such as GooglePlus, Skype and Zoom are available on the Internet.

22) **BE DIRECT** If you are inviting someone to a discerning weekend, be clear about the purpose of the event. Know the why of your communications as well as the how. Our human nature wants to be subtle and indirect, but clarity can eliminate confusion.

23) **ADD INTERESTED PEOPLE TO YOUR E-MAILING LIST** Give candidates a chance to learn more about your congregation through the written word. Ask them if they want to receive your community’s e-newsletters or e-mail blasts. Invite them to your special events, anniversaries and jubilee celebrations.

24) **MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS** Effective communications measures whether or not strategies work. Great electronic evaluation tools such as SurveyMonkey are available online for free. It is another way to connect and communicate with young people by asking their feedback on a meeting, retreat or prayer service.

25) **MEET FACE-TO-FACE** At the end of the day, all the technology and social media in the world will never replace the face-to-face, personal relationships you build with a potential candidate. Few ministers need reminding to leave their computers behind, put their smartphones and iPads away and be fully present to those who are drawn to their community.

### *Bonus Best Practice*

25+) **FOLLOW POPE FRANCIS** Pope Francis incorporates many of the emerging trends listed above in the ways he shares the Gospel message. The pontiff uses religious icons, is visual, has a strong online presence and speaks simply. The informal, direct style of communication found in his daily homilies, tweets and vivid metaphors appeal to the masses and convey very powerful messages. His straightforward, open communication style invites participation. Follow his example on his Twitter page @pontifex. (He has nine different Twitter accounts, each in a different language, with over seven million followers.) Visit his Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/PopeFranciscus](http://www.facebook.com/PopeFranciscus); or read his quotes on the Pinterest page at <http://pinterest.com/goodnewsmin/pope-francis-quotes/>. ■



# # What can a hashtag do for you?

**I**F YOU'RE A SOCIAL MEDIA NOVICE, hashtags—those short links preceded by the pound sign (#)—may seem confusing and unnecessary. But they are integral to the way we communicate online, and it's important to know how to use them. Plus, they can be a lot of fun.

On Twitter, the pound sign (or hash) turns any word or group of words that directly follow it into a searchable link. This allows you to organize content and track discussion topics based on those keywords. So, if you wanted to post about the Breaking Bad finale, you would include #BreakingBad in your tweet to join the conversation. Click on a hashtag to see all the posts that mention the subject in real time.

The hashtag's widespread use began with Twitter but has extended to other social media platforms. In 2007, developer Chris Messina proposed, in a tweet, that Twitter begin grouping topics using the hash symbol. Twitter initially rejected the idea. But in October 2007, citizen journalists began using the hashtag #SanDiegoFire, at Messina's suggestion, to tweet updates on a series of forest fires in San Diego. The practice of hashtagging took off; now users and brands employ hashtags to cover serious political events (#Cairo) and entertainment topics (#MileyCyrus) alike.

With the following beginner's guide, you'll be hashtagging like a pro in no time.

## SUPPORTED CHARACTERS

Which characters can you include in a #hashtag? For starters, spaces are an absolute no-no. Even if your hashtag contains multiple words, group them all together. If you want to differentiate between words, use capitals instead (#BlueJasmine). Uppercase letters will not alter your search results, so searching for #BlueJasmine will yield the same results as #bluejasmine.

Numbers are supported. [Vocation directors could, for instance, tweet about vocations101 or 5WaysToDiscern.] However, punctuation marks are not, so commas, periods, exclamation points, question marks and apostrophes are out. Forget about asterisks, ampersands or any other special characters.

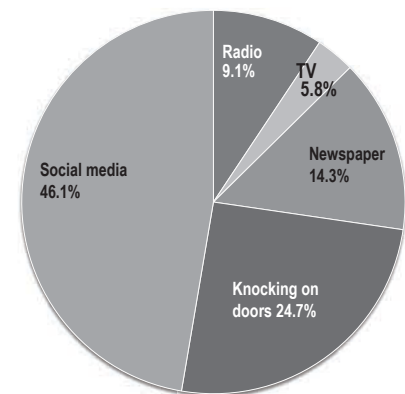
Keep in mind that the @ symbol does something completely different. Using @ before a person's Twitter handle will tweet at him directly, letting him know you have written to him via the @Connect tab. A hashtag will not. Sometimes users will hashtag a celebrity's name instead of using her Twitter handle—it is acceptable to tweet #Lorde or @lordemusic. But if you are trying to reach someone directly, don't use a hashtag.

There is no preset list of hashtags. Create a brand new hashtag simply

BY REBECCA HISCOTT

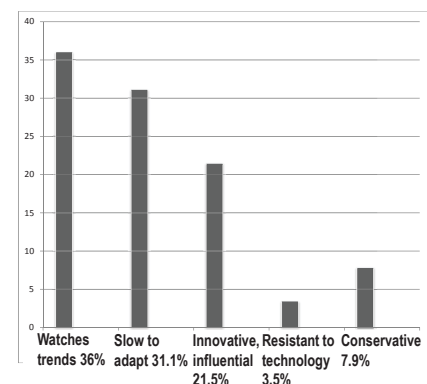
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## What churches state as their most effective method of outreach



BUZZPLANT SURVEY 2012

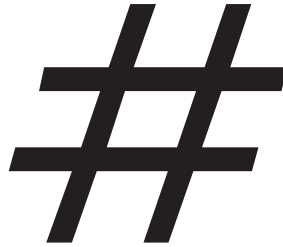
## How churches describe their involvement in adopting Internet and technology



BUZZPLANT SURVEY 2012

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by putting the hash before a series of words, and if it hasn't been used before, voilà! You've invented a hashtag.



#### SUPPORTED PLATFORMS

Most major social media platforms support hashtags. These include:

##### TWITTER

Twitter is the birthplace of modern hashtag usage—as such, its hashtags are more versatile than other sites' (see “Tone & Voice,” below). Twitter hashtags are mainly used to denote specific topics of conversation; the “Trends” sidebar of your Twitter feed curates a list of hashtags you might be interested in, based on your tweets.

When you search for a hashtag on Twitter, there are three ways to filter the results. The “Top” option displays the most relevant and popular posts, including those from users you don't follow. “All” shows you every tweet that uses the specific hashtag in real time, and “People you follow” will only display results from users you are following.

##### FACEBOOK

Facebook only recently added hashtag support in June 2013, and the practice has not picked up much steam. Nevertheless, clicking on Facebook hashtags will take you to a list of posts containing the same hashtag. Unlike Twitter, you will only see posts by users you know.

##### INSTAGRAM

Hashtags can be used to complement photos shared on Instagram and help you discover new accounts and pick up followers. Some hashtags were created specifically for Instagram photo challenges —#ThrowbackThursday, for example, encourages users to post retro photos.

##### VINE

Vine uses hashtags in the same way — try accompanying each of your Vine videos with at least one hashtag to maximize shareability.

##### GOOGLE+

When you click on a hashtag in Google+, the search results will include the original hashtag as well as posts with similar tags and keywords.

Google search results display on the left side of the

page, while hashtag results from within Google+ appear on the right. Google also gives you the option to search within Facebook or Twitter.

##### TUMBLR

Tumblr posts have a special “Tag” section where you can enter tags. These tags func-

tion like Twitter hashtags, organizing posts by topic, but the hash symbol is inserted automatically. Hashtags included in the main body of a post are not transformed into links.

##### PINTEREST

Use Pinterest hashtags to mark and search for content. Click on the hashtag in a pin description to navigate results that contain the exact hashtag, plus pins with the same word or phrase in the description.

Curious which hashtags are trending across social media? Hashtags.org tells you which tags are hot in real time.

##### TONE AND VOICE

Beyond simply organizing your tweets, Twitter hashtags can help you craft your voice while joining in a larger discussion. You can use multiple hashtags in one tweet, but don't go overboard. One to three is generally an acceptable range.

In a post for *The New Yorker*, Susan Orlean points out that hashtags can provide colorful commentary as a sort of “muttered into a handkerchief” aside, to give context and to convey humor or sarcasm.

Sometimes a hashtag is so zany or specific that there are few, if any, search results attached to it. These exist mainly for entertainment purposes. Orlean gives the example “Sarah Palin for President??!? #Iwouldratherhaveamoose.” As she points out, it is unlikely anyone would actually search for “#Iwouldratherhaveamoose,” but it adds a dash of humor that followers appreciate.

##### SITES FOR LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

churchandnewmedia.com  
catholictechtalk.com  
gcflearnfree.org  
mashable.com ■



Right now religious life is in “crunch time.” Looking ahead, the future isn’t about anxiety. It’s about a clear-eyed embrace of God’s abundance and creativity.

Religious in their 20s and 30s—such as Brother Patrick Winbush, OSB of the Benedictine Abbey of Newark, NJ—are usually a small age minority within their communities. That reality has many implications for both young religious and vocation directors today.

## A loving gaze at religious life realities

**C**ONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LIFE, as it is lived out in North America, is in the midst of a dramatic demographic shift. Within the next two decades, the large groups of religious currently aged 70 and older will pass on to the next phase of their religious life with their Creator. Meanwhile, there is not another large generation waiting in the wings to replace them. This undeniable reality leads to many questions about the future of religious life.

Whether one views this reality as the proverbial elephant in the community room or as the writing on the wall, the time has come when we can no longer avoid talking about it, as if that was ever truly possible. The crucial question of this moment is how to engage this reality. Do we look askance at it from a place of anxiety? Or can we gaze lovingly at this shift and see God’s promise of abundance, even there? The lens we choose nec-

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Age Distribution of U.S. Religious December 31, 2012 – Data from National Religious Retirement Office		
AGE GROUP	NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN	PERCENT OF TOTAL RELIGIOUS
Under 40	1,797	3.5
40-50	1,716	3.4
50-60	3,217	6.3
60-70	9,942	19.5
70+	34,243	67.3

essarily influences our capacity to navigate the shifts for the sake of the Gospel and the mission of Jesus. (Note: I have borrowed the term “navigating the shifts” from the Presidential Address of Sister Pat Farrell, OSF to the 2012 LCWR Assembly (<https://lcsr.org/media/news/navigating-shifts-presidential-address-pat-farrell-osf>).

## Religious life by the numbers

First, however, we must take an honest look at the numbers. In 2013, there are 68,004 Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests in the United States. This number has been steadily declining for the past five decades, from 214,932 in 1965, to 145,195 in 1985 and 88,222 in 2005. Diminishment holds true across all three groups of religious, but it is most dramatic in the number of sisters, which has decreased from 179,954 in 1965 to 51,247 today (CARA, Frequently Requested Statistics).

The National Religious Retirement Office offers another perspective on the numbers which is particularly relevant to this discussion—a generational breakdown. The latest NRRO statistical report looks at the ages of 50,915 religious men and women in 548 institutes. Their analysis often employs the age of 70 as the line of demarcation: 67.3 percent of religious today are over 70, while 32.7 percent are under 70. Our reality is thrown into even starker relief, however, when one inserts additional lines of demarcation for those under 70 (see chart).

## Pondering the future

The colloquial phrase that comes to mind when I look at this chart is: “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet.” The steady decline of the past 50 years will transform into a rapid change in the generations that make up religious life. Keep in mind that those under 60, according to the NRRO report, make up just 13.2 percent of religious men and women today—a grand total of 6,730 people across 518 congregations. The next group in their 60s is more substantial, just shy of 20 percent of today’s re-

ligious. Some in their 60s already find themselves “at bat,” being called to community and leadership roles. Others are “on deck,” poised to discern a potential shift from ministries to which they have been long committed to community-based ministry. Given the rapidity of change, the under 60s will not be too far behind them in this reality.

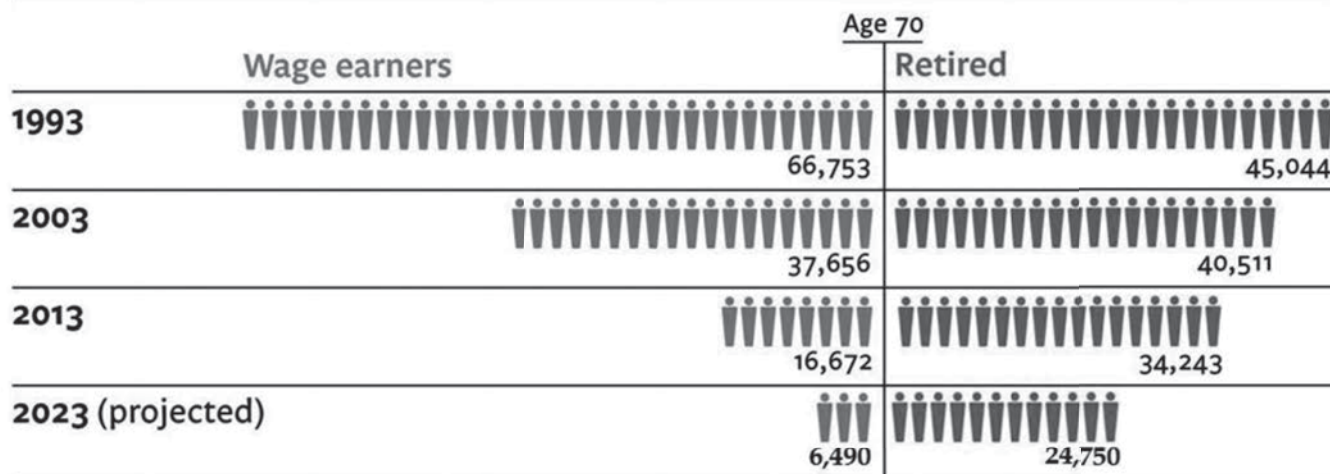
This small group—along with lay associates, partners in ministry and new vocations—will be the ones to carry the charisms and visions of our founders into the future. It is important to realize that this is a very mixed group with three generations—Boomers, Gen X and Millennials. Society and culture have been rapidly changing in the past sixty years. As a result, these three generations have been formed by distinct cultural experiences. Depending on when they entered community, there is also a wide variation in their experience of formation and religious life. This small diverse group will be called to mingle these varied experiences as they live out their vows together in a rapidly changing context.

Ultimately, of course, we have no idea what the future will look like, which is enough to make anyone just a little bit anxious. When I ponder the future, however,



New members of religious communities will, by necessity, need to take on leadership roles rapidly. Pictured here is Sister Nicole Trahan, FMI, reflecting on the daily Scripture readings during a Giving Voice gathering. Sister Nicole is the national vocation director for the Marianist Sisters.

## Membership Status, NRRO Participating Religious Institutes



Each symbol represents 2,000 religious.

**By 2023, the ratio of wage-earning to retired religious is projected to be 1:4.**

Sources: Statistics for reporting years 1993, 2003, and 2013 based on data submitted to the National Religious Retirement Office by participating religious institutes; 2023 projections based on William M. Mercer Mortality Tables for Religious.

I am often comforted by the memory of an experience I had in the novitiate with one of our wise elders, Sister Mary Byrnes, CSJP. When I arrived in the infirmary to interview Sister Mary for a novitiate assignment about her experience of renewal after the Second Vatican Council, she was ready and waiting. “I’ve been up all night,” she said, “thinking about what I want to tell you.” She then proceeded to capture my undivided attention for the next two hours. Towards the end, she told me how much she admired those of us entering today. She thought we were courageous because we have no idea what it is we are signing up for. This stopped me in my tracks. “When you entered,” I asked her, “did you have any idea you’d do all those things you just told me about?”

She had to admit that the answer was no and that we had more in common than she had realized. The key difference in our experiences is that while Sister Mary did not know when she entered in 1950 that major changes were just around the corner, I’ve known all along that we don’t know what lies ahead. Those who have lived religious life since the Second Vatican Council share in the common experience of flux and the unknown.

Pondering the future of religious life is part and parcel of contemporary vocation discernment. From that first crazy step of contacting a vocation director to my discernment retreat for final vows, it’s been a major

hurdle to jump over. You can’t really ignore questions about the future or walk around them, but need to take a deep breath and jump. On reflection, I realize this is not a new experience. Our founders and pioneer community members certainly found it necessary to jump multiple hurdles in their day.

It has helped me tremendously to have a group of religious life age peers with whom I can ponder the future and jump the hurdles. Since my novitiate days, I have been part of Giving Voice, a grassroots network of women religious under 50. My Giving Voice friends bring their own insights and perspectives to the shifting landscape that lies before us. We pray and reflect on these realities and dream together about the future at retreats and conferences sponsored by Giving Voice. Increasingly, we also engage in meaningful conversations online.

### Dealing with the demographics

In fact, I recently had a very enlightening online conversation on changing demographics via the Giving Voice private Facebook Group. We were discussing what has come to be known in our circle as the “Blue People/ Green People” chart. You may know the one. It is in the NRRO Statistical report and graphically tells the story of the shifts in wage earners in religious congregations. The



Christin Tomy; Jessica Taylor, SP; Hong Nga Nguyen, SP; and Alison Green, SSMO take a break at the 2013 Giving Voice National Gathering.

numbers of religious under 70 (wage earners or “green people”) and over 70 (retired or “blue people”) were relatively equal when I began my own discernment journey in 2003. By 2023, the ratio of wage earners to retired religious is projected to be 1:4. That is one wage earner to every four retired religious (see chart). Just reading those words or looking at the chart might be enough to make one anxious!

What struck me most, however, about our online conversation was that, as “green people,” we weren’t particularly anxious or surprised. We know that the religious life we entered will not be the religious life we will live in coming decades. Most of us expressed deep gratitude that our communities are doing the work now to make sure that we will have enough resources to care for the large numbers of retired “blue people.” Some of us expressed concern about how to ensure that the “green people” are not tied down by administrative or care-taking duties in the future, but are able to go about the mission of Jesus.

For the most part however, there was great excitement and energy, particularly when the conversation turned to implications for leadership. We recognize that given this demographic reality, the traditional path of mentoring and gradually assuming increased responsibility, leading to credentials for leadership, won’t work for us. For one thing, we don’t have time as we enter this period of rapid demographic change. Perhaps more importantly, we realize that we need new models and paradigms for leadership. We already experience leader-

ship in our lives and networks such as Giving Voice more as self-organization, and we anticipate carrying that over into future leadership roles in our religious communities. We are also inherently connected—across congregations and to the wider world. Social media, technology, globalization and intercongregational collaboration are just a few of the trends and experiences that will shape our style of leadership into the future.

## Glimpsing possibility

To be honest, my simplest advice to vocation directors would be to reach out to young men and women who are filled with excitement about the future, capacity for leadership and creativity. This seems to be who is being called by God to religious life these days any way. In my circle of younger women and men religious friends, I know doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, community organizers, campus ministers, law enforcement officers, scientists, artists, writers, chaplains, government officials and theologians, just to name a few. Keep in mind, these are work and ministry experiences they bring to religious life. Even the younger religious I know who entered shortly after college bring a depth of knowledge and experience. Many of them participated in life-changing volunteer or mission programs, such as Jesuit Volunteer Corps or Peace Corps, that set them on fire for mission.

There is also a great deal more diversity present in this group than has been part of American religious life to date. For example, CARA reports that the group of brothers and sisters who professed perpetual vows in 2011—my year of final profession—was “more diverse than other perpetually professed religious in terms of their racial and ethnic diversity.” Sixty-five percent identified as white, 19 percent Asian and 9 percent Hispanic. 30 percent were born outside of the United States. (CARA, *New Sisters and Brothers*, 2) This is just a taste of the diverse cultures and backgrounds that are coming together in religious life for the sake of the Gospel.

## God’s resources

My thoughts about anxiety and abundance have been deeply informed by the writings of Walter Brueggemann. When we put on the lens of anxiety, we have a tendency to try to become self-sufficient and fool ourselves that we are in control as we attempt to plan our way through chaos. “But the downside of such theological autonomy is that without the restraint of God, one is also without the resource of God” (Brueggemann). Our anxiety can

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blind us to the gifts of abundance in our midst. We know, of course, that scripture is filled with examples of groups of people who faced impossible situations and yet were gifted with abundance. “Biblical faith, having vetoed autonomy, is an invitation away from anxiety to the abundance of God. The God of the gospel is the God who keeps giving” (Brueggemann).

Sometimes of course, the gift may not be packaged exactly as we expect it. I spent part of my summer vacation this year visiting our retired sisters at our regional center in Bellevue, Washington. The two sisters who normally act as sacristan were both having surgery, and so I agreed to help out, even though it was not a role I had ever filled before. As you might imagine, I spent a lot of time in the chapel as a result, arriving early, setting up, etc... One day, praying before Mass, I remembered an experience I had praying in that same chapel as an inquirer, during one of my hurdle-jumping moments. At the time I was struggling with my feelings of being so at home with the community yet unsure if I could handle the large age gap and the unknown future. I remembered looking out the chapel windows at Lake Washington, my head filled with these thoughts, when I felt a sudden deep peace. It was as if God had a hand on my shoulder and told me everything would be OK. I would have ten to fifteen great years with these women, and then things would start to get messy, but all would be well.

Flash forward 10 years or so. I have indeed had a great time in community with a wonderful group of faithful women of peace, but we have reached the messy period. I have been to more funerals than I can count. I’ve lost dear friends. It has not been easy. Then, sitting in that same chapel, I had a moment of clarity and solidarity with Jeremiah. “You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped.” (Jeremiah 20:7). I imagined God smiling at me as I finally figured it out. You see, it dawned on me that I am part of the equation—along with those who entered with and after me—for how all will be well as we navigate through and beyond this messy period. My experience as substitute sacristan was just a glimpse of the adventure that lies ahead.

## Giving voice to abundance

The journey with God is often filled with surprises, especially when we choose to look through the lens of abundance. Just one week before my vacation/sacristan experience, I was in a space where it is very easy to see abundance—the Giving Voice National Gathering in Belmont, California. I wish that anyone who is anxious

about the future of religious life could have shared that experience. Seventy women religious in their 20s, 30s and 40s from 33 different congregations engaged in four days of prayer and conversation around “Mission and Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” I’d like to share two reflections by Giving Voice sisters that have further informed my understanding of abundance and where it might be leading us.

Sister Nicole Trahan, FMI reflected on the story of the sending of the 72. She noted that it is significant that it is only found in Luke’s Gospel, “the Gospel of the anawim—the Gospel written for the poor, marginalized, the forgotten and neglected.” She named the call as one to “be the anawim—a call to vulnerability—to poverty.” Then she raised the question that I have been sitting with ever since. “[W]e have to ask ourselves whether or not our measures of security or our conceptual structures keep us from responding to the real, concrete needs of our world in the way we are called and in the way our Foundresses and Founders would have hoped” (Trahan, 1).

Perhaps there is indeed a gift of abundance bundled in diminishment. As we are called to a smaller, leaner and less institutionally-tied future, might we also be gifted with an abundance of energy, resources and on-the-ground connections for mission and ministry? One implication of the “Blue People/Green People” chart that I have often reflected on is the potential reality in 2033, when I will be 61. By that point, I suspect, the ratio between wage earners and retired will have shifted again, with a greater percentage of religious in active ministry and a small number of retired religious. What will be the gifts and challenges of that new landscape, when the majority of religious are once again engaged in active ministry with the wider community? I am excited about the creative possibilities of this potential reality.

A phrase gifted to the Giving Voice conference by our speaker, Sister Yolanda Tarango, CCVI, became a sort of mantra at this year’s gathering—“charism happens.” Sister Anna Keim, SNJM built upon this theme in her witness talk. She spoke of charism as energy, noting that “we should allow that energy to flow freely.” She pointed to the need to “let go” of old structures as “part of that free flow of energy, a firing and melting of all that which no longer serves us.” She also pointed to the combining of our energies through collaboration across congregations as another way the energy might flow freely. “Maybe it is through collaboration that we can finally rid ourselves of hierarchical models and mind sets and demonstrate new models of leadership for our church

and for our world” (Keim).

## Flow of blessings

Keim’s words remind me of the “Cycle of Blessings” model proposed by Eric H.F. Law (see image). He names six interrelated currencies as essential for ministries to be both “sustainable and missional.” While he writes for a different audience—mostly Protestant churches—his ideas are easily transferable to our context. The mission of Jesus is central to our call to religious life, and our anxiety around the changing demographics is at its core, a concern about how sustainable this way of life will be for future generations.

Law offers a potential way of proceeding, through developing and nurturing the currencies in the Cycle of Blessings. He names these currencies as time and place, gracious leadership, relationship, truth, wellness and money. They are dynamic and interrelated, “flowing inward to renew and strengthen internal relationships and increase gracious leadership capacity, and flowing outward to connect, discern the truth, and foster wellness in the wider community.” Law notes that it is essential to learn how to “develop, access, and ‘flow’ these currencies” if a church or community is to be sustainable and focused on mission (Law, 13).

How might this apply to religious life? Your community might devote adequate resources—money, time and leadership—to vocation ministry, enabling you to be in a place where you can engage with young people burning with creativity, passion and capacity for leadership. Your community might choose to live more intentionally so as to become a place into which blessings flow and out of which blessings come. You might expend energy on renewing relationships within your community, the strength of which will then flow outwards. You might flow resources inward to ensure that your elder members are adequately cared for, thereby freeing more active members to flow wellness, truth and relationship outwards to the wider community through ministry. You might foster gracious leadership in younger and newer members and be open to the experiences and new styles of leadership they bring. The dynamic possibilities that flow from this model for the future of religious life are endless.

Currencies and abundant gifts also flow to religious life. Each of our congregations hold cherished memories in our histories of generous benefactors and fortuitous



ERIC LAW, HOLY CURRENCIES

invitations that increased our capacity and called us to ministry in surprising places. Such relationships are not only in our past, however, as evidenced by the men and women who join us as lay associates and partners in ministry. At this crucial moment in religious life, God’s gift of abundance can also be seen in the influx of millions of dollars by lay-run foundations, such as Lily Foundation, GHR Foundation and the Conrad Hilton Foundation, into programs to strengthen and build up religious life for the future. Such moments and relationships are reminders of the Cycle of

Blessings. They also call us to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open for surprises.

When it comes down to it, the future will happen no matter what we do. We cannot stop it, but we can help shape and welcome the future. Our role is not to be anxious or to try to plan our way through chaos—although some amount of planning is necessary and important. Rather, we are called to cultivate open hearts and communities, to seek out and welcome the abundance in our midst and to listen and respond to the needs of the anawim, for the sake of the Gospel. ■

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Vocation ministry is all about reaching out, drawing in. These two acts are the heart of the Christian mission, and they began with Jesus who immersed himself in the world in order to draw people to God.

Jesus reached out time and again beyond the usual boundaries of his age, even healing the daughter of the persistent Canaanite woman, depicted here just before their conversation. ("Christ and the Canaanite woman" by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn)

## Reach out, draw in

**I**N THE SPAN OF A FEW SHORT MONTHS, Pope Francis has struck a deep cord in the hearts of Catholics and even those outside the church. His actions have been accompanied by challenging words to the leaders of the church, reminding them of their mission to reach out beyond the confines of the church to those in need. In a letter to his fellow Argentine bishops shortly after his election, the pope declared: "A church that does not go out of itself, sooner or later, sickens from the stale air of closed rooms." He went on to say that in the process of "going out" the church risks "accidents" but he added, "I prefer a thousand times over a church of accidents than a sick church." In a similar vein, in an address on July 28, 2013 to the Episcopal Conference of Latin America during his visit to Rio de Janeiro, the pope reminded them:

We do well to recall the words of the Second Vatican Council: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the

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grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #1). Here we find the basis for our dialogue with the contemporary world. Responding to the existential issues of people today, especially the young, listening to the language they speak, can lead to a fruitful change, which must take place with the help of the Gospel, the magisterium, and the church’s social doctrine.... God is everywhere: we have to know how to find him in order to be able to proclaim him in the language of each and every culture; every reality, every language, has its own rhythm.

## Mission and outreach: refreshing tonic

Such a spirit of openness and a commitment to the outward mission of the church is not a creation of Pope Francis, of course. It has been a consistent theme of the

pope’s modern predecessors. In his pastoral letter on religious life, for example, John Paul II, who through his travels had reached out to the whole world, reminded religious that they had the “prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God’s providential action in history. This is the plan for

the salvation and reconciliation of humanity” (*Vita Consecrata* #73). Perhaps after so much time in recent years spent wrestling with the tragedy of sexual abuse and with some of the strident clashes over orthodoxy, a reminder about the true mission of the church to the world comes as a refreshing tonic.

This sense of mission and outreach, Pope John Paul II noted, “is announced in Scripture.” At a time when Pope Francis is challenging the church to be more outward directed, it might be worthwhile to recall how true this statement is—a spirit of mission to the world is a hallmark of the New Testament. It is important to note that a spirit of mission, of reaching out to the world, is not in opposition to the pastoral need to strengthen the identity of the church and to build a strong sense of community that is also a hallmark of Christian tradition. Outreach to the world and concern for the health

of the church as a community are not alternatives, but both have an essential relationship to each other and each must be present for the church to be fully alive. It is a truism, but worth repeating: every form of Christian life must take its inspiration from the life and mission of Jesus, particularly as presented to us in the Gospels. And if any sense of Christian mission must take its spirit and meaning from the mission of Jesus, then that is where we must turn.

One way I have come to think of Jesus’ ministry is that it resembles the work of breathing—a drawing in of life into a vital center; the extending of life to the farthest boundaries of reality. A gesture also similar to an embrace, reaching out and drawing in. The more I have stood back from the Gospels, the more I conceive of Jesus’ mission in terms of these two related gestures that become one fluid movement and characterize the fundamental elements of Jesus’ ministry: reaching out and drawing in. Both gestures were compelled by the deepest convictions and religious instincts of his life and his vocation: reaching out in a wide embrace of the whole expanse of Israel, including those on the margins; drawing in the entire community—washed and unwashed—into a communion of life that gives glory to God. And this dynamic would animate the life of the early church and be reflected in the Gospels, in the letters of Paul, and in rest of the New Testament literature.

One of my favorite texts is Matthew 11:18 where Jesus confronts his opponents, playing back their hostile words, “‘We piped you a tune and you did not dance, we sang you a dirge and you did not wail.’ For John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and you said he is insane. But the Son of Man came eating and drinking and you say, ‘Behold a wine bibber and a glutton, a lover of tax collectors and those outside the law.’ Yet Wisdom is proved by her deeds.”

Implicit in his opponents’ hostile response is a tribute to the two characteristic gestures of Jesus I spoke of. “A lover of tax collectors and those outside the law”—a sign of Jesus’ extraordinary outreach beyond the boundaries. Jesus was committed to restoring Israel to God, hence in a spirit of compassion he sought out also those who lived on the margins of the community, those on the fringe, the “lost sheep” of the house of Israel. And, at the same, time this “wine bibber and glutton” drew in the lost to the vital center where he would break God’s bread with them. Here we see tribute to the inclusive meals so characteristic of Jesus’ mission as portrayed in the Gospels.

Both of these gestures—reaching out and drawing



Jesus ate and drank with all, inviting controversy as he reached out broadly. Even after Jesus rose from the dead, meals were a means of revelation. ("Supper at Emmaus" by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn)

in—are fundamental to the Gospel portrayal of Jesus and fundamental guides for the church in all ages. No contemporary study of the historical Jesus would deny the fact that Jesus had extraordinary rapport with those on the margin, with those who were isolated and alienated without the social context of first century Palestinian Judaism. Think, for example, of the Gospels' emphasis on Jesus' commitment as a charismatic healer. All one has to do is read the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel to see this in such raw and powerful detail—Jesus healing from sun up to sun down, the doors jammed with the sick who come to him as if drawn by magnetic force. Healing, then as now, is not only physical transformation—and Jesus was surely dedicated to that—but healing also involves the dissolving of isolation and exclusion which the sick in traditional societies, but also in our own, characteristically experience.

Or consider Jesus' eye for the socially marginalized: Levi at his tax collector's post, the centurion in Capernaum, the Canaanite woman, blind Bartimaeus by the roadside, Zaccheus in his sycamore tree]. It is also clear from the Sermon on the Mount and other sayings and parables of Jesus that he was convinced that those deval-

ued by others were themselves capable of heroic virtue. Jesus had great faith in the capacity of the human person for holiness and greatness.

There is no doubt that the historical Jesus reached out beyond the boundaries, and there is also no doubt, that this provocative outreach was grounded in his own experience of the God of Israel as one whose reach was not confined to the boundaries of Israel but reached beyond those boundaries. Jesus, it seems, opened his mind and heart to the occasional Gentile as well. As a devout Jew Jesus did not frequent Gentile territories nor did he, as one called to restore Israel, conceive a mission to the Gentiles as his primary mission, but when confronted with one of God's children in need, even if a Gentile, he apparently responded with compassion—setting the foundation for what the early community would ultimately feel compelled to do, to reach beyond Israel in the name of Jesus. Jesus earned and gloried in the judgment of his enemies: "a lover of tax collectors and those outside the law."

And then there is the dimension of his drawing in—clearly an important way of understanding the Jesus of history is not that he came to found a church in the sense of establishing a completely new entity apart from the community of Israel. The "church" was in a true sense already there, the qahal of God, the "assembly" or ecclesia of Israel. Jesus, rather, saw as his God-given vocation the restoration of Israel, the breathing of new life and a deeper sense of community into the people created by God and sealed with the Sinai covenant. So Jesus in a burst of wonderful irony and God-given optimism would call his ragtag and vulnerable band of disciples the "twelve" and promise them that they would sit on the thrones of the tribes of Israel.

## Extraordinary meals

And here surely is the inner meaning of the extraordinary meals that seem to have been a characteristic of the ministry of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Meals with Levi and his friends, meals with Simon the Pharisee, meals with the crowds on the hillsides, meals with his disciples. The ideal meals that are described in his parables—wedding feasts in which the invitations extend to

the highways and by-ways, royal banquets groaning with food and seeking guests, meals at which strangers would come from east and west sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Passover meals drenched with poignancy and longing.

The early Christian community would see these characteristic meals as evocative of God's feeding the people in the desert with manna and with quail, and as a sign of the Eucharists to come. In each case, they signified the ultimate meaning of Jesus' mission as a gathering of Israel, as an inclusive communion of all the children of God, as a sign of the ultimate communion in joy and praise and abundant vitality with the God of Israel who, in the vision of Isaiah 25:6-9, would set a banquet on Sion and feed the people with choice meats and beautiful wines, taking away the cobweb of death and drying the tears from every face.

The mission of Jesus, understood in these terms of outreach and drawing in, of inclusion and communion, would trigger the opposition of his enemies and lead ultimately to his death and give meaning to the cross as an act of profound love. Jesus died because of the way he lived.

Thus the characteristic notes and deep patterns of Jesus' ministry—his reaching out and his drawing in—can ultimately be traced to Jesus' own experience of the God of Israel. A God whose transcendent beauty reached far beyond the boundaries of Israel's imagination and far exceeded it hopes. A God whose unconditional love and startling compassion were more than any human heart could grasp. This God was the ground of Jesus' being and the foundation of his mission. The Spirit-driven intuition of the early community would enable it to see that Jesus not only revealed this God through his ministry but that Jesus himself—in his very being—embodied this divine reality.

Here we touch on another intuition of the church's teaching about mission that has come to the fore in our times, namely that the ultimate theological and biblical foundation for mission is the very life of God, indeed the mystery of the Trinity itself. God embodies the mission impulse—reaching out in self-transcending love—love as an incredible, irrepressible abundance emanating from the very relational being of God, love surging out into the act of creation, love extending into the life of a people and their history. And a love whose ultimate intent is to

draw all creation into the unfathomable beauty and vitality of God's own being—to create a communion among all living things.

Here is the ultimate life-act: breathing out and breathing in; reaching out and drawing in. This divine rhythm of life is the ground of all mission. In a wonderful book on mission in the Old Testament, Lucien Legrand points out that this divine rhythm finds an echo in a dynamic tension inherent in Israel's own life (see L. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). Legrand sees a fundamental dynamic already apparent in the Old Testament where Israel is stretched on the twin poles of its election as God's chosen people, on the one hand, and its historic interaction—perhaps we might even say, "mission," to the nations on the other. Although Israel conceived of its own status as unique and compelling it also understood

that the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Israel, was also the God of the Nations. Inevitably, therefore, Israel had to deal with the nations, at times standing over against its surrounding cultures in the name of religious purity, at other times interacting with the nations and absorbing fundamental aspects of their cultural life and religious structures, and still at other times experiencing the nations as instruments in God's own purification or chastisement of Israel.

That dynamic tension between identity and outreach, between community and mission, between particularism and universality arches through

the entire Bible, including both testaments. Israel caught throughout its history between its sense of election as God's own special people, concerned with the demands of the covenant to build a community of justice and compassion—and yet wondering about the nations, those peoples who were also children of Abraham and somehow destined to be part of God's ultimate embrace. Election and outreach. Community and mission. Breathing in and breathing out.

## Controversial outward direction

And the New Testament, too, knows this dynamic. But now because of the powerful dynamic of Jesus' mission, because of Christian faith in his authority as the Messiah and the Son of God, and because of his victory over death through resurrection that breaks the ultimate bar-

Confronted with one of God's children in need, even if a Gentile, Jesus apparently responded with compassion—setting the foundation for what the early community would ultimately feel compelled to do, to reach beyond Israel.

rier to human life—because of all these things, a sense of outreach to the world in service is at the core of Christian responsibility. We see this in each of the Gospels. Matthew’s Gospel, for example, which is concerned with continuity with the sacred heritage of Judaism, portrays the mission to the nations as the fulfillment of the mission of Jesus and the ultimate sign of his messianic identity. In the final scene of Matthew’s Gospel, the Risen Christ appears in triumph on a mountain top in Galilee and sends his disciples out into the world (28:16-20). Luke, too, although in a different mode, also stresses from the opening scenes of his Gospel the determination of Jesus to reach across boundaries when in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth he evokes the boundary breaking ministries of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:16-30). Luke follows up his Gospel account with the Acts of Apostles, illustrating how the Spirit—which is the Spirit the Risen Christ sends to his church—propels the early community “from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The story concludes (but does not end!) in Rome with Paul in house arrest but continuing to preach the Gospel “unhindered” (Acts 28:31)!

The Gospels of Mark and John have their own mission dynamic—Mark presenting Jesus as moving beyond the confines of Israel to reach across the boundary to Tyre and Sidon and healing the daughter of a Gentile woman (Mark 7:24-30) or moving across the Sea of Galilee to the Decapolis (a league of 10 Greek, that is, Gentile cities) and there feeding the multitudes (Mark 8:1-10) and transforming the Gadarene demoniac who had lived a tormented life among the tombs into the first missionary to the Gentiles (see Mark 5:1-20)! John—always in a different key—distills the commissioning of the disciples for mission into a succinct command of the Risen Christ: “As the Father has sent me so I send you” (John 20:21; also 17:18). The community is to emulate the cosmic and world-reconciling mission of Jesus himself who was sent into the world to save the world by revealing God’s transforming love for the world he had created (John 3:16-17).

And need we say anything about Paul’s commitment to outreach? The restless apostle who was transformed by an appearance of the Risen Christ from a vicious persecutor of the early church to its most dynamic and ardent proponent (see Acts 9:1-19). In letters to his Gentile communities Paul insists on his God-given call to be an apostle to the Gentile world (see, for example, Galatians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 15:8-11). Despite resistance from fellow Christians who thought Paul was too outward

directed and too accepting of the Gentiles (perhaps even Peter thought so at one point; see Galatians 2:11-14!), Paul never tired of bringing his Gospel to the outskirts of the Greco-Roman world and even desired to go to its outer rim in Spain! (See Paul’s comments on the wide range of his mission, including his desire to go to Spain in Romans 15:14-24.)

Certainly much more could be said about these and other New Testament texts, but clearly the call to reach out beyond the boundaries of the church to the wider world, seeking its renewal and its reconciliation is, as Pope John Paul II stated, “announced in Scripture.” It is a renewed commitment to this fundamental Christian heritage that Pope Francis is now urging upon the church. The church cannot let itself be absorbed with its own domestic concerns or have its leadership be stifled by a sense of clerical privilege. Only with a commitment to reaching out to the world, including now other religious traditions, can the church itself be a vital community and an instrument of Christ’s mission to the world. ■

That dynamic tension between identity and outreach, between community and mission, between particularism and universality arches through the entire Bible.



Jesus’ outreach was expansive enough to even include an adulteress. (“Jesus and the adulteress” by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn)

# Feed your spirit



PHOTO BY MTSOFAN

When I became publications editor for NRVC in 1998, I had no idea how much I'd learn from the vocation directors I would meet.

One value this author has learned from religious men and women is "Don't go it alone"—the walk of discipleship is best done with others.

BY CAROL SCHUCK SCHEIBER



Carol Schuck Scheiber has been publications editor for NRVC since 1998 and content editor of VISION vocation guide since 1990. She is married and has three children.

## What you've taught me

**I** NEEDED A JOB. That's how I found my vocation within a vocation. Fifteen years ago I needed work to support my family, at an especially critical time because my husband was in graduate school. I knew the National Religious Vocation Conference from editing VISION, so when the former Executive Director, Sister Cathy Bertrand, SSND called to ask me about editing HORIZON and the newsletter, I thought about it, and I said *yes*. That sweet word that suitors, vocation ministers, children and salespeople live to hear. *Yes*.

I had no idea how much I would learn. But since this is NRVC's 25th anniversary, let me name a few things that sisters, brothers and priests have taught me about being human. Like all people, of course I'm still a work in progress, attempting to make good on what I've learned.

**Pray.** First, last and many times in between. This daily, constant conversation is the only way to grab hold of God's infinite mercy, love and wisdom. Lots of people have taught me about prayer, but not the least of them

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have been those in religious life. Poring over manuscripts written by religious for decades has taught me that they are human beings with warts, just like everyone else. But they take those warts to the Lord, and sometimes that makes all the difference.

**Listen with openness.** After all these years in vocation publishing, I ought to have learned a few tricks about discerning God's will. And all of you in religious life have told me again and again in your words and your actions that prayer is not just taking my "to do" list to God. It's also about listening for God's voice in big and little ways in the daily events of my life. The openness to grace, when it arrives in both pain and pleasure, is a core value that I've gleaned from experience with all of you sisters, brothers and priests. I see that communities have to work hard to find that sweet spot of allowing in change, of listening to new ideas and new ways, while at the same time holding fast to the faith tradition. Open and listening, but not adapting to every shift in the wind: neither religious nor laity get it right every time, but we try.

**Be grateful.** This one is a toughie. Here you are, vocation ministers of the world, working your hearts out day after day—in the trenches of college cafeterias, late-night retreats, sleep-deprived service trips—and *how* many new members do you have to show for it? The ability to be grateful even when you do not see results, is impressive. It has taught me to try looking through a different lens for seeing God at work in the world.

I've also noticed that people in religious life thank others frequently. Many of you thank me just for showing up and doing my job. The cynic could say that's what non-profits do best: thank those who give, be it donors, employees or volunteers. But gratitude among religious seems more like a life stance rooted in the Gospel. When you're thankful for the privilege of vocation ministry—which probably none of you set out to do when you took your vows—now *that* is a foundational type of gratitude.

**Be hopeful.** These last two are intertwined. Brothers, priests and sisters have taught me that hope is a virtue. They really do believe that by his cross and resurrection, Christ has saved the world. That's optimism. In my own life, my mom needs hope badly right now as she faces one of the hardest moments in her vocation: to get out of bed each day and care for my father, who has Parkinson's and dementia. But whether you hang onto hope while your marriage is convulsed by disease; or you grasp at hope when your re-

ligious community is struggling for its future, hope is our bedrock. Vocation ministers are hope in action.

**Offer hospitality.** What's a Come and See without top flight hospitality? Sisters, priests and brothers know how to open their doors and put on a spread. And, boy, do they know how to use their networks. I travel regularly from Toledo, OH to Chicago for NRVC meetings, and most of the time I would stay at my brother-in-law's Chicago home. One time, though, I needed a room in Chicago, and I was surprised that some nuns down the street from NRVC were my landing pad. I've since learned that among religious, hotels are for when you haven't yet met the religious community in town. Once religious have met their local counterparts in a place, that seems to be the natural place to stay. *Mi casa es tu casa.* (Allow me a shout out to Sister Debbie Borneman, SSCM and the Sisters of St. Casimir in Chicago. Now that my brother-in-law has moved, Sister Debbie and the sisters offer me remarkable hospitality. Thank you, sisters!)

**People first.** No group can live out this motto to everyone's satisfaction, but my experience with religious is that they usually try harder than most to put the human person first. Is dinner late because a crying child needs attention? No problem, sisters have told me: that happens all the time in ministry. This value for the human person plays itself out in loyalty. I've noticed that when people in religious life have a healthy business relationship, they don't throw it away at the first opportunity. And, most obviously, a "people first" attitude drives religious to assist the most vulnerable in their ministries.

**Don't go it alone.** The whole idea behind religious life is that it happens in community, and in our individualized society, we sorely need that witness. I still remember one of the best pieces of advice I ever received, and it came from a Maryknoll priest. My husband and I, through a series of unusual circumstances wound up in Venezuela with weak language skills and suddenly, unexpectedly, on our own in a mission setting. "Don't try to do this alone," Father Leo told us. "You need a community for support and guidance." He was absolutely right, and even in more familiar settings, the walk of discipleship is best done in community, no matter your vocation. As American culture spins apart into greater isolation, loneliness and individualization, we particularly need the social statement of a communal life.

I could go on because you all have shaped me greatly. Suffice it to say I'm just glad I said "Yes" 15 years ago. ■

# Book notes



ARTWORK BASED ON PHOTO BY ARTHUR VAN BEVEREN.

As in most pastoral ministry, vocation ministry can easily lead to situations where ethics are compromised.

Maintaining boundaries is one practice that helps ensure a professional and ethical ministry.

BY SISTER DEBORAH BORNEMAN, SSCM



Sister Deborah Borneman, SSCM is a Sister of Saint Cyril and Methodius. She has been the associate director of National Religious Vocation Conference since

2011. Prior to that, she was a certified Catholic Campus Ministry Association campus minister and served as vocation director for her religious institute for 10 years.

*Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers,*

BY FATHER RICHARD GULA  
(Paulist Press, 2010)

## Is your integrity intact?

**I**N VOCATION MINISTRY, there are books we read that are inspirational, filled with phrases and paragraphs we bookmark for discernment weekends and prayer services. Then there are books we read that are informative, complete with lists and quotes that can be used for reports at community gatherings and presentations at regional meetings. *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers*, a 271 page book by renowned ethicist, Father Richard Gula, SS, is both inspirational *and* informative. It is a comprehensive, relevant resource for vocation teams that desire to minister with integrity and credibility. Gula focuses on the ministerial practice of responsibility and accountability by integrating interesting case studies and concrete strategies to be proactive as an ethical pastoral minister.

This book is a prudent reminder of the seriousness of professional ministerial leadership and the need to be both compassionate and competent pastoral ministers. The author affirms the need for professional ministerial organizations to have a code of ethics, and he also addresses the limits codes have in covering all circumstances. For this reason it helps vocation ministers to stay updated on ethical issues, trends and best practices while ministering with inquirers in discernment. They can easily be-



come consumed with the varied obligations of vocation ministry and neglect on-going education. This book is an ideal way to revisit the issues raised in NRVC's workshops on this topic. Furthermore the author's approach is consistent with the *Code of Ethics* published in 2008 by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). (Online at [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net).)

Father Richard Gula's intended audience is those who are involved in pastoral ministry or in training programs to become ordained clergy, religious or lay ministers. Naturally new and seasoned vocation ministers are part of this audience. In just eight chapters, Gula addresses topics such as: ministry as vocation, ministry as profession, the minister's character, the virtuous minister, the dynamics of power, confidentiality and pastoral care. Gula admonishes those who rely on the slippery slope of pastoral identity to exempt themselves from professional standards, expectations and conduct.

## Healthy understanding of vocation

Gula defines vocation as being called by God, thus distinguishing a vocation from a job or career by referring to the broader understanding found in *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter 5 "Universal Call to Holiness"). Vocation ministers will relate to Gula's lighthearted explanation that despite the extravagant stories of call that we read about in Scripture, God is not always so direct or specific in vocation discernment. Gula opposes a view of vocation that sees it as a predetermined "Post-it note" mandate. He is to be commended for his contemporary approach to vocation discernment, which echoes the sentiments of most vocation ministers. He goes beyond the "What's best for me?" mentality and challenges those in discernment to ask, "What does the world need?" Gula convinces his readers that an authentic vocation is more than personal gain; it is a radical response to God to give our very selves for the life of the world. Vocation as a disciple in the 21st century can be defined as responding to the needs of the powerless and the suffering with radical availability, abundant generosity and boundless compassion.

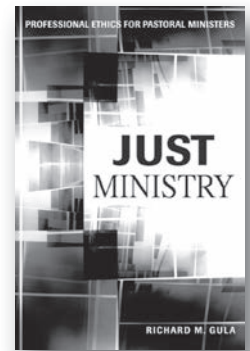
In Chapter 3 of *Just Ministry* I was delightfully surprised to read an endorsement from Gula of the seminal work in behavioral assessment presented by Father Raymond P. Carey, of the Archdiocese of Portland, OR. For over 20 years, Father Ray Carey has been presenting NRVC workshops on behavioral assessment, ethics in vocation ministry, and contemporary issues of younger inquirers and older candidates. Attending a workshop given by Father Ray is best described as a rite a passage

for new vocation ministers. I would also like to extend gratitude to Gula for including the NRVC contact information as a footnote for those who would like more information about these workshops.

Although it is best to read this book in its entirety, I particularly recommend two significant chapters to vocation ministers: "The Dynamics of Power" and "Confidentiality." Both of these topics are excellent themes for discussion when vocation ministers and their teams gather and for peer supervision consultations. I suggest using Gula's book simultaneously with the NRVC *Code of Ethics* to look at the topics of dual relationships and confidentiality.

Any inquiry into those two areas will quickly move to an examination of boundaries. When we negate the inequality of power between inquirer and vocation director, and when we dismiss unintended yet manipulative actions, we inevitably find ourselves on slippery slopes. Gula holds pastoral ministers accountable for dual relationships that mix personal and professional relationships, as well as ambiguous boundaries that confuse inquirers. Up-to-date release and consent forms are imperative for responsible vocation ministry and to protect the rights of discerners. Gula writes insightfully that abuses in confidentiality occur more often than sexual abuse because of carelessness and conflicts over power. Vocation ministers know the feeling of loneliness exacerbated by frequent travel, time away from community and the lack of validation. When community members inquire about our ministry, it can be difficult to avoid cynicism, sarcasm and pessimism, whether talking about discerners or apathetic members in our religious institutes. Gula wisely favors silence in ambiguous situations and offers effective strategies to maintain ethical behavior in regard to confidentiality.

This book on professional ethics for pastoral ministers, then, is a must-read. Inspiring and informative, it deserves to be on the bookshelf of every vocation minister. Its contents are not revolutionary; if anything, each category could serve as a well-written summary of what a trained vocation minister has already learned at NRVC workshops. However that's not to say it will be redundant; rather this book is a rich opportunity for reflection and growth—a solid reminder of the characteristics necessary to be a virtuous minister in the 21st century. ■



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