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The art of finding the perfect prompts

When I was in high school my favorite teacher and mentor was a Christian Brother. He and I would have long talks about music, literature, politics, art, and travel. I would ask him a million questions about his life, his loves, his passions. He, on the other hand, would rarely ask me questions, rather he would make observations. He would point out simple truths about what was important in life that would give me pause and help me adjust my thinking. It wasn’t until the end of my senior year that he finally asked a question that I knew immediately would be one of the most important I’d ever be asked: “Patrice, have you ever considered religious life?”

It was a nudge to focus my attention in the direction that animated me most. Although in the end, I did not enter religious life, I built my life around my faith—what I studied in college, my career choices, and much of my social life. That simple prompt based on years of smaller well-crafted prompts generated a unique path designed especially for me out of countless options.

I thought about all of this as we created the cover for this issue of VISION. We entered a string of prompts related to vocation discernment into the Shutterstock Artificial Intelligence art generator, which scans thousands of images artists have given their permission to use in AI-generated art. After several less satisfying results, we came up with just the right combination of descriptive words and phrases to generate this vibrant unique image drawn from the talents of many. The key to getting the results that ring true, we discovered, is in the quality of the prompts. Indeed “prompt engineers” have become one of the hottest jobs across industries. For our cover, we used the following prompts: artistic image of spiritual path, answer God’s call, follow Jesus, cross, apostolic, evangelical, contemplative, monastic, missionary, catholic religious vocation discernment, multicolor.

As you discern your vocation, our hope is that VISION will help you find a mentor or vocation director—a “prompt engineer” extraordinaire—who will offer the astute observations and questions you’ll need to unleash creative and positive energy to design and construct the life path that feels just right for you. Like the outstanding women and men religious featured in this issue, we hope your path will lead to a lifetime of good works for God’s sake and ours.

—Patrice J. Tuohy, VISION Publisher

NRVC UPDATE  Placeholder copy: still to be reviewed/OK’d by Sister Nicole

Last fall the NRVC gathered in Spokane for its biennial convocation. With the theme of “Call Beyond Borders,” we explored the many ways that living religious life and serving as vocation directors impels us to go beyond borders and meet people where they are—physically, spiritually, and culturally.

We plan to continue the discussion of crossing borders with our new series of handouts based on the keynote addresses of the Convocation.

We also hope that our new storymap, “Bold and Faithful: Meet today’s religious” will send the good news far and wide that religious life knows no bounds and continues to thrive.

As men and women religious, we live strive to live our faith with an inclusive and welcoming manner, and speaking as a Marianist, we do that in the spirit of Mary bringing Christ to the world.

All of us at the NRVC hope that our many resources, particularly VISION Vocation Guide, will help you find the vocation that impels you to become a person who crosses borders for Christ’s sake.

—Sister Nicole Trahan, F.M.I, NRVC Board Chair
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Questions Catholics Ask
Spanish/French Resources
Digital Edition
RELIGIOUS SIGHTINGS

BY THE NUMBERS: TRAITS OF NEW RELIGIOUS

THE U.S. CONFERENCE of Catholic Bishops each year surveys the roughly 175 to 200 people who complete the years-long formation process to enter a religious institute in the United States. Find the survey at tinyurl.com/CaraReport.

Facts from the findings in 2023:

PRAYER AND FAITH DEVELOPMENT
• 68 percent of the newly professed had attended a retreat before entering religious life,
70 percent regularly prayed the Rosary, and 77 percent regularly took part in Eucharistic Adoration; 58 percent said they had received spiritual direction, and 48 percent took part in a faith-sharing or Bible study group.

EDUCATION AND WORK
• 75 percent had at least a bachelor's degree, and 19 percent of newly professed religious had earned a graduate degree before they entered religious life; 53 percent had been employed full-time, and 31 percent part-time, before entering religious life.

AGE AND VOCATION CONSIDERATION
• Just over half (54 percent) of the newly professed were ages 30-39; 19 percent made final profession at age 29 or younger; and 21 percent made final profession after age 40.
• The typical newly professed religious began to consider a religious vocation at the age of 18 and was familiar with his or her institute for three years before entering religious life.

The best way to learn about religious life is to meet actual Catholic sisters, nuns, brothers, and priests. The National Religious Vocation Conference, VISION’s parent organization, has launched a new storymap—“Bold and Faithful: Meet today's religious.” It is a website that showcases the stories of women and men in religious life through video and audio and pinpoints where you can find religious institutes in your area and in-person and virtual events that will allow you to meet today’s religious.

Bold and Faithful:
Meet today's religious

An introduction to our newest Catholic sisters, nuns, brothers, and priests and opportunities to learn more.

National Religious Vocation Conference

The best way to learn about religious life is to meet actual Catholic sisters, nuns, brothers, and priests. The National Religious Vocation Conference, VISION’s parent organization, has launched a new storymap—“Bold and Faithful: Meet today's religious.” It is a website that showcases the stories of women and men in religious life through video and audio and pinpoints where you can find religious institutes in your area and in-person and virtual events that will allow you to meet today’s religious.
Archivist digs deep into community’s past

A
rchivists are a bit like detectives,” says Brother Tom Cole, O.F.M. An archivist and vicar for his community, Cole digs into the records and finds treasures. They look like this: photos, member files, ledgers, personnel paperwork, solemn vows books, and digitized files about friars of past generations. These are men who built schools, universities, retreat centers, parishes, and foreign mission compounds. The friars often started with nearly nothing and over generations carved out substantive institutions and innovations.

As the community archivist, Cole organizes and preserves the record for his community. He also responds to requests. For instance, “Parishes having an anniversary will ask us when certain friars served there,” says Cole. Other times he may be in touch with family members wanting to know about an uncle or brother who belonged to the friars.

Sometimes Cole turns to the elders in the community for help. “I can go to somebody in the house and ask them questions.” Archivists such as Cole strive to maintain accurate, accessible records of members, ministries, properties, and more—digitizing the information when they can.

Their work helps preserve the community charism—that is, its spirit, personality, mission, or raison d’etre. Every religious community, large and small, wants to ensure that the gift of its charism lives on, and every community has an archivist. It is often, but not always, a part-time ministry.

“Really if you went through the archives of any community, you would get such a sense of pride of what was accomplished,” says Cole. His community stretches back to Saint Francis in the year 1210. More recently, when the 19th-century German ruler Otto von Bismarck expelled religious communities from Germany during his Kulturkampf, one group of Franciscans fled to Patterson, New Jersey in 1876. The German-refugee friars set to work educating and evangelizing the many poor German immigrants streaming into the United States at that time. And that is the “lineage” to which Cole belongs today, acquiring and organizing the historical record for people now and into the future.

Cole says his deep dive into the archives has enriched him over the past nine years. “It gives me a different appreciation. People think archives are something that happened and ended but it’s part of a continuum.”

JESUS REIMAGINED

This image of Christ was created by Father Jonathan Harmon, S.J. (right). Harmon is a visual artist completing a fine arts degree who hopes to use his skill for evangelization. “I want to be a working artist with a mission-oriented practice,” he states on jesuitscentralsouthern.org.
ACCOMPANYING a man on death row, speaking publicly against the death penalty, organizing in favor of restorative justice—these are ministries Sister Eileen Reilly, S.S.N.D. never expected as a young sister. When she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1965, she thought she would be in a classroom most of her life. That is how she spent her first 12 years.

However, over time Reilly has applied her talents as an educator to a number of social justice ministries—including being an NGO representative to the United Nations for her religious institute. Today she focuses on educating, organizing, and advocating for two things: for restorative justice and against the death penalty.

“I feel my whole life was preparing me for this work,” she says about her ministry as a religious engagement associate for Catholic Mobilizing Network. Her community’s motto is “Transforming the world through education.” It aligns nicely, says Reilly, with her efforts to uplift human dignity through education and social action.

Reilly keeps in contact with dozens of religious institutes so they can use their collective power to keep pushing for an end to the death penalty (now outlawed in 23 states) and to encourage restorative justice as an alternative model of criminal justice.

“Today is the first Friday of the month, so from 2-3 p.m.,” says Reilly, “a couple hundred of us will meet for prayer virtually.” Religious communities also respond to action alerts regarding legislative initiatives in their states.

To reach younger Catholics, she and her colleagues sponsor a poetry contest on the injustice of the death penalty. “A huge number of Catholics don’t know what the Catholic stand on the death penalty is,” she explains. Church teaching has consistently condemned it as out of sync with the sacredness of life.

OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE HALLS OF JUSTICE

SISTER EILEEN REILLY, S.S.N.D. is a religious engagement associate for the Catholic Mobilizing Network. She organizes and educates religious communities and other groups of Catholics to oppose the death penalty and support alternative justice policies.

Salesian priest helps those with spinal cord injuries

THANKS to the ongoing efforts of Father Jaime Reyes Ratana, S.D.B. and his Salesian community, more than 100 people a year in Mexico can now access help after a spinal cord injury. In the fall of 2022 Reyes and the Salesians of Don Bosco established the Latin American Center for Comprehensive Care for Spinal Cord Injuries. Located in Guadalajara, it is the first comprehensive center of its kind in the country.

The center offers state-of-the-art equipment, including rehab exercise bikes, kinesitherapy devices for upper and lower limbs, walking support, and electric standing frames. The center also offers occupational therapy and promotes new science and technology for treating, caring for, and rehabilitating patients with spinal cord injuries.

The center builds on Reyes’ previous success in helping young people who needed wheelchairs. In 2010, Reyes established Don Bosco on Wheels to provide wheelchairs and social support to disabled youth in Guadalajara. The Latin American Center for Comprehensive Care for Spinal Cord Injuries is larger and more comprehensive, with a goal of serving 125 people a year.

The Salesian Missions website reports that some 9.2 million people in Mexico have some form of disability, most often related to mobility. As much as 45 percent of Mexico’s disabled population lives in poverty with no way to overcome it because of discrimination and the lack of access to holistic care.
CATHOLICS are partway through two processes aimed at revitalizing their faith: the international Synod on Synodality and the U.S. Eucharistic Revival.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops notes on its website that the synod began in 2021 and its intent has been to reflect on the journey that has been made since the 1960s Vatican II renewal and help the church “live communion, achieve participation, and open herself to mission.”

Catholics contributed to wide-ranging synod discussions during 2022, addressing various aspects of church life. In 2023 the U.S. bishops released a report synthesizing what American Catholics said. Find it in English and Spanish at tinyurl.com/USCCBSynthesis.

Next, bishops from around the world, who conducted similar consultations, will meet in Rome in October 2023 for the first of a two-part discussion. Organizers hope the process of the synod will help cultivate greater openness, a welcoming atmosphere, and more collaborative leadership in the Catholic Church. Learn more about the synod at synod.va.

The Eucharistic Revival, launched in 2022, will culminate in a Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis July 17-21, 2024. “It’s our mission to renew the church by enkindling in God’s people a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the holy Eucharist,” states the event website.

The revival has involved catechesis, prayer, resources, processions, Eucharistic Adoration, and more. Organizers intend the revival to rejuvenate the faith of the U.S. Catholic Church so that believers will go forth energized to serve and evangelize. Details are at eucharisticrevival.org.
The body is a powerful carrier of wisdom. Everything we have experienced lives on in the body. Indeed, the body is life as we know it. Our senses registering the world, our muscles carrying us, the digestive system breaking food into nourishment—this is the body at work. Our activities, people living together, tending to children, working, falling ill, exercising—these are our embodied selves.

All experience, and hence, all information for vocation discernment and other types of decision-making, must come to us first through our bodies.

Embody your decisions

When making important decisions, we do better if we listen not only to our heads and hearts but also our bodies.

The body is a powerful carrier of wisdom. Everything we have experienced lives on in the body. Indeed, the body is life as we know it. Our senses registering the world, our muscles carrying us, the digestive system breaking food into nourishment—this is the body at work. Our activities, people living together, tending to children, working, falling ill, exercising—these are our embodied selves.

All experience, and hence, all information for vocation discernment and other types of decision-making, must come to us first through our bodies. Sometimes sensations can be subtle and take practice to notice and learn to interpret. Others, like the headache I typically get when my computer breaks down, can be glaringly...
It's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings.

MEISTER ECKHART, OP (1260-1328)

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Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, New York
sparkill.org

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More positive sensations might be buoyancy, energy, freedom from twitches, knots, or pressure. This subtlety and lack of explicit language makes reading the body a challenge. Consequently, learning to understand the language of our bodies can take some practice. I encourage you to notice and interpret the wisdom your body holds about how God is calling you. The practice on page 17 is one way that you can begin this listening process.

Scripture gets physical

Scripture is filled with bodies and bodiliness. Recall how Genesis speaks poetically about the sweep of creation. God’s creative “Let there be...” (Gen. 1) brings forth the bodies of an immense variety of living things, including humanity. Later, the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery is remarkably physical, from the parting of the Red Sea to God sustaining the Israelites with manna and quail. The Song of Solomon is an unabashed love poem that begins with “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!”

In the gospels, we encounter the mystery that God became fully present in a particular human body. On the night before he died, Jesus tended to the bodies of his closest friends, washing their feet, sharing the Last Supper with them. After he
rises from the dead, Jesus eats with his disciples and instructs Thomas to touch his hands, feet, and side. Saint Paul uses the body as a metaphor for the unity of the church, but it is more than a metaphor, as he also instructs Christians on a number of bodily concerns, from sexual fidelity to caring for the naked or hungry.

Bodily experience is inherently ambiguous. We live in the tension between being a body and having a body, freedom and constraint, sacredness and vulnerability. Yet our whole self includes our body, and in order to keep moving toward wholeness, the body must not be ignored nor denigrated or overindulged.

**Friend or foe?**

You might concede that bodies in general may be holy but still not be comfortable with your own body as a source of God’s revelation. It’s pretty easy to see bodies as a general category as good—after all, God created them—even as your particular body, tied intimately to your sense of self, may not appear good or even acceptable. Perhaps your body has been hurt or abused; if this is your history, it may not be obvious how your body could help in your discernment. You may want a trusted person or spiritual director to walk with you.

---

**Check out these award-winning online resources at VocationNetwork.org**

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A discernment tool to help you narrow your search for the right vocation.

**QUESTIONS CATHOLICS ASK**
A regular feature shedding light on the traditions and practices of our rich Catholic heritage.

**E-VOCATION NEWSLETTER**
Monthly insights on discernment matters and help on your vocation journey. Sign up at VocationNetwork.org/newsletter.

**VISION EVENTS CALENDAR**
Postings of service, education, and discernment opportunities in your area. Sign up to receive alerts from communities that interest you at vocationnetwork.org/en/events.

**TAKE FIVE FOR FAITH**
Daily faith formation for busy Catholics.

**SPIRITUALITY QUIZ**
Insights into your spirituality type.
Our bodies keep us grounded to this place and these relationships where God is already at work.

as you begin to explore the positive wisdom your body may offer.

God loves each of us for who we are and wants the best for us. Our bodies keep us grounded to this place and these relationships where God is already at work, and so provide an essential starting place for other forms of discernment. Vocational discernment—who I am called to be and how I am called to live out this call—fruitfully begins here.

Putting it into practice

Some find the exercise in the accompanying box (at right) easy to do; others find it difficult, including those who are skeptical. Even those who are resistant often tell me things like: “It seemed so hokey, but I tried ‘listening’ to my body, and it worked!” Or: “I had no idea my body would register an opinion at all, so I was surprised when there was a definite shift within myself as I posed different possibilities.” Others find their bodies essentially leaning away from a possibility that seems so right in their brains. There is no correct response to the exercise. Just listen to your body and learn by experience how to interpret its language.

For Christian decision-making, it is important to control the speed and intensity of bodily sensations in order to use them fruitfully. If you find any part of this exercise makes you uncomfortable, stop. Or wait and pick up the exercise in a place and with people with whom you feel safe. ❖

RELATED ARTICLE: VocationNetwork.org, “Listen closely.”
Approaching discernment through the body

1. Prayerfully renew your desire to follow God’s call.

2. Clear a space inside you. Allow yourself to become aware of your body, all its parts and organs.

3. While attentive to your body and its responses, present your discernment question in detail. Pay attention to everything that happens in your body as you do.

4. What do you sense in your body with respect to your question? What is the quality of the felt sense? Write it out in detail.

5. Carry on a dialogue with yourself about your discernment question. If your body sense shifts, follow where it takes you.

6. Record any new awareness about a potential decision that comes through your body.

7. Return to your desire to follow God’s call. Place your new awareness before God and notice what happens. Record this outcome too.

8. Add other forms of discernment to the information provided by your body. All these indicators together suggest the direction in which you are being called.
Y INSATIABLE desire to be with Jesus and learn from him draws me to scripture, and praying with the word of God is part of my daily life. The power of the word of God is hard to capture and even more difficult to express. Yet from Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* to the musical *Godspell*, thousands of people continue to share the fruits of their own prayer via artistic expression. Their efforts enrich our own prayer experiences and even lead us back to the Bible for a more profound personal encounter.

This has been my experience of *The Chosen*, a downloadable TV series created and produced by Dallas Jenkins, the biggest crowd-funded TV project in history. Why do people all over the world continue to fund this endeavor? Perhaps it is because—as the show states—“all biblical and historical context and any artistic imagination are designed to support the truth and intention of the Scriptures. Viewers are encouraged to read the Gospels.”

Who knew that a TV show would drive me back to my Bible and help deepen my connection to Jesus?
Daughters of St. Mary of Providence

Trust the Providence of God
On our own, we can do nothing, but leaving all to Divine Providence, everything is possible!

Reveal the merciful, providential love of God
Promote a culture of life, love and mercy, responding to the deepest needs of the human person

Become a gift of Providence
Closely conforming ourselves to Christ, our gift of self becomes “providence” for all we serve and meet

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is a way to deepen our relationship with Jesus and our personal identities as children of God. The episode I have in mind is simply titled “Matthew 4:24,” which illustrates this verse from the Gospel of Matthew:

His fame spread to all of Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain, those who were possessed, lunatics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

The scene begins with two of the apostles talking to each other. Matthew asks Philip to teach him more about prayer. Walking alongside Matthew and Philip, we see the long lines of people waiting to be cured. We hear the joyful cries of those who have been healed. We catch glimpses of the apostles setting up camp. They are building tents, gathering food, caring for the crowds, playing games and getting to know one another better. They are exhausted from their travels, excited about the miracles, concerned about people’s motivations, and plagued with uncertainty about the future.

Everything about their situation is irregular. In a time when students choose their own rabbi, the apostles are a motley crew chosen by their teacher, Jesus. Each follower has a unique personality and story. The crowds, constant travels, and unexpected events are elements of a

Perhaps, like me, viewers desire a fresh encounter with Christ that leads them back to the word and teaches them to pray. Of the many good episodes I have watched, I want to highlight one that I found particularly informative and transformative. I’ll break it down bit by bit, similar to how I pray with scripture: by using imaginative prayer or “Ignatian contemplation.” Saint Ignatius developed this type of prayer that encourages vivid imagination of biblical scenes.

**Enter the scene**

In each episode of *The Chosen*, we are invited to enter scenes of scripture. “Entering the scene” is at the heart of Ignatian contemplation. It

We come to see the life of Jesus through the eyes of those who are following him, through the eyes of those who are being affirmed and challenged by the way he lives.
reality they had not anticipated when they agreed to follow Jesus. We arrive at the scene as mere observers and soon become participants.

Engage the senses

As evening settles, we, too, settle more deeply into this moment with the apostles. We join them at camp and imagine the taste of the food shared at a meal and listen to the sounds of locusts, owls, and people in the distance. We imagine the conversations among the followers while Jesus is away with the crowds. Mary and other women are among the apostles, and we can appreciate the group’s honest conversations about religion, identity, loss of a parent, expectations, and the meaning of happiness.

We come to see the life of Jesus through the eyes of those who are following him, through the eyes of those who are being affirmed and challenged by the way he lives. In joining this group of followers around the fire, we, too, come to sense our authentic selves in this conversation. We, too, in following Jesus, are led to think of the deeper reality and questions of life.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church encourages all Christians to “learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8)” by frequent reading of divine Scriptures. ... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and [person].”

Allow emotions and deeper questions to surface

The conversations depicted by Jesus’ followers in this episode reflect what can happen within our souls during prayer. By entering the scene and engaging our senses, we allow our most vulnerable feelings to surface: feelings of doubt, fear, frustration, resentment, confusion, unworthiness, and shame. These strong feelings give way to deeper questions in our hearts: How long will this last? Why hasn’t God healed me? Why haven’t I asked God for healing? What is happening? What am I part of? Does God really need me?

Sitting with such difficult questions and emotions can seem overwhelming. When I watch The Chosen series, I often meditate on these types of questions afterward. I need time to let them sit in my heart.

As we allow questions to rise to the surface and be expressed in
prayer, we may discover conflict within ourselves. In these experiences of desolation, we long for consolation from the One who seems absent. This episode captures this reality when the disciples engage in a heated argument that continues to intensify and escalate. The scene is tense and, as viewers, we wonder how this dispute could ever be resolved.

Encounter Jesus

Just then Jesus arrives on the scene. He walks through the camp completely exhausted from healing those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics. The intensity of the argument, the judgments, and the comparisons all come to a halt. Jesus doesn’t address the emotions, the behaviors, the questions, or the content of conversation. With Jesus’ mere presence, God’s people are led to honest self-reflection. No words are necessary because his presence provides perspective.

“Good night,” he says to his disciples. Silence falls over the camp, and as the camera focuses on the face of each disciple, it is clear this brief encounter with Jesus is affecting something deep within each one. Mary runs to Jesus and begins to wash his hands. “Oh, Eema [Mother], thank you,” he says. Jesus prepares to

Full surrender

Jonathan Roumie, who plays Jesus in The Chosen told the National Catholic Register about a pivotal moment in his own life: “I was on my knees, and I said to God, ‘I don’t know why you brought me to this place. I don’t know why I’m here. I think I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing. I think you put this into my heart, to be an artist, to somehow serve you—but I can’t make ends meet. I’m going to need you to step in.’

Later that day, he received money in the mail that would tide him over.

“I said to God, ‘So this is how it’s going to be? Full and complete surrender, huh? Okay. You got it.’ From that moment on, my life turned on a dime—and has never been the same since. I’ve had obstacles like all of us do, stresses—but how I handled them was completely different from that moment on.”

Three months later, he received the role of Jesus in The Chosen.
sleep and prays aloud to God. Then there is silence. This is how the episode ends.

Such an encounter with Jesus—in art, film, TV, life, or scripture—can lead the soul to silence. To a realization. To peace. We experience the humility of God whose presence meets us in the chaotic camps of our hearts.

The strength of the word of God

For me, this episode of The Chosen, based on Matthew 4:24, not only teaches me about the importance of the presence of Jesus; it enters me into prayer with Jesus. It leads me back to scripture, which likewise leads me to prayer.

Pope Francis, in his audience on January 27, 2021, speaks of the transforming power of praying with God’s word:

“We read the Scriptures because they “read us.” And it is a grace to be able to recognize oneself in this passage or that character, in this or that situation. The Bible was not written for a generic humanity, but for us, for me, for you, for men and women in flesh and blood, men and women who have a name and a surname, like me, like you. And the Word of God, infused with the Holy Spirit, when it is received with an open heart, does not leave things as they were before: never. Something changes. And this is the grace and the strength of the Word of God.

Matthew 4:24 is one simple line of scripture that points to the great works Jesus was doing. Yet, in this episode of The Chosen, Jesus does not announce statistics of people he has healed. He does not brag about power or share stories of conversions. Jesus is different. His motivations are different. His movements are different. His mission is different. And he invites us to be different, to be more like him.

The Chosen has many wonderful episodes that encourage me to open my Bible and to connect more deeply with Jesus. The episode I’ve described teaches at least two foundational truths about our faith. Jesus’ presence transforms everything, and we are invited to encounter Jesus in the stories of his life. May you encounter Jesus in prayer, in scripture, in TV and film, and in your daily life! †

Related articles: VocationNetwork.org, “Religious life captured on film” and “Family movie night.”
Throughout history, spiritual directors have warned against casting spiritual seekers into one mold. Saint Ignatius Loyola said there is “no greater mistake in spiritual matters than to force others to follow one’s own pattern.”

Many observers have noted four main dispositions, or temperaments, that help describe how people behave on their spiritual journey: the path of intellect, the path of devotion, the path of service, and the path of asceticism. These four main pathways are anchors in the Catholic spiritual tradition and worth exploring in some depth to help you understand your own spiritual preferences. What
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helps you develop spiritually may be dramatically different from what attracts the person next to you.

Take the quiz on page 27 to find your spirituality type. Your quiz results may confirm what you already know about your spiritual leanings, or you may feel called to explore a different pathway. Consider your results an invitation to know yourself better and explore different forms of prayer, worship, and meditation. It is best to not feel bound by or limited by your result—your spirituality could very well be a combination of these four pathways. It is merely a tool to give you more insight into your preferences when it comes to living out your Christian call.

Religious orders represent a rich multitude of spiritualities drawing on these traditions but their spirituality is also far more nuanced and complex than these categories. Do not limit your exploration of religious communities to the traditions and saints associated with these spiritual paths. Simply use it as a starting point. Remember: Drawing closer to God and unraveling the mystery of God is the work of a lifetime.

Now, please take the quiz on page 27 to see which of the four basic spiritual paths described below you currently find yourself drawn to.

“Happiness, bliss, well-being comes from community—comes from connection.”

—Rainn Wilson, talking about his new series Geography of Bliss
What is your spiritual path?

**INSTRUCTIONS:**
1. There are four words in each row across. Choose the word that is **most** descriptive of you **here and now** (not what you would like to be some day), and circle “4” in front of that word.
2. Pick the word that is **least** descriptive of you **here and now**, and circle “1.”
3. Circle a “3” next to the second most descriptive word and a “2” next to the third most descriptive.
4. Repeat the above steps for each row.
5. When you are finished, total up the circled numbers in each vertical column and write the sum in the box below each column. Whichever column has the highest score represents your preferred spiritual path:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1 — Path of intellect</th>
<th>Column 2 — Path of devotion</th>
<th>Column 3 — Path of service</th>
<th>Column 4 — Path of asceticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>independent</td>
<td>compassionate</td>
<td>spontaneous</td>
<td>factual</td>
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<tr>
<td>logical</td>
<td>creative</td>
<td>adventurous</td>
<td>thorough</td>
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<td>straightforward</td>
<td>empathetic</td>
<td>adaptable</td>
<td>systematic</td>
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<td>visionary</td>
<td>idealistic</td>
<td>self-determined</td>
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<td>committed</td>
<td>observant</td>
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<td>speculative</td>
<td>curious</td>
<td>enthusiastic</td>
<td>realistic</td>
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<td>original</td>
<td>expressive</td>
<td>playful</td>
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<td>challenging</td>
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<td>clever</td>
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<td>decisive</td>
<td>personable</td>
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<td>tough</td>
<td>verbal</td>
<td>pragmatic</td>
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<tr>
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<td>concerned</td>
<td>risk-taker</td>
<td>reliable</td>
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<td>change agent</td>
<td>supportive</td>
<td>troubleshooter</td>
<td>consistent</td>
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</tbody>
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**TOTAL, COLUMN 1**
**TOTAL, COLUMN 2**
**TOTAL, COLUMN 3**
**TOTAL, COLUMN 4**

*To further refine which religious vocation might be best for you, visit VocationMatch.com.*

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Path of intellect 
(Thomistic prayer)

The method of Saint Thomas Aquinas is known as scholastic prayer. The main emphasis is on the orderly progression of thought from cause to effect. People drawn to this prayer type prefer neat, orderly forms of the spiritual life as opposed to the more free-spirited attitude of the Franciscan approach. Their spirituality is centered on the earnest pursuit of all the transcendental values: truth, goodness, beauty, unity, love, life, and spirit. Like Saint Teresa of Ávila, they are willing to exert superhuman effort to achieve their goal.

Because of their disdain for second best, they seek total truth and authenticity in their lives and work hard to reach the whole truth about themselves, about God, and about sanctity. This intense pursuit of truth colors their whole spiritual life. Books of prayer frequently call the Thomistic method of prayer “discursive meditation.” In this type of prayer one takes a virtue, fault, or theological truth and studies it from every possible angle. Change of behavior is an essential part of this prayer—it doesn’t stay at the intellectual level.

Path of devotion 
(Augustinian prayer)

This pathway to spiritual growth uses creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to today’s situation—as if the scripture passage is a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us (like Saint Augustine picking up Romans 13 and reading a message pointed directly at him). The essential element of this spirituality, going back to New Testament times (Jesus, Saint Paul, and the early church leaders), is experiencing a personal relationship with God. Because they read between the lines and catch what is inexpressible and spiritual, those who follow the path of devotion understand symbols and their use in liturgy.

This path concentrates on meditations that loosen the feelings and expand the ability to relate to and love others. The stress is on the love of self, others, and God. Those on this path can follow the four steps of lectio divina: listen to what God says in scripture; reflect prayerfully and apply it to today; respond to God’s word with personal feelings; remain quiet and stay open to new insights.
Path of service
(Franciscan prayer)

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, those who follow this path must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do. One thinks of Saint Peter impetuously jumping into the water to join Jesus as a typical action of this type. Franciscan spirituality leads to acts of loving service that can be a most effective form of prayer. The gospel stories about Jesus have a special appeal, particularly the Incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, which is the center around which Franciscan life and spirituality revolve. Franciscan prayer is flexible and free-flowing, making full use of the five senses; it is spirit-filled prayer.

Those on this path can make a meditation on the beauty of a waterfall, flower, meadow, mountain, or ocean—all of God’s creation. There is more stress in prayer on the events of Jesus’ life rather than his teaching. Like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, prayer is done with total concentration. It is the most important thing to be doing at this moment. Thérèse did all tasks knowing that each was a part of the total harmony of the universe.

Path of asceticism
(Ignatian prayer)

This pathway involves imagining oneself as part of a scene in order to draw some practical fruit from it for today. This spirituality goes back to the Israelite way of praying in 1000 B.C. in which one remembers and immerses oneself in an event and thus relives and participates in the event in a symbolic way.

That is how Saint Ignatius of Loyola meditated on the figures in the Nativity scene: “I will make myself a poor, little, unworthy servant, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit.”

Ignatius’ preoccupation with order was evident in his Spiritual Exercises, which he aimed at overcoming “disorderly affections, so that [people] may make a decision that is in keeping with God’s will,” says Thomas Clarke in Playing in the Gospel. According to Clarke, “Most souls who are willing to endure the discipline of the 30 days of intense prayer activity of the Spiritual Exercises are rewarded with an unforgettable spiritual experience that frequently changes the whole direction of their lives.”

Related articles: VocationNetwork.org, “A user’s guide on the ways to pray.”
Two members of religious communities look at the vibrant future. While communities experience dramatic changes as a large generation lives its final years, creative new energies are afoot.

GOD’S LOVE CONTINUES

By Sister Susan Rose Francois, C.S.J.P.

GOD’S LOVE will always be. It is everlasting and beyond understanding. At our very core, we who have been loved into existence by our Creator are programmed to respond in turn. Each person’s response is unique of course, and the church recognizes vocations to marriage, single life, and religious life as ways we are called to live in and share God’s love.
JOIN Our Brotherhood

The Franciscan Friars of the Atonement is a community of Brothers, Priests, and Tertiaries, who follow the Rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis. Inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, Fr. Paul Wattson, SA, Servant of God, founded the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement to walk as brothers alongside those who are lost and need God’s healing.

The Friars’ ministries include:

CHRISTIAN UNITY

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DRUG & ALCOHOL REHABILITATION

RETREAT & PARISH MINISTRIES

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40 Franciscan Way
Garrison, NY 10524

FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT:
845-690-1079 EXT. 3323
Vocdirector@atonementfriars.org
Code #003 @VocationNetwork.org Community Search
From the earliest days of the church, some people have been drawn to prayer, community, and common mission as a particular way to live into the vastness of God's love. For more than two centuries, individuals and groups have felt the inexplicable urge to imitate and follow Christ through the religious life, from the Desert Fathers and Mothers to the monastics, mendicants, apostolic communities, and newer ecclesial movements. If you are reading this article, then most likely you too have felt this indescribable tug. More than that, you are taking the next step in your discernment, seeking to learn if people even do this anymore.

Is religious life alive? Does it have a future? The answer, my friends, is yes! That's because God’s dream, God's being, and the needs of the world are so big. How could this unique gift of the church as a way of responding to God's love ever come to an end, even as it changes?

What is coming to an end, in many cases, is the large-scale religious life that the Holy Spirit called forth and nurtured to meet the needs of an earlier time. My own religious community was founded in the United Kingdom and quickly expanded to the United States to meet the needs of the immigrant church in both countries.

Many of my sisters entered in large groups, and as soon as they made first vows, they were sent to serve as teachers and nurses in our sponsored works, often without much training or education.
This was before the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and the growing understanding of the call of lay people to also share in the mission of the church. After the council, my sisters responded faithfully to the emerging needs of the times. They sought theological and professional education so that they could empower and encourage their lay partners in mission and engage more directly in ministry and presence with people living on the margins. Our mission continues today, in a more collaborative way.

So, too, does religious life, now and into the future. Each generation is called to discern how to bring the light of God's love to the needs of the age, and the Holy Spirit sends the people needed for that time. As we move into the next decades, could it be that you are part of the equation? Are you called to help make the path by walking?

I do not have a crystal ball to predict the future, but I do see glimmers of the emerging future of religious life present today, here and now. The future I glimpse is smaller and more interconnected. We are invited to live into the bigness of smallness to meet the needs of our age.

I know younger men and women religious who are alive with their charism and passionate about responding to God's call through prayer, community, and common mission. We have wise elders in our communities who are there to welcome us, mentor us, and dream with us. There is such creativity and
entering in relatively small numbers is that we often engage in religious formation collaboratively across congregations. We are building relationships and connections today that will be the seed of future collaboration as we build on the legacies of our sisters and brothers in mission. Through it all, the Holy Spirit is at work. God’s love continues, and so does religious life.

RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY AND TOMORROW
By Friar Mario L. Serrano, O.F.M.Conv.

WHAT A PRIVILEGE it is to reflect on religious life with people who are considering it. If you are wondering whether a consecrated, communal life dedicated to the gospel is worth living, my short answer to you is a resounding yes!
As you discern religious life, you might be wondering how you are called to live. I know that this can be a very confusing place to be. However, be sure to step into the friaries, the monasteries, the cloisters, and the religious homes where you can encounter religious men and women who have dedicated their life to a religious community and a charism. You (and thousands of others) are proof that young adults are still considering religious life as a viable option in today’s world.

Although we might hear the narrative that religious life is dwindling, or we may see a tireless priest serving as pastor of two or more parishes, or we might notice changes in the ministries performed by religious—even with all that, we should not conclude that there is a lack of vocations. This decrease in the overall number of members in the United States is at times depicted as the demise of religious life. It is not. Every year, men and women continue to join religious communities. The people of God still desire to live their baptismal call to love and serve God as religious. Each year hundreds of U.S. men and women begin life in a religious institute where they live in an intentional community that prays together and serves others in ministry.

Valarie Kaur speaks of a powerful image of the time we are living now. She states, “My faith dares me to ask: What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?” She is referring to society in general; however, religious life is also going through seismic changes. In the United States, as a younger Franciscan friar, I don’t see the tomb ahead of us. Religious life has been part of our church and society for a very long time and I believe that religious life will be part of the future we have yet to see.

Consecrated life—with its dynamic history stretching from the desert hermits to the religious com-
To name just a few examples:

- Brother Jaime Zaragoza, O.F.M.Conv., feeds God’s people in the Franciscan Kitchen in Louisville, Kentucky.
- Sister Norma Pimentel, M.J., advocates for migrants and offers them safe spaces to rest and regain strength.
- Franciscan friars are remaining in Ukraine and also creating places for war refugees in Poland.
- Father James Martin, S.J., reminds us to uphold the dignity of our LG-BTQ+ siblings.

If you are curious about religious life, I would like to tell you that it is a challenging and beautiful life worth living, especially now in our highly digitized and globalized world.

communities of today—excites me as I look toward the future. The reality is that each community is being asked to reinterpret the gospel challenge as our reality changes within society and within the church. As a Franciscan friar, my brothers and I are again being challenged to live an alternative lifestyle, one that requires us to become prophets and mystics.

New, exciting ways of living this life are becoming visible. Along with my brothers and sisters, I am living through what the church calls the Paschal Mystery: the dying, rising, and sending of the Holy Spirit. Although consecrated life is changing, I see it vibrantly alive in many ways.

If you are curious about religious life, I would like to tell you that it is a challenging and beautiful life worth living, especially now in our highly digitized and globalized world. This reality has thrust religious life into a new way of being, a new way of living. It is because of technological leaps that I can form relationships with my brothers beyond the borders of the United States. I’m able to foster relationships with friars from Poland, Zambia, Mexico, El Salvador, and any of the 70 countries where our friars are currently ministering. Recently I spent a week with 60 friars in formation who were from 25 different countries. We have new ways to experience community, spiritual growth, and ministry.
I entered religious life at age 18 in 2001, as the new millennium was beginning. I cannot believe I have been with the friars for more than 20 years already! I continually fall deeper in love with religious life, with Franciscan life. Francis of Assisi began with a few brothers with a mission to rebuild the church. He did not seem preoccupied with there being only a few brothers. Francis wanted each friar to be vigilant regarding his prayer life. He himself was nourished by his profound encounter with Jesus before the San Damiano Crucifix, an experience that transformed his life. Francis heard the crucified Christ speak: “Francis, don’t you see that my church is falling into ruin? Go and rebuild it.”

After this encounter with Christ, Francis sought to live an authentic response as he discovered what needed to be rebuilt. He learned that his mission was not only to rebuild the physical chapel of San Damiano but to rebuild his relationship with God, God’s people, and God’s creation.

What does Francis’ story mean for you today? It means you should continue to practice holy curiosity. Allow yourself to see what I see—that religious life is a large, complex, and living reality filled with possibilities.

Keep seeking and remember that the church needs you! We all need one another’s gifts and prayer. May God bless you as you seek your most authentic form of life.

**Related Article: VocationNetwork.org, “Our newest religious possess an age-old Christian virtue: hope.”**
Migrants and refugees who travel through Mexico to the U.S. border face many perils. Numerous men and women in religious life are there to provide humanitarian relief, spiritual care, assistance, and advocacy. Meet some of the sisters, brothers, and priests who “run toward the suffering.”

T’S ONE OF THE GREAT SCANDALS of our time: Thousands of refugees fleeing terror, poverty, or both are stopped at the border of one of the richest nations on Earth, an immigrant nation at that.

Who stands with the “least of these,” people who have risked everything and may be getting nothing? Faithful people. Catholic women and men religious—sisters, priests, and brothers—along with lay partners, have been there, often leading, for many years.

Over time, relief organizations have grown on both sides of the border. Kino
MEN AND WOMEN religious are an important part of the effort to provide migrant relief and advocacy. Jesuit scholastic Jaret Ornelas, S.J. (clockwise from top), Sister Tracey Horan, S.P., Sister Josefina “Pina” Bejarano Padilla, M.E., and Sister Anastacia “Tachita” Monjarez, M.E. are all staff members of Kino Border Initiative.

DURING THE OFFERTORY procession at a border Mass in Nogales, a girl carries a cross to remember the migrants who have died in the desert. Priests who come to the border offer the sacraments to the migrants they encounter.

Border Initiative, based in Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, straddles the international border. The initiative is the joint effort of six Catholic organizations on either side of the border: California Province of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit Refugee Service, the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, the Mexican Province of the Society of Jesus, the Diocese of Tucson, and the Archdiocese of Hermosillo.

Sister Tracey Horan, S.P., a Sister of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods (Indiana), is on the Kino leadership team. Her understanding of the challenges at the border evolved. “We’re ready to hear things when we’re ready,” she told the Messy Jesus Business podcast. An early inspiration had been Sister Janet Gildea, S.C., who worked at the border as a physician. When her sisters were discerning how their congrega-
tion could be of help and witness at the border, Horan stepped up. She volunteered for an assignment at Kino Border Initiative, to live among Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, a Mexican congregation, in Nogales, Sonora. There she works both in advocacy and in direct service to asylum seekers who find themselves unable to cross the border. They are particularly vulnerable and usually uncertain of where to turn next.

“We offer holistic accompaniment in the form of food, clothes, medical attention, psychological accompaniment,” explains Kino Border Initiative spokeswoman Gia Del Pino. She explains a far-reaching program that includes social work, legal assistance, humanitarian assistance, and political advocacy.

“You can imagine folks who are being discriminated against simply because they are migrating,” says Del Pino. There’s an educational component too, providing opportunities for people to come from afar and see for themselves the reality of the border.

Seeking to provide closure

Kino is one of a multitude of relief efforts along the 2,000-mile border, from California to Texas. Sister Maria Louise Edwards, C.S.S.F. is a woman who literally stopped in her tracks when she heard about Angeles del Desierto, Angels of the Desert. It’s a volunteer program with a grim mission—to scout the desert trails for human remains, looking for lost loved ones. Since 1998, 8,000 migrants have died trying to cross the border, and 3,500 are missing.

Scorching hot 100+ degree days, nights that can dip into freezing temperatures, and distances longer than promised all spell disaster. The weak are left behind to die; their bodies become food for coyotes. The Angels seek to bring closure to families who have no idea what happened to their loved ones. They find remains then report the location to legal authorities.

Edwards has been at this since 2018. She started by making wooden crosses that could be placed at the location of remains when found, but “I wanted to see for myself,” she told St. Anthony Messenger. On her first trip with the Angels, what she saw along the California-Mexico border was horrific—a woman’s rib cage and skull, then a little girl’s shoe, with part of her foot within. She told the reporter of her revulsion at the sight, then reflected on the gift that women and men religious try
FELICIAN SISTER Maria Louise Edwards, C.S.S.F. (facing page) serves as a leader in Ángeles del Desierto (Angels of the Desert), a voluntary search-and-rescue effort started by a man grieving the death of his brother, left to die in the desert by a smuggler. The Angels of the Desert operate patrols in California and Arizona, often finding human remains, to be returned to families for proper burial. Here Edwards is at the Arizona border, in the Tohono O’odham Nation, with a border officer.

LAS POSADAS Advent rituals (left) take place in many areas. The faithful reenact the unwelcome migrant experience of the Holy Family, going from house to house seeking shelter and being turned away. Kino Border Initiative sponsors the bi-national event in Nogales.

ACROSS THE BORDER in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, Kino Border Initiative operates an aid center for deported migrants. Below, a group of young men awaits dinner while chatting with members of a visiting delegation of U.S. bishops.
to bring to painful scenes: “You run toward the suffering; you don’t run away from it.”

Uplifting human dignity

Another image of mercy comes from the witness of Franciscan Brother David Buer, O.F.M. In addition to regular visits to Mexican healthcare clinics, he travels two hours to the border from his Elfrida, Arizona friary to Ajo, Arizona to volunteer with “Ajo Samaritans.” These volunteers carry gallons of water to the migrant trails in an effort to save lives.

Friar Sam Nasada, O.F.M., now pastor at Mission San Luis Rey in California was in formation when he shared in Buer’s ministry. He remembers one story well. This month their group had trekked along a

“I THINK it’s important to come from a deep contemplative space for this work,” says Franciscan Brother David Buer, O.F.M., seen here writing a hopeful message on a water jug. He travels into the desert from his community in Elfrida, Arizona, to leave life-saving jugs of water along migrant pathways. People have been tricked into longer treks than they anticipated; more than 7,000 have died in the past 20 years, among the hundreds of thousands crossing.
trail leaving water jugs and reclaiming empty ones. Then they found human remains. It was shocking. Someone called the sheriff, and as the group waited, they sat in a circle around the remains and shared faith stories. Nasada recalls, “Probably for the first time ever since his death, a group of people actually gathered around to remember him and celebrate his life.”

That uplifting of human dignity, the willingness to do even something small in the face of an enormous problem, is emblematic of these religious who minister along the border. They are pointing all of the faithful toward solidarity. They are taking seriously the gospel call, the church’s call, to stand with the least. ♦

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “Religious orders aid and advocate for migrants.”

CHILDREN (above) are a huge part of the refugee stream from Latin America, as families in desperate situations risk the journey north.

SISTER JOSEFINA “Pina” Bejarano Padilla, M.E., of Kino Border Initiative (at left), holds a backpack in front of racks of donated clothing that will be given to migrants. “We want them to feel seen as an individual, to feel valued. We want them to know their worth,” says Padilla.
You sense God might be calling you to religious life. But you lack legal status in the United States or otherwise fall into an immigration loophole. Learn the basics from two legal experts.

AS IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS working with religious organizations and international religious workers from all over the world, we know about the complexities involved in pursuing a vocation to consecrated life in the United States if you do not have citizenship.

You don’t always know where God will call you to serve. A call to consecrated life is a call to follow Christ with one’s whole heart, loving him and others the way he loved us. Obedience to that call can sometimes be challenging if you are called to serve away from the country where you were born. Does your religious vocation call you to the United States? There are several scenarios to look at.

Dreamers and others without lawful status

Let’s first look at a common situation, that of Dreamers—those born elsewhere,
brought outside the law to the United States, and raised here. In addition to Dreamers, other adults are already in the United States but lack lawful status.

Unfortunately there are no easy solutions to resolve issues of unlawful immigration status. The Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, implemented in 2012, has provided some legal protection for certain younger immigrants, but legal challenges have limited the program for the time being. Its future is also uncertain. Regardless of the few remedies available, it is still important for those individuals to speak with an experienced immigration attorney or immigration specialist who can thoroughly screen their immigration background to ensure that all possible options are considered. In addition, though it may not seem possible at the present time, there is still some hope that Congress will act to address the millions of members of our communities and their families who, but for their immigration status, benefit the United States.

Sometimes a person in discernment or initial formation with an international religious institute will be able to pursue studies and formation in the country of their birth. This option would come at a high cost, however, if the person cannot legally re-enter the United States. This may not be an advisable choice for many because of the risks and pressures it puts on the person’s discernment and formation.

Tourist visas

In addition to Dreamers and others without legal status, there are those who live outside the United States but want to come here to enter a religious institute. One way to at least begin this process—working closely with a religious community, of course—is to gain and use a tourist visa. Each year millions of visitors travel to the United States for many different reasons. Some come to visit family and friends, others to study, and others to work. For those pursuing consecrated life, various visa options may be available, including the most commonly available type: the tourist visa.

The tourist visa is also known as a B1/B2 visa. Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. Department of State would regularly grant more than 5 million B1/B2 visas each year to those seeking to visit the United States for a temporary stay. When applying for this type of visa, the applicant must show he or she intends to only visit temporarily and will return home. It is important to know that the B1/B2
becoming sisters, brothers, or priests may be interested in attending a U.S. college or university as part of their religious formation or education. They must first be accepted at the college or university. Then a designated school official must issue the student a form to apply for an F-1 student visa. As with the B1/B2 tourist visa, applicants must show their intention to visit temporarily and return home at the end of the academic program. Also, the student must be enrolled full time to maintain F-1 student status while in the United States.

For example, suppose Alex from the Philippines has been accepted at a seminary in the United States to begin education and formation to become a priest. The F-1 student visa would allow him to enter the United States and permit him to study there for four to six years. Suppose Sister Monica from Ghana has been instructed by her superior to obtain a master’s degree in education in the United States. She could use an F-1 visa to pursue her studies.

**Religious worker visa**

Finally, there are times when religious (or people becoming part of a religious community) who live in another country are called to minister in the United States. The R-1 religious worker visa program was created for international religious workers assigned or called to serve and work for a nonprofit religious organization, such as a religious institute, archdio-
cese, diocese, or parish in the United States. Through this visa program, an individual becoming a Catholic sister, brother, priest, minister, or other traditional religious occupation is permitted to come to the United States temporarily to be employed by the religious organization and pursue their religious vocation. For example, Sister Reina from El Salvador has been instructed by her superior to join their convent and community in Texas to teach religious education at a local parish for the next three years. The R-1 visa would be required for her to teach and would be appropriate for her situation. Roberto from Italy is a novice who has been assigned to complete his novitiate year at the institute’s monastery in the United States before he takes first vows. He could use an R-1 visa to complete this part of his formation before taking his vows.

The R-1 visa process is not always easy however. The religious organization must first file a petition with the immigration service. After the petition is approved, the religious worker can then apply for the R-1 visa. There can be delays in processing immigration paperwork here in the United States and at U.S. embassies or consulates abroad. The program also includes site visits by the immigration service and increased scrutiny. However, if all goes well, the religious worker will obtain an R-1 visa and be permitted to stay in the United States for a temporary time (2.5 years and then another 2.5 years if an extension is requested).

Whatever purpose brings a religious individual to the United States, there are many visa options to consider. Most important, the visitor must know the limits and permissions of his or her visa and know how long he or she may lawfully stay in the United States. We encourage all religious individuals to speak with an immigration attorney or immigration specialist so he or she fully understands the limits of the visa they use.

Consecrated life has had an international aspect to it for centuries, so these questions of moving, studying, and ministering across borders will be with us for the foreseeable future. If you are in discernment with a U.S.-based religious institute and have concerns about citizenship or visas, it is good to discuss these topics with your vocation or formation minister or your religious superior. We wish you peace and blessings as you seek to follow God’s call.

The information in this article is not intended as legal advice and should not be taken as such.
ESSENTIALS FOR THE VOCATION JOURNEY

Questions | Other vocations | Prayers

COMMON QUESTIONS

How can I enter religious life and how long does it take?

Joining a religious community takes time—typically three to nine years—and involves several stages. While these vary, the basic stages include: candidacy, novitiate, and vows. In addition, becoming a religious priest generally takes four years of college, followed by several years of seminary, a college for preparing men for priesthood.

How important is prayer?

Prayer is central to religious life both in solitude and in community. Many in religious life spend about two hours a day praying at Mass, saying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary, holy reading, or reflecting on scripture. Whatever shape it takes, prayer is a way to stay in communication with God and offer praise and thanksgiving, seek forgiveness, and petition for the needs of the world.

Do men and women religious work?

Just like most adults, religious sisters, brothers, priests, and nuns spend a portion of each day working—some in paid jobs related to their community’s charism, or spirit of the community; others in the ministries of their religious institute. The work of those in religious life often centers around serving others. Religious strive to share their lives with others and reveal Christ in all they do.

After people enter religious life, what happens if they are attracted to others in a romantic way?

Sisters, brothers, priests, and nuns experience normal human needs, feelings, and desires. As celibate people they choose to channel those feelings into other healthy directions. They work at remaining faithful to their vows of chastity through prayer, closeness to Jesus, good friendships, and physical exercise. It isn’t always easy to remain faithful to one’s vows, no matter one’s life’s calling. Dealing with challenges honestly can make a vocation stronger.

Can I spend time with family and friends after I enter religious life?

Each religious community has its own policies, and some, particularly cloistered, are fairly restrictive. However, all communities recognize that the support of loved ones is crucial for novices as well as vowed members and encourage contact with family and friends.

OTHER VOCATIONS

GOD CALLS all of us to be true to ourselves and live in ways that bring us the greatest joy, whether that be within marriage, single life, holy orders, consecrated life, or other vocations, such as:

Associates Single and married laypeople who have a close bond with religious communities that offer this form of membership. Associates commit to integrating the community’s charism, or spirit, into their way of life and usually take part in some activities of the community.

Secular third orders Laypeople who follow the inspiration and guidance of a religious institute in their daily lives. Third order members are usually received into the religious community in a particular ceremony and pledge themselves to certain prayers and religious practices.

permanent deacons Men ordained to minister in preaching, liturgy, counseling, and other forms of service in a diocese after a formal period of formation. Deacons may be married at the time they receive Holy Orders.

Diocesan hermits A relatively rare but ancient form of life that involves living a life of prayer and contemplation in solitude with the approval of the bishop.

Secular institutes A form of consecrated life in which members commit to a life of celibate chastity, poverty, and obedience while providing Christian witness wherever they live and work.

Consecrated virgins Women who commit to living in perpetual virginity supervised by the her local bishop. Candidates for consecration must be women who have never been married, had children, or lived in violation of chastity.

Lay ecclesial movements Church organizations focused on a particular ministry or spirituality, or both. Examples include Cursillo and Focolare.

VOCATION PRAYERS

Prayer for discernment

LORD, help me to:

BOLDLY take charge of my life, aim for the most beautiful and profound things, and keep my heart pure.

RESPOND to your call, with the aid of wise and generous guides, and realize a proper plan for my life to achieve true happiness.

DREAM great dreams and always have a concern for the good of others.

STAND with you at the foot of the cross and receive the gift of your mother.

WITNESS to your Resurrection and the hope it brings.

BE AWARE that you are at my side as I joyously proclaim you as Lord. AMEN. —Pope Francis

Prayer for focus

Dear LORD, focus my faith on you. Like Mary, Blessed Virgin, help me to concentrate on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious. I give you praise.

Dear LORD, focus my hope on you. Like Paul the Apostle, help me to concentrate on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious. I give you praise.

Dear LORD, focus my love on you. Like Julian of Norwich, doctor of the church, help me to rest assured that all shall be well. Show me your meaning in all things, which is Love. I give you thanks. AMEN. —Vision Vocation Guide

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Find more information on religious vocations, religious life today, and discerning a vocation as a Catholic sister, nun, brother, or priest at VocationNetwork.org/en/articles/archive
Although the terms neglected, and underserved, particularly with the abandoned, to serving wherever the need is greatest, of dedicating their prayer and ministry from a nun, who lives an enclosed, or active, religious institute, distinct professes public vows to an apostolic, A woman religious who SISTER makes promises of obedience and poverty or community living.

VOCATION 

vo-ˈkā-shən noun: a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action, especially to the religious life; a response to one’s baptismal call to follow Jesus as a disciple in a life of holiness and service. From Latin vocatio (summons) and earlier vocare (to call) from vox (voice).»

WOMEN AND MEN IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

SISTER A woman religious who professes public vows to an apostolic, or active, religious institute, distinct from a nun, who lives an enclosed, contemplative life. Sisters have a legacy of dedicating their prayer and ministry to serving wherever the need is greatest, particularly with the abandoned, neglected, and underserved.

NUN Although the terms nun and sister are often used interchangeably, a nun belongs to a contemplative order, lives in a cloister, and devotes the majority of her time to prayer for the good of the world.

BROTHER A brother publicly professes vows to God and models his commitment by serving others as a minister of mercy and compassion in ways that express the charism of his religious institute. Striving to imitate Christ, a brother relates to others as Jesus did, as a brother to all.

PRIEST A religious priest professes vows in a religious institute and is ordained through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. A religious, or order, priest is accountable to his major superior and the other members of his community, as well as to the local bishop and the people he serves in ministry. Religious priests take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and any additional vows of their community. A diocesan priest is ordained through the Sacrament of Holy Orders to serve the local church primarily through parish ministry in a specific diocese/archdiocese. He is accountable to his bishop and the people he serves. A diocesan priest makes promises of obedience and celibacy to his bishop, but not vows of poverty or community living.

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS Vocations

APOTOLIC Apostolic religious communities are engaged primarily in active ministries. While prayer and community are important elements of their life, members serve in many ways, including education, parish and youth ministry, healthcare, social work, and care for poor and elderly people.

CLOISTERED Contemplative religious communities are often cloistered or partially cloistered—that is, they live separated from the rest of the world to be more focused on prayer. As cloistered religious they rarely leave their monasteries, and all or most of their work is done within the monastery itself.

CONTEMPLATIVE Contemplative religious communities focus on daily communal prayer, especially the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours, and individual prayer, such as lectio divina, which is the prayerful reading of scripture. They live in relative solitude so that they can better direct their prayer and work toward contemplation, though some contemplative communities are engaged in active apostolic ministries.

MONASTIC Monastic men and women place a high value on prayer and living in community, but many are also engaged in active ministries, such as preaching, teaching, and spiritual direction. Monasticism centers on community life, work, and common and individual prayer.

MISSIONARY Missionary communities focus on promulgating the gospel in other countries or areas of their own country where the church is not yet present in a robust form. Missionaries serve in many different places in such ministries as preaching, teaching, advocacy, social services, and other forms of witness.

WAY OF LIFE

CHARISM A religious community’s spirit, way of life, and focus, which grows out of its history, traditions, and founder. From the Greek charisma meaning “gift,” charism guides decisions about mission and ministry.

VOWS Members of religious communities—priests, sisters, nuns, and brothers—and others in consecrated life, such as members of secular institutes, take vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Many communities add a fourth or fifth vow related to their charism, such as stability, hospitality, or service to the poor. In most religious communities new members take temporary vows for a specified length of time—and they may renew those temporary vows. The last, binding step is to profess perpetual, or final, vows.

PROCESS TO ENTER

DISCERNMENT The process of reflecting and praying about how to respond to God’s call to follow Jesus as a disciple in a particular way of life. This time often involves prayer, spiritual direction, wise counsel, and holy reading.

FORMATION Education and spiritual development that takes place after joining a religious community.

POSTULANT A candidate requesting membership in a religious community before becoming a novice. The period of postulancy usually lasts six months to two years, during which time the candidate lives within the community while continuing his or her education or work experience.

NOVICE A new member taking part in the initial stage of entering a religious community. The novice is typically involved in discernment and formation activities, including studying the community’s charism, history, constitution, and way of life and learning more about themselves and their faith lives. This novitiate period usually lasts from 12 to 24 months. Novices then may go on to take their first profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

PROFESSION The religious rite in which a person formally enters a religious community by making public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, among others. Typically religious make first profession and then three to nine years later perpetual profession, or final vows.
VOCATION BASICS

Timeline of religious life through the ages

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<td><strong>EARLY CHRISTIAN</strong></td>
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<th><strong>EARLY MIDDLE AGES</strong></th>
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<td>1009-1300</td>
<td>Cistercian order (Trappists) greatly increases in number and influence with the help of French monk Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. The first Cistercian monastery for women is established in Dijon, France in 1125.</td>
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<td>1112-1134</td>
<td>Saint Norbert combines a monastic regimen with parish work, foreshadowing the coming of the mendicant, or begging, orders and their service in cities. A double monastery of canons and nuns is established at Prémontré, France. The Norbertine Third Order, or lay association—the first of its kind—is founded. Often referred to as associates, tertiaries, lay associates, or secular tertiaries, such associations continue today.</td>
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<th><strong>HIGH MIDDLE AGES</strong></th>
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<td>1150-1244</td>
<td>Mendicant orders emerge. In contrast with the previous emphasis on contemplative life and stability, members are free to travel to preach the gospel and respond to the needs of the poor. The four major mendicant orders are the Carmelites (1150), Franciscans (1209), Dominicans (1216), and Augustinians (1244).</td>
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<td>910</td>
<td>Benedictine Abbey of Cluny in central France spearheads reform of the medieval church and produces leaders who become bishops and popes.</td>
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© VISION Vocation Guide | A downloadable 4-page Vocation Basics handout available at VocationNetwork.org.
Timeline of religious life through the ages

1209 | Saint Francis of Assisi founds a new order. In 1212 Saint Clare joins him and establishes a community for women (Poor Clares). She is the first woman to write rules for monastic life. Over the centuries diverse Franciscan men's and women's communities emerge, with members exercising influence as teachers and evangelizers and promoting piety practices, such as the Christmas crèche, Angelus, and Stations of the Cross.

1242 | Saint Thomas Aquinas joins the Dominicans in 1242. Among the greatest theologians, study of his works is required for those seeking ordination or entrance in religious life.

1348 | Catherine of Siena enters public life after years spent in solitude as a tertiary Dominic. Se champions spiritual reform and church unity and has the ear of the pope. Named a doctor of the church— one of four women so designated.

1517 | Augustinian priest Martin Luther proposes his 95 Theses for church reform in Wittenberg, Germany, resulting in his excommunication and symbolic beginning the Protestant Reformation and its accompanying social and religious upheaval.

1534-5 | Saint Teresa of Ávila and Saint John of the Cross, influential mystics and writers, begin their reform of the Carmelite order in Spain.

1540 | Jesuits are founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Their efforts in education and mission continue to wield global influence. Missionary activities of Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians expand globally.

1545-63 | Council of Trent encourages renewal of religious orders and new forms of religious life.

1617 | Synod of Trent marks the 15th century and the beginning of the Reformation and its religious upheaval. Symbolically starting the Protestant Reformation and its accompanying social and religious upheaval.

1625 | Council of Trent (1625) issues Decrees on Sacred Scripture and Holy Scripture.

1789 | American colonies declare independence from Great Britain.

1809 | Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton founds the first apostolic community of women in the United States in 1809.

1890-1965 | The 19th century and the Industrial Revolution see the growth of new forms of religious life. Orders and new forms of religious life are established, including the Sisters of Mercy and the Daughters of Charity. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) encourages the formation of secular institutes, a distinct form of consecrated life that vows poverty, obedience, and chastity without communal life.

1962-65 | Second Vatican Council convenes to reestablish the church. Religious communities are urged to return to their original charism, or guiding spirit, as well as to respond to the needs of the times. All aspects of religious life, including consecrated life, experience significant change.

1978 | Pope John Paul II declares a Jubilee Year of Mercy.

2009 | Ground-breaking Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life (NRV/CARA) sets benchmarks for the new millennium. The 2020 follow-up study confirms that after a steep decline in the late 20th century, entries to religious life remain steady.

2013-23 | Pope Francis, a Jesuit, draws attention to religious life when he is elected in 2013. He is one of 34 religious institute members to become pope. The church designates 2015 as the Year of Consecrated Life, and in 2018 Francis convenes an international synod of bishops on “Young people, the faith, and vocational discernment.” The 2023 World Youth Day marks the 15th international gathering of youth, lay ministers, clergy, and religious first convened by Saint John Paul II in 1986.

Ongoing | In response to God’s call, people continue to discern religious vocations, enter consecrated life, and find new religious communities.
Religious communities have deep and diverse roots

Religious communities often have deep roots and long, varied cultural histories. Read on to learn about the many ways that cultural and ethnic heritage is lived and celebrated in religious life today.

For nearly 2,000 years, religious life has developed and shape-shifted while always staying true to its mission of discipleship. As the world has grown more interconnected, so too has religious life taken on an increasingly global character.

All of the following communities are located in the United States, but their cultural heritage comes from around the globe. Some of these are religious institutes that came here from Europe to serve Catholic immigrants. Others are U.S.-initiated communities with members who represent the many cultures within the country. Regardless, their members are proud of their multiethnic heritage, and they find many ways to celebrate it. Food, dance, song, prayer, art—nothing is spared when these sisters, priests, and brothers engage in celebrations. They also incorporate their ethnic and cultural strands in their worship, community life, ministry, and more. Read on for a glimpse of the many colors of religious institute heritage.

For more, see the 2024 Spotlight article online at vocationnetwork.org.
AN IRISH BLESSING

I Grew up in Ireland and was impressed by missionaries who came to visit our school and tell us of their work. It was then that the seeds were sown for me to become a sister," says Sister Helen Cahill, F.M.O.L. For many years Cahill was an oncology nurse, and today she is a chaplain in a mental and behavioral health unit. "I admire the strength and courage it takes to deal with emotional pain," she says. View the video of Cahill delivering a traditional Irish blessing in the 2024 Spotlight article online at vocation-network.org or scan the QR on page 52.

—Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System Internal Communications

CHURCH IS A UNIVERSAL CALLING

AS I DISCERNED MY FRANCISCAN VOCATION, I participated in many liturgies that grabbed my attention and heart. They began when Sister Edward Marie blew on the conch shell as a call to worship, ribbons waved in the air, and there were hulas and songs in Spanish and Hawaiian. They captivated me and deepened my understanding of my Catholic faith as church universal. That was 18 years ago. We no longer blow the conch shell before liturgies, but the feeling of church universal remains," says Sister Caryn Crook, O.S.F.

The conch shell was a tradition tied to Hawaii, where the community has served for generations, beginning with efforts to aid those with leprosy.

"More than ever, we must now take every opportunity to know other cultures, learn to appreciate them and understand the importance and richness of interculturality. Cultural diversity is a vehicle for development, social cohesion and peace. It makes us more open and understanding because it gives us meaning, makes us unique and encourages us to share," says Crook.

"Putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes does not mean becoming the other person; it is for understanding more than just one point of view. Today our sisters continue to learn and grow in honoring God’s wonderful, diverse creation."

—Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities
**NOT BY BREAD ALONE**

**WHEN I JOINED** a religious community founded in the United States by Slovak immigrants, I expected to enjoy delicious ethnic dishes and desserts like halushki, pierogies, poppyseed bobalki, and fruit kolache. After all, growing up in the ethnic neighborhoods of Pittsburgh I attended many parish festivals with these doughy delights. What I was surprised to learn was that these meatless meals would become regular Friday suppers because we abstain from meat (or engage in acts of charity) every Friday for the intention of world peace. In fact, during my very first visit to the community I was served a simple plate of cheese-filled pierogies.

The ethnic traditions within our Saints Cyril and Methodius community have been passed along through the decades from sister to sister. One is the custom of placing a statue of St. Joseph in the convent food pantry. As a provider, St. Joseph ensures that the cupboard shelves will not grow bare. I myself have a beautiful wooden carved image of the Holy Family that sits on the kitchen shelf. It is a visual reminder to pray for our sisters and brothers who lack consistent access to food in order to live active, healthy lives.

—Sister Deborah Borneman, SS.C.M.

**HONOR YOUR ANCESTORS**

**THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS** of Saint Placid Priory in Lacey, Washington celebrate Day of the Dead, an important festival in Mexican and Mexican-American culture. The history of the festival stretches back to pre-conquest Mexico when the celebration of one’s ancestors among indigenous peoples would last more than a month, says Sister Paz Vital, O.S.B. After the Spanish conquest and evangelization of Mexico, church officials encouraged a blending of the indigenous and Catholic customs on November 1, All Saints Day (which is followed on November 2 with All Souls Day).

“The Day of the Dead is not just a day to remember and honor our dead, but also a day to protest,” says Vital. “I choose to protest for the migrants’ conditions and the children’s separation from their parents. At St. Placid in our petitions we remember the children and their parents and all the people at the border waiting for their petitions to be answered.”

—St. Placid Priory

**GIVING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION A LEGO UP**

**SISTER ELIZABETH ANN** DeMerchant, I.H.M. used Legos to build a replica of the log cabin in which the three original members of her religious community lived in the mid-1800s. Her use of art to teach religion and history is firmly within the tradition of the community. The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton was co-founded by a Redemptorist priest and Oblate Sister of Providence and then I.H.M. Sister Theresa Maxis Duchemin. The Redemptorist priests passed along their use of art and music as teaching tools.

The Lego log cabin has not been DeMerchant’s only creation. She regularly uses Legos and projects of STREAM (Science, Technology, Religion, English, Art, and Math) to teach religion at All Saints Academy in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

—Sister Elizabeth A. DeMerchant, I.H.M.
WORLDWIDE WITNESSES OF LOVE

A PRIEST FROM INDONESIA, Cameroon, and Texas walk into a church . . . . It sounds like the opening line to a tacky bar joke. But on the Lower Brule and Crow Creek reservations in South Dakota, it’s just another weekend Mass. Served by the Priests of the Sacred Heart (also called the Dehonians), the Lower Brule Pastoral Ministry Team includes priests from these diverse backgrounds. Other ministries of the Priests of the Sacred Heart are run by teams of priests and brothers with similarly varied ethnicities and cultures.

Since their beginnings in the late 1800s in France—where they were founded to address the needs of the poor and challenge social injustice—this congregation of missionary priests and brothers has established ministries in more than 40 countries. Their mission is to be witnesses of God’s transforming love in souls and society and to spread God’s love around the world with open heart and mind.

—Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians)

REORDERED BORDERS

THE MEMBERSHIP of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace has changed from its founding days in 1884 in Nottingham, England. For many years, it received members from Canada, Ireland, England, and the United States. More recently, the community has welcomed new members from beyond the usual borders, including India, Kenya, and Korea.

“The acknowledgment and realization of how racial bias has led to biased membership decisions and white privilege continue to impact the congregation and are still a work in progress since 2011,” writes Sister Jo-Anne Miller, C.S.J.P. The openness to acknowledge the emerging diversity of our C.S.J.P. membership has led to demanding a change of heart to be, think, and act differently.”

—Sister Jo-Anne Miller, C.S.J.P.
**TIES THAT BIND**

**THE ALEXIAN BROTHERS** community includes men from a variety of cultural and ethnic traditions. Brother Exequiel Mapa, C.F.A. says, “Making little, conscious efforts to come together and uniquely recognize individuals on special days helps us establish closer relationships.” Special days might be feast days, birthdays, or other milestones.

—Congregation of Alexian Brothers

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**CULTURES CHERISHED, COMMUNITIES STRENGTHENED**

**FROM A SMALL GROUP** of women reaching out to the poor in Germany in the mid-1800s, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ have become an international congregation present in nine countries.

“Each [has] its own distinctive culture, language, and accent when [we] speak English,” says Sister Edith Schneider, P.H.J.C. “We are beginning to experience changing structures which will bring us more opportunities to live interculturally and to cherish community bonds with sisters from varied ethnic backgrounds.”

“We look forward with hope to continued growth as a congregation,” she continues. Listen to the community singing a Spanish and English song in the 2024 Spotlight article online at vocationnetwork.org or scan the QR on page 52.

—Sister Connie Bach, P.H.J.C.

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**TRANS PACIFIC TRADE**

**THE SISTERS** of Charity of Seton Hill, Pennsylvania, have a province in Korea with sisters serving in 11 dioceses there. Each winter native Korean members of that province lead an annual celebration of the Lunar New Year at the U.S. province motherhouse. Called Seollal, the celebration involves food, games, ancestral rites, and more. At the end of the festivities, the Korean sisters pay respect to their elders by taking a deep bow called se-bae. In return, the sisters who live in the U.S. motherhouse offer blessings and thanks in song and applause for deepening interculturality in the community.

—Lynn Wagner
ACKNOWLEDGING AND HEALING PAST SINS

MORE THAN 177 YEARS AGO, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (I.H.M.) were founded in Monroe, Michigan by Mother Theresa Maxis Duchemin, O.S.P. and Father Louis Florent Gillet, C.Ss.R. a Redemptorist priest and Belgian immigrant. Duchemin was a U.S.-born biracial woman, daughter of a Haitian refugee and a British military officer. Duchemin was involved in the beginnings of two religious congregations: first the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore and then, when the demise of the Oblate Sisters seemed imminent, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Duchemin set aside her identity as a woman of color and established herself in the white community. For many years Theresa's ethnic heritage was muted within the congregation. Her background, however, was known to the bishops, and ultimately it became an underlying motivation for her expulsion from the I.H.M. congregation in Monroe.

The subsequent split of the local communities in Monroe and Pennsylvania led to the establishment of the three autonomous I.H.M. congregations that still exist today: Monroe, Scranton, and Immaculata. Along with our Oblate Sisters in Baltimore, we Sisters of I.H.M. own and openly admit that the dynamics of racism influenced our beginnings and impacted the unfolding of our four histories. Therefore, we commit ourselves to the work of undoing racism. On the eighth day of each month, we pray together “A Prayer for Racial Healing.” Scan the QR on page 52 to read the prayer online.

—Sister Candyce Rekart, I.H.M.

HERITAGE IN REEL LIFE

THE SISTERS OF ST. MARY OF OREGON are captured on video celebrating the Vietnamese New Year with traditional attire, dance, and cuisine.

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NAZARETH, KENTUCKY share videos used during the congregation's Foundation Day celebration. The videos show a sharing of the soil symbolizing the connected of their various global ministries, and prayer is also carried out in different languages and styles. Scan the QR on page 52 to view these communities’ videos.

ADDING MUSIC TO THE MIX

I AM A SECOND-GENERATION Mexican American whose roots are in deep South Texas,” says Brother Ignacio González, O.S.B., oblate director for his Benedictine community. “My monastery is in our nation's capital. My heritage enriches the community because of the 12 of us monks, I am the only one of Hispanic descent, and my understanding of the faith is rooted in Mexico’s 500-year-old tradition of honoring our Lord Jesus through La Virgen de Guadalupe.” Scan the QR on page 52 to hear González singing a hymn in Spanish.

—Brother Ignacio González, O.S.B.
PRIOR TO MAY 24, 2022, when a lone gunman massacred 21 people at Robb Elementary School, most of the country had never heard of Uvalde, Texas. Despite living only a few hours away, Sister Regina Hlavac, D.C. also had not. Two days prior to the mass killing she drove through the small town on her way to and from a retreat in Del Rio, Texas. She commented to another sister in the car, “This is such a quaint, beautiful, and peaceful town that I'll have to return to visit.” That return happened sooner than expected.

Once Uvalde was thrust into the national spotlight and it was apparent that the town’s loss was beyond measure, Hlavac felt impelled to return to Uvalde and serve among the people. “Uvalde is in my backyard. I just knew I had to do some-
A GROUP VIEWS a mural of one of children who died during the school shooting in Uvalde Texas in May 2022. The child's mother receives a hug.

COURTESY OF SISTER REGINA HLAVAC, D.C.
thing! I wasn’t exactly sure what it was I was meant to do or be for the people there, but I knew I had to do and be something.”

As she prayed about how best to respond, the Holy Spirit moved quickly and Hlavac received an invitation from Catholic Extension to serve at a summer camp for students from Robb Elementary. The goal of the summer camp was to offer the children and their families hope, love, and support. She felt like this was a direct invitation from God, a way to respond to the longing in her heart to be present to the Uvalde community after the tragedy.

**Healing takes many forms**

Camp I-CAN served rising third, fourth, and fifth graders from Robb Elementary. I-CAN stands for “inner strength, commitment, awareness, and networking.” Recognizing that healing from trauma takes many forms, the sisters and volunteers artfully wove in spiritual activities that allowed students to pray and share their feelings with games like table tennis, air hockey, cornhole, and arts and crafts. Twenty-five students from Robb Elementary attended the four-day camp held in July of 2022. The sisters worked to give the children a sense of normalcy. Of course, after a major tragedy, normalcy is often difficult to obtain.

As is common in religious life today, this ministry was inter-congregational. Hlavac was one of 13 sisters who responded to the call to serve at Camp I-CAN. The sisters represented eight different communities, including the Society of St. Teresa of Jesus, Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, Brigidine Sisters, Comboni Missionary Sisters, Sisters of St. Francis of Penance, Sisters of Christian Charity, Siervas del Divino Rostro (Servants of the Divine Face), and the Daughters of Charity, and traveled from Michigan, California, San Antonio, and Uvalde to minister for that week. Together, the sisters formed their own community. They began each day with shared prayer and supported one another as they built community with the students and volunteers.

The camp was a testament to the power and transformation that comes from prayer, community, and fun. During the first days of Camp I-
CAN, Hlavac recalls that some of the children were reserved and unwilling to let their parents leave for the day. Hlavac tells the story of a young boy who asked to have his mother stay with him on the first day. He would not accept a camp T-shirt. “The next day, he said, “I’ll take one of those T-shirts, and Mom, you can go home now.” Something Hlavac wants people to know about the campers: They showed resilience and an ability to move from trauma to trust.

**Build community, build strength**

The community-building didn’t stop with the children. The sisters had opportunities to form bonds with the childrens’ parents and other family members who joined their campers.
each day for lunch and supper. The adults also needed support, a listening ear, and a loving heart because they, too, experienced heart-wrenching loss. In fact, the entire town was grieving.

“I remember watching an artist painting murals of the victims,” says Hlavac. “One woman came day after day as the artist worked on a particular portrait. When the artist finished, the woman just sobbed. It was a portrait of her child.”

The stories of sorrow and healing continue. Several sisters on the original ministry team continued to visit for weekend activities and outreach. Hlavac volunteers in the third-grade classroom of Sacred Heart School, where a number of children from Robb Elementary are now students, thanks to scholarships given by Catholic Extension.

About six months after the shooting, sisters put on a retreat for parents and grandparents and sponsored activities for their children to enable the adults to attend. Among the parents, says Hlavac, “There were a lot of tears but a lot of hope.” She emphasizes that point: “We and they gave each other hope. That was the main thrust of it all.”

Everyone has been affected by the tragedy that happened on that beautiful spring day. But Hlavac is quick to point out that the healers became healed as well to transform tragedy to joy, hate to love—that was the gift children of Uvalde shared with the world. “We should be the ones thanking the families,” says Hlavak, “for we came to be the face of Christ for others in their pain and we ended up seeing the face of Christ in the faith, hope, and love of the children of Uvalde.”

VISION editors also contributed to this story.

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “In search of healing, one story at a time.”
PARENTS and other family members were invited to share lunches during the camp, allowing the sisters to lend a listening ear to affected adults and siblings. They also joined the camp each evening for supper.

ANY NORMAL school sign is not surrounded by grave markers, but Robb Elementary and the town of Uvalde was convulsed in pain after 21 people were shot to death on what should have been an ordinary day in May winding down the 2021-22 school year.
We only have one rule.

Luckily, it’s a really good one.
So you’re thinking that you might be called to religious life. That’s exciting…and more than a little scary.

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It took some time for Sister Karina Conrad, C.D.P. to find her calling, but today she is part of a life-giving community, and as a therapist she helps others find fuller lives too.

THE THING ABOUT God’s call is that it nags you until you respond. Then, it nags you more until you get it right. Sister Karina Conrad, C.D.P knows plenty about both experiences because it took time for her to get it right.

In the crosshairs
It was July 4, 2022. Conrad was relaxing in the Chicago-area home she shares with another Catholic sister. It had been a long week at the two behavioral
health clinics where she served. No fireworks or parades were on her schedule. She planned to enjoy the quiet. At the moment, she was scrolling through Facebook posts on her phone.

Then she saw the breaking news: An active shooter was mowing people down at the nearby Highland Park parade. Videos from parade-goers showed families running, belongings scattered, as they tried to escape the attacker. Carnage and chaos were replacing what had been a happy celebration with floats, American flags, candy, and patriotic music.

“I got an urgent email asking for Spanish-speaking therapists. I prayed, ‘God, what do I do?’ I felt God answer, Go. They need you. I’m with you. I had never helped someone through this kind of trauma before. I’d never thought I would need to. You never think a shooting is going to happen in your backyard.”

Conrad waded into the crosshairs of shock, grief, and a landscape of human lives lost, gouged, and forever changed. Although she’s still processing the experience more than a year later, she’s certain of two things: It affirmed she is on the right path, and it deepened her gratitude that the right path—and place—finally materialized.

It just took much longer than she had anticipated.

**First nudges**

Conrad’s first inkling that she was being called happened after what she calls her “grumpy face phase,” the attitude she brought to her Miami parish church every Sunday throughout her adolescence. *What did Mass have to do with her? That phase lasted until she found herself in a pew at Confirmation, checking the last box off her Catholic-child-must-do list. She was sitting there only because she was supposed to be sitting there.*
Then something happened. “I felt something as I was anointed with oil. Peace started running through my body. I really felt it. Then the bishop asked, “Has anyone ever thought about becoming a sister or priest?” Of course, I never had. But suddenly I wanted so much to raise my hand. I looked behind me, but no one was raising theirs, so I didn’t raise mine.”

Conrad’s Costa Rican mother had insisted her daughter complete the Confirmation process (her Cuban father didn’t practice a faith). But her parents had also been affirming of her questioning nature. So Conrad always felt supported, no matter how she challenged convention.

Conrad didn’t know what her Confirmation experiences meant, but she was moved by them. She joined the church youth group and began attending Mass willingly. She explored a more personal relationship with God. She also gave voice to the artist within by enrolling in an “eye-opening” performing arts high school as an accomplished clarinetist. “It shaped me a lot. The arts, the
creativity, all kinds of people. It was incredibly diverse—races, sexual orientation.”

**Irreconcilable differences**

As Conrad tested her faith in the real world of classmates, she grew in her confidence that all are sacred children of God. Simultaneously, she began to feel what she understands today as a call to religious life.

“I did regular dating. Movies, coffee. Then in college I met a group of apostolic sisters I liked. They were doing amazing service in the world. I loved the vocation director.”

She began active discernment with the community, leaving college to enter it at the age of 21. The things in her life that had once seemed important—school, friends, a profession—paled in comparison with the urgency she felt to become a Catholic sister.

“My parents weren’t happy about me leaving college. There were other red flags I ignored as well. I was the only U.S.-born Latina. It was very conservative. They practiced unquestioning obedience.”

Conrad persisted for eight years, trying to fit the community’s definition of a good sister: one who is unquestioning of the superior’s authority, obeys wholeheartedly, and pursues deep friendship with no one but God. For a questioner who valued deep friendship with many people, trying to fit in there was like trying to shove a round peg into a square hole.

**Still called ... somewhere**

A Catholic sister’s initial formation lasts for several years, typically including postulancy, novitiate, and temporary profession. Its purpose is to allow further discernment for both the woman and her community before final profession. It’s not uncommon for the woman, or her community, or both to decide to end the relationship, but—as with any breakup—it can be painful.

Conrad knew it was the right decision, and she was devastated.

“I would have been depressed my whole life if I had stayed. I didn’t feel it was OK to be me there. I still felt called to be a sister, to be with other women on this journey. But would another community ever want me? Could I even be me as a sister?”

Conrad moved back in with her family and got a job as a pastoral associate with a parish. She read, prayed, and spent time with her spiritual director, a Sister of Divine Providence. She began to heal.

“Well-meaning friends tried to set me up with dates. But I wasn’t ready for that. I still felt called [to religious life]. I finally asked my spiritual director about her community. She put me in touch with their vocation director, and I visited their motherhouse in Pittsburgh. I watched the sisters together. They were obviously friends. They laughed. Their charism also drew me: Making God’s providence visible to the world. I felt like they were making God’s providence visible to me.”

That providence was nearly palpable. Indeed, it felt like home.

“The C.D.P.s were welcoming of
me. They have room for everyone. There was room for my questions. For my curiosity. I could create friendships. I was able to be me. It was such a relief.”

Two years after leaving her first community, Conrad entered the Congregation of Divine Providence in Pittsburgh.

**Life as a Sister of Divine Providence**

Back on course, Conrad finished college and went on to earn a master’s degree in counseling. She graduated in 2018 and, shortly after, professed final vows and moved to Chicago to begin her ministry. Today she counsels undocumented Latinas at El Circulo, a sponsored ministry of the international Catholic Sisters’ Society of Helpers on the southwest side of Chicago.

“There’s a lot of trauma in the undocumented community. A lot of poverty. It’s a hard life.”

As the lone bilingual counselor, Conrad is working on creating a support structure for therapists who work alone. She would need a network of support as she responded to the most urgent and difficult chal-
July 2022

Conrad walked into Highland Park High School alongside other therapists, detectives, Red Cross representatives, and volunteers carrying stuffed animals, toys, and food. It had been designated the Family Assistance Center for anyone affected by the shooting. Kids played. Therapy dogs cuddled. People searched through piles of belongings for what they had dropped while running.

Conrad turned in to the classroom for therapists, where she waited to be called in for Spanish-speaking patients.

“It was the first time I was in such a crisis, seeing families in such acute pain. The numbness. The dissociation. They were like zombies. Listening to their stories was painful and tragic, and God was present.”

One young woman ran with the crowd to the back of a restaurant and into the kitchen. To protect those already inside, she shut the door against the shooter, and everyone else fleeing him.

“She felt so guilty for shutting people out. She had to live with the...
guilt of that. But I saw God, and hope I helped her see God. She had done it to protect innocent life, and was grieving those she could not help. It was tragic, but it was also a loving and blessed moment.”

Outside, an elderly man had been knocked down in the panic and lay there, looking up. “He saw a woman get shot and fill with light. Her whole being filled with light as she died. God was already there, ready to take her. This was transformational for me spiritually.”

Why live as a Catholic sister?
Unlike single women of the past, single women today have much more freedom to pursue the educational or professional path that attracts them. They don’t need to enter the convent to live a life of prayer and service. So why become a sister at all? Community and the communal support in life, work, faith, and prayer is a dominant reason for many modern women.

Conrad, who also serves as a vocation minister for her congregation, says, “My Divine Providence sisters helped me reclaim my self. I know I’m where I am supposed to be. But there are losses. I will never be married, or have children. I’ll never own my own car. I’m often not in control of my own schedule.”

Of course, there are losses on any path, as well as extraordinary gains. “Thanks to my sisters, I’m bringing God’s healing to others. I am aware of how sacred it is. I couldn’t do it without them.”

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “My millennial response to a perennial call.”
What have you enjoyed most about ministry as a sister?
I teach at Holy Family School in Lafayette, Louisiana, and my favorite part is teaching religion to the young children. Before I started teaching, I also liked feeding the poor who would come to the door of the motherhouse.

How did your family respond to you joining a religious community?
They were supportive about it; they encourage me to allow God to lead me where he wants me to go.

Do you have any favorite saints?
Saint Martin De Porres, Saint Jude, and Saint Anthony.

Favorite way to pray?
Alone in a very quiet place.

Any surprises so far in religious life?
Teaching religion to the young kids is something I never thought I could do. God’s presence is in their smiles. That experience of seeing God in them allows me to share his love with them and tell them about the life of Jesus.

Seeing God in a child’s smile

SISTER MARIE ELIZABETH JERRY, S.S.F.
Sister Marie Elizabeth Jerry, S.S.F. grew up in the Baptist Church and converted to Catholicism as a young adult. She met her community, the Sisters of the Holy Family, while volunteering in their New Orleans convent garden. The sisters encouraged her to attend a retreat that proved decisive: “At that moment I knew God was calling me to come live with the sisters,” Jerry says about talking with the sisters during the retreat. Today Jerry is a member of the community, which is one of only three religious institutes in the world founded by an African American.
The secret’s out: Brotherhood is a great vocation!

Dan Masterton is a lay vocation minister with the Viatorian Community and a writer who has published two books on ministry with the National Catholic Educational Association. Find his writing at linktr.ee/danmasterton.

Catholic brothers sometimes say they’re the best-kept secret in the church. These remarkable men are quietly doing life-altering ministry and prayer—together, in community, alongside laity.

SOMETIMES RELIGIOUS BROTHERS are described by what they are not. Brothers are not priests, do not preside at sacraments, and cannot be parish pastors. However, no vocation should be noted mainly for what it isn’t, for God’s invitation is always positive, an active opportunity to respond.

Brother Rob Robertson, C.S.V., a brother with decades as a member of the Viatorians, describes brotherhood more fully: “I could be doing the exact same thing that I do as a religious if I were a layperson, but the fact that I’m doing it as a religious brother allows me to do it more generously and more freely. My time is
Men who seek rich community life, dedication to prayer, solidarity with the laity, and the chance to be profoundly present to the people of God ought to give religious brotherhood a good, long look.

completely about my ministry. When I come home, I come home thinking about how I can minister more. What more can I do?” When he’s home with his brothers, a unifying force is their shared dedication to the same mission.

His confrere, Brother Peter Lamick, C.S.V., adds an important detail: “Everyone can do the things I do—I’m trying to set an example and spread the joy for living those gospel values. We do a lot of the ministries laypeople do, and there’s a solidarity with laypeople.”

For these men, living their religious life as perpetually professed brothers in apostolic community, the draw was and is the chance to immerse themselves completely in ministry, service, and community life—especially prayer. While the life of a brother may be similar to that of a layperson, the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience govern their lives in a distinctive way. Plus, the steadiness of prayer and community life with a religious community brings a nourishing structure.

Men who seek rich community life, dedication to prayer, solidarity with the laity, and the chance to be profoundly present to the people of God ought to give religious brotherhood a good, long look. There are two basic types of brothers: apostolic (active, ministry-oriented) and monastic (focused on prayer in a monastery).

Apostolic religious life
Apostolic religious communities read the signs of the times and seek to bring to life the vision of their founder. This means going places and serving the people of God in a variety of ways.

As such, these religious brothers are placed in ministries where they can take their community’s spirituality into interpersonal work and ministerial accompaniment. Their work
In any case, men who continue into religious life in a monastic community will spend most or all of their lives on the monastery grounds, working and praying with that group of men. Each monastery has its own personality in the way it prays, interprets the vows, and so on. While all religious brothers are dedicated to prayer and community life, the main distinction from apostolic brotherhood is that monks live solely in their enclosed community while apostolic brothers could be placed anywhere that their community ministers.

Monastic religious life
Some brothers live their religious lives in monasteries as monks. Their religious lives unfold within the cloister—the walls or boundaries that demarcate the monastic life from the life of the world. Monasteries are meant to be places of work and prayer, where members focus on a structured, disciplined life to grow closer to God and offer a faithful, prayerful example of holiness. While monastic life is largely enclosed, visitors are welcome in limited ways to join in prayer or make retreats in separate areas of the grounds.

The shape of monastic brotherhood varies. For instance, the Trappists at the Abbey of Gethsemane invite discerners to complete a six-month “postulancy,” (early preparation period) after which they may continue into a two-year novitiate (formal preparation program). As novices, these men become brothers and continue discerning their vocation as brothers with the community and its formation directors.

The Benedictines of St. Meinrad Archabbey explain monastic brotherhood like this: “Whether ordained or not, we are all monks, and that is the primary vocation for everyone in the monastery at Saint Meinrad.” When you look at the monks, it is hard to tell the difference between those who are ordained priests and those who are not. Monks who are also priests use the title Father while other monks go by Brother.

Brothers online
- Brother Peter Lamick, C.S.V and Brother Rob Robertson, C.S.V. discuss brotherhood in depth in “Religious Brothers Day: Roundtable with Brother Rob and Brother Peter”: tinyurl.com/brothersroundtable
- ReligiousBrothers.org
- TodaysBrother.com

In any case, men who continue into religious life in a monastic community will spend most or all of their lives on the monastery grounds, working and praying with that group of men. Each monastery has its own personality in the way it prays, interprets the vows, and so on. While all religious brothers are dedicated to prayer and community life, the main distinction from apostolic brotherhood is that monks live solely in their enclosed community while apostolic brothers could be placed anywhere that their community ministers.

Although communities such as the Benedictines of St. Meinrad have members who begin religious life as brothers and eventually become ordained as priests, the main way to think about brotherhood is as a permanent way of life.

How to discern brotherhood
Is God inviting you to be a brother?
When you reflect upon the sacraments, do you feel drawn to pastoral formation and accompaniment, to liturgical planning, to hospitality?

When you reflect upon the sacraments, do you feel drawn to pastoral formation and accompaniment, to liturgical planning, to hospitality? Brothers are involved in such work. They often serve in the important roles of acolyte, sacristan, liturgical preparation, and sacramental catechesis.

When you reflect upon servant-leadership, are you drawn to grassroots pastoral work, such as organizing people, being part of a working group, or serving as director of a ministry? Again, the roles that brothers play are many and varied.

When you reflect upon community life, how would you engage in a community of faith and fit with other members? Are you drawn to

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Br. other Rob Robertson adds that the shape of his brotherly life is an ideal fit: “[Brotherhood] gives me a lot more flexibility and openness to being more who I am without having that burden or expectations of what a priest should be. I feel like I can get down into the mud with people—dig trenches, nurse babies of drug-addicted mothers, and things that are more who I am.”

And for these two brothers, and many others, community life is what richly sustains them. The consistency of meals and prayer with one’s housemates adds a steadiness for processing the day, sharing spiritually, and hearing about the similar yet different ministries others do. Often, too, it’s the social time after a meal and prayer that brings deep joy and great consolation. The sense of brotherhood, of knowing this group of men will be there for you in good times and bad is the essence of life as a religious brother.

Is God inviting you to be a religious brother? ❅

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “What does it mean to be a brother?”
How did you meet your community?
The Augustinians did a mission in my parish when I was in seventh grade, and I remembered them from that. Also, my mother was educated by the Augustinians in California in high school and has a great love for them. Additionally, some of my extended family members were involved in different Augustinian parishes and schools in the Midwest.

Did you grow up involved in the church and in service?
My two brothers and I attended Catholic grammar school and went to Sunday Masses. My mother was very formative in our faith life, teaching us to share our gifts with others. I remember as a child volunteering at the local homeless shelter and also visiting retired Holy Cross Sisters in Notre Dame, Indiana.

Do you have a favorite way to pray?
Having scheduled communal times for prayer at the beginning and end of each day serves as bookends for my daily ministry. Setting aside time for personal reflection and contemplation is a catalyst to notice the continual work of the Holy Spirit.

Your best experiences so far as a brother?
Being present to people during the height of the pandemic was meaningful. Our community sought to include everyone in its pandemic outreach. This showed me the beauty of how the Augustinians bring everyone together for the common good.

Better together

BROTHER DAVID RELSTAB, O.S.A.

When Brother David Relstab, O.S.A. was thinking about a life of church service, what drew him to religious life was its most distinctive quality: community. Sharing meals, prayer, and daily living with a group of men focused on a common mission was a big attraction. As an auto technician with a newly completed degree in automotive engineering, Relstab—who by then was looking into vocation options—did a 180-degree turn away from engineering. He connected with the Augustinian Friars, and in 2018 he took the formal step of entering the formation (or preparation) program to join the community.
Monastic life is habit-forming

by Father Paschal Pautler, O.S.B.

The years-long process of joining a monastery involves the “investiture,” or ritual putting-on of habits and other symbolic clothing. A monk who is preparing to be a priest takes on additional clothing at different stages.

Clothing matters. Whether we are playing Frisbee in the park or attending a business meeting, the clothes we wear say something about who we are and what we are doing. And that is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history people have used clothes to manifest who they are and what...
significance. The black habit that we Benedictine monks wear is a sign of our consecration to God in the monastery. And it serves as a sign to the world—and to ourselves—of what we are supposed to be about—the things of God.

In fact, the English word *habit* (which we use to refer to our daily religious garments) comes from the Latin word *habitus*, which connotes a condition or state of life as well as attire. In other words, the habit we wear is a reminder of our way of life, a life consecrated to God through prayer and work with our brother monks in the monastery.

The habit has a long history. Beginning in the fourth century, a change of clothing was the defining part of the ceremony of monastic profession. (Profession is when a person takes vows promising to live in a religious community.) Before spoken vows or written contracts were developed, receiving the mo-
monastic habit from the hands of the abbot (the superior of the community of monks) indicated that a man had become a monk. The monk’s habit, which the man put on for the first time, now indicated who he was and what he was about. The monastic habit became an important tool in reminding the man himself and others that he was now a monk and that his life now had a singular purpose: seeking God.

The custom of presenting a newcomer to the monastery with the monastic habit still happens today. Even now, some 1,500 years after the death of Saint Benedict, we Benedictine monks still see the habit as an important sign of our way of life. In my monastery, St. Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Alabama, the habit is given slowly, piece by piece, to the man as he progresses into the community.

**Tunic and belt**

When he first arrives at the monastery with the intent to join the community, a man receives the tunic and belt. These fundamental pieces of the habit signify that the newcomer wishes to learn and live the monastic manner of life.

**Scapular**

Later, when the man is admitted to the novitiate (a time of intense monastic living and a sort of year-long monastic boot camp), the abbot
gives the novice the scapular, a long apron-like garment that hangs over the shoulders and is worn over the tunic and belt. This scapular, used originally as an apron for work, signifies the cross of Christ, which the novice freely accepts. “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Hood
After having discerned the monastic way of life and having lived in the monastery for nearly two years, a novice can ask to make temporary vows in the monastery. With these vows, the novice commits himself to life in the community for three more years. Once again, this profession of vows is marked outwardly by yet another addition to the monastic habit: the hood. The monastic hood (or capuche) is placed on the head of the monk as a sign of dedication to God and as a “helmet of salvation” as he does “battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.” Thus, the professed monk is clothed with the monastic habit, a sign of consecration to God.

Cuculla
One last piece of the habit still remains to be given: the cuculla. The monk receives the cuculla when he makes solemn vows, also called final or perpetual, vows, promising his entire life to God in the monastery. The cuculla is a long, pleated cloak that encompasses the monk. In addition to serving as a more formal habit for solemn liturgical celebrations, the cuculla signifies that the monks have accepted the monastic way of life and the Rule of St. Benedict.

Traditionally, the cuculla has 73 pleats that represent the 73 chapters of Saint Benedict’s Rule, which a monk freely accepts at the time of his solemn vows. Thus, when wearing the cuculla, he is clothed with the Holy Rule.

Deacon’s stole and dalmatic
After making solemn vows, some monks are ordained as deacons and priests. Once again, the abbot clothes them with the sacred vestments of their order. The deacon is vested in the stole and the dalmatic, a kind of

What is a monk?
Monastic life is life in a monastery. Those who belong to monastic religious orders (such as Benedictines or Trappists) live a communal religious life that is dedicated to praying the daily office and performing a ministry or type of work that fits into the emphasis on daily communal prayer and worship.

Both men’s and women’s religious institutes can be monastic. Monastic women typically call themselves “sisters.” Those who live cloistered lives, staying within the monastery walls, call themselves “nuns.”
and the religious habit that the monk wears beneath. The chasuble, covering all else, signifies love—the charity of God, which is the greatest of all the virtues; it covers the whole world.

Each piece of clothing that the abbot places on a monk signifies the life to which he has been called. It also reminds him of his responsibility. Just as the grace of God covers us, so too the monastic and—for some, priestly—clothing that is laid upon us symbolizes the gifts God heaps upon us, layer after layer.

In the end the clothing that monks or others in consecrated life wear is meant to remind them that the goal of their lives is always to further the kingdom of God. God is their source and their aim. It is in the joy of gospel living that they can cry out, “I will rejoice heartily in the Lord … For he has clothed me with garments of salvation, and wrapped me in a robe of justice” (Isaiah 61:10).

Priest’s stole and chasuble
The monks who are deacons are usually later ordained as priests. Then they are vested in clothing that priests wear at Mass: a stole (a long, flat type of scarf worn around the shoulders) and chasuble (a flowing poncho-like garment), which covers all the other sacred vestments and the religious habit that the monk wears beneath. The chasuble, covering all else, signifies love—the charity of God, which is the greatest of all the virtues; it covers the whole world.

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “17 questions about church vocations.”
BROTHER CHARLES Manning, O.S.B. (at left) wears the cuculla, the garment of a monk in solemn vows. The cuculla is worn on Sundays, feast days, and other festive occasions. The monk is clothed in the cuculla on the day of his solemn profession. He is also buried in it as a sign of his life in the monastery, faithfully lived.

FATHER PASCHAL Pautler, O.S.B., Father Dominic Lee, O.S.B., and Father Pachomius Alvarado, O.S.B. (below) are wearing the sacred vestments of a deacon. Deacons wear an alb, stole, and dalmatic. Underneath their vestments for Mass, the monks all wear the same Benedictine habit, signifying the monastic vocation, which is the foundation of their life. At the time of this photo, all three were deacons. They have since been ordained priests.
Father Honest Munishi, C.S.Sp. has embraced the highs and lows of a missionary calling—one that has taken him from a small Tanzanian village to major U.S. cities—listening to God at every step.

LIKE PASTORS EVERYWHERE, Father Honest Munishi, C.S.Sp. had to get creative. He was finding it tricky to organize young people at his parish in Baltimore. But he had a shrewd idea. “We are going to play soccer,” he declared one day. “That is where we started the youth program: on the soccer field, not in the classroom. From there, I brought in the youth minister to explain the faith—only after playing soccer, sitting down, maybe sharing some food together.”
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And you better believe he was playing, too. “I had my shorts and T-shirt, and I was playing with them. Every game, I was there. Maybe sometimes I wasn’t playing very well, but they laugh at me, and that’s part of the game.”

As a missionary priest, Munishi has had many experiences of learning how to play whatever game the locals play. He belongs to the Spiritans, also called the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. His current post in Houston is a long way from his childhood home in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania.

A first place of ministry

Back in Tanzania, Mount Kilimanjaro rises almost 20,000 feet above sea level as the highest freestanding mountain in the world and the tallest summit in Africa. On its southern edge sits the town of Moshi and the village of Kibosho. Years ago, there you would have found a young Honest Munishi, growing up with his 10
siblings and mom and dad—and all the people of his village. “Every parent in my village is the parent of all children,” Munishi recalls.

This region of Tanzania is known for its large Catholic population. “My parents and siblings and I are all practicing Catholics. We would pray every day, in the morning and the evening, and then have Rosary together before we go to sleep. And we would go to Mass every Sunday—you could not miss Mass!” Munishi laughs.

And his home village was really his first place of ministry. “Neighborhood youth would organize ourselves to have centers for prayer, so people could pray together. We would gather to pray things like the Rosary—together,” he said.

This communal, local experience of the church seeded his vocation to religious life and priesthood. Munishi remembers his First Communion at age 11 as a major event. “Then, my mom would take me to Adoration and Benediction, and from there, it clicked. I felt like I

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of national service and—with a continuing desire to be a priest—Munishi went off to a college-level seminary. His experiences had already begun to shape him, molding the village boy into someone with a growing sense of the bigger world and his place in it.

“When I went to minor seminary, I encountered many other students from different areas of Tanzania. I came to know that the way they do things in other areas was not the way I did things at home. It showed me what was happening outside my own region, my own culture, and my own family. And that’s why I wanted to be a missionary,” Munishi said.

“Slowly, I learned how to adapt, how to accept things, and how to be flexible.”

A sense of the larger world

He completed a mandatory year of national service and—wonted to become a priest. I developed an interest in serving Mass, so I joined the altar servers society in my parish. I developed an interest in going to Mass every day before I went to school. I ended up serving for over seven years, and when I was finishing primary school, I applied to minor seminary,” Munishi says. (A minor seminary is a secondary school for young men considering the priesthood.)

Finding a match

With priesthood and the possibility of missionary work on his mind, eventually Munishi found a match in the Spiritans, a missionary congregation that runs a major seminary in Tanzania. After studies and ordination, Munishi was assigned to parish
MUNISHI with Duquesne University students who visited his Baltimore parish to learn about and assist with the Spiritan ministry there.

ministry in Zimbabwe, where he served for seven years. He rounded out his first decade with additional ministry in Tanzania when a new opportunity arose.

“My provincial in Tanzania approached me and asked, ‘What do you think? The U.S. province is looking for someone.’ I took time to respond. So he asked again, and then a third time, and I said, ‘OK, I think I will go.’ And the first place I landed was in the Diocese of Little Rock, in a parish.”

Munishi wondered how well Americans would understand his accent, and he had some struggles acclimating to the culture. “For example, back home, I cannot call my mom or other mothers by their names—I call them ‘Mom.’ In Arkansas, I would call a woman ‘Mom,’ and she might say, ‘I’m not your mom.’ I would tell them that back home calling a mother by her name could be disrespectful. So, slowly, slowly, they came to understand, especially the older ones, who saw me more as a son,” he explains.

He also learned about ministering somewhere that was not as Catholic as his home region in Tanzania. His smaller U.S. congregations shocked him, “and the length of Mass was strange for me—to say Mass for only an hour!”

Missionaries, by the very nature of what they do, must frequently adjust themselves to new cultures and realities. “Slowly, I learned how to adapt, how to accept things, and how to be flexible. And with the help of the priest I was working with, and the time and training my congregation gave me to adapt, I grew into becoming a pastor. In the United States, we have more—the facilities, the system, the organization here is excellent compared to Tanzania. I brought in the idea to appreciate all we have and learn to share with others,” he says.

Modeling missionary ministry

After Arkansas, his community asked him to serve in a predominantly black parish in Baltimore. “At the beginning, I had challenges because I was bringing the ideas and lifestyle I learned in Arkansas, which didn't work very well. The spirituality of the black community parish is different from that of a mixed or mainly white community.”

Now, several years later, he is serving as a vocation director in Houston, hoping that young people will see a little of missionary minis-
try and community life and consider it for themselves. “I want young people to pray about this, to share this with their parents, to develop a deep and personal relationship with God,” he says. “In that way, a young person will hear the voice of God and find the place where God is pointing him or her. Invite God into your life, and you will discover God. Attune to the simple, profound, clear voice of Jesus.”

The voice of God, it seems, is what has kept Munishi moving forward into many unknowns, from his rural boyhood near Mount Kilimanjaro to the bayous and oil refineries of Houston. As with any priest—or any Christian—life comes back to following Christ. 

**Related articles:** VocationNetwork.org, “5 reasons I love being a missionary priest.”
What is your ministry?
I now work half-time at the parish St. Cyril of Alexandria in Tucson, Arizona. I also work as a chaplain at Salpointe Catholic High School in Tucson, and I serve on the vocation team for my province.

What first drew you to religious life?
Community life! I love having meals with my brothers, praying together, and working on common projects with different Carmelites. It doesn't mean that I want to be with them all the time. I also need my personal time alone and with God. Religious life gives you a balance between community time and personal time.

Favorite ministry?
I loved teaching Spanish at a Carmelite high school in Joliet, Illinois, because it made me realize that I like to be in a school working with young people. They are funny and recharge me with their energy, dreams, and hopes.

What form of prayer do you like best?
I have a strong love for long periods of silence where I can be myself with God. Also, I like lectio divina (praying with scripture).

What gives you hope about religious life?
Even now, religious life has something positive to say to the world. I always find people saying that religious are different, that we run parishes, schools, and social projects differently. It does not mean that we do different activities. It means that our spirit and the way we are makes the things we do feel different.

Father Roberto Mejia, O.Carm.
Father Roberto Mejia, O.Carm. grew up in Mexico with dreams of being an army pilot, a pediatrician, or a psychologist. “In the end, God won!” he says about his eventual decision to enter the Carmelite religious order. He met his community in college when a friend encouraged him to attend a “Come and See” weekend. His parents were less excited, but, he notes, “Over time, my parents not just accepted my religious vocation but also they fell in love with my life as a Carmelite.”
Religiosos que marcan la diferencia

Por Carol Schuck Scheiber; traducción de Mónica Krebs

Un mundo de personas de vida consagrada está construyendo comunidad, orando a Dios y haciendo el bien en el mundo. VISIÓN te presenta algunas de ellas.

LOS HOMBRES Y MUJERES Latinos son una parte importante de la vida religiosa porque son una parte importante de la Iglesia de Estados Unidos. Estas son algunas personas que marcan la diferencia en su ámbito de vida consagrada. Ya sea trabajando en funciones de liderazgo, orando por las necesidades del mundo, o enseñando la fe a los jóvenes, hermanas, monjas, sacerdotes y hermanos están construyendo cada día el reino.

Carol Schuck Scheiber es redactora jefe de VISION y editora de publicaciones de la Conferencia Nacional de Vocaciones Religiosas. nrvc.net.

Mónica Krebs es la editora de VISION En Español.
UN OBISPO ATIENDE A SU REBAÑO QUE SUFRE

Arzobispo Gustavo García-Siller, M.Sp.S.

LA VIOLENCIA armada y las necesidades de los inmigrantes son dos temas candentes en San Antonio, que han obligado al arzobispo Gustavo García-Siller, M.Sp.S., a adoptar posturas firmes. Miembro de los Misioneros del Espíritu Santo, García-Siller es conocido en todo el país por sus francos comentarios a favor de la reforma de la inmigración y el control de las armas.

“Hemos hecho de las armas un ídolo en este país,” dijo García-Siller en MSNBC. “Creo de todo corazón que el control de armas debe hacerse de una forma más radical.” Sus declaraciones se produjeron después de visitar a las familias afectadas por el asesinato masivo de 21 personas en una escuela primaria de Uvalde, Texas. García-Siller hizo un llamado a los Católicos para que caminen con quienes sufren la violencia y permanezcan con ellos durante el largo proceso de sanación.

Poco después de la masacre de Uvalde, en 2022, 53 migrantes fueron encontrados muertos en un tractor-remolque sobrecalentado, con otros migrantes en el camión luchando por sus vidas. Después de visitar a los sobrevivientes, el prelado...
dijo: “No es admisible que nadie en nuestra sociedad se quede de brazos cruzados y mire hacia otro lado ante la crisis humanitaria causada por la migración no regulada,” dijo. “Todos tenemos un papel que cumplir en solidaridad con las personas que huyen en busca de oportunidades de desarrollo.”

Si bien es cierto que García-Siller aparece en los titulares por sus comentarios sobre temas controvertidos, su ministerio diario es similar al de cualquier obispo: se centra en la enseñanza, la evangelización y el liderazgo de los casi 800.000 católicos de su arquidiócesis. Creció en México y es uno de los 26 obispos, arzobispos y obispos auxiliares de Estados Unidos que tienen ascendencia Hispánica.

Una vez, cuando le preguntaron por las vocaciones, dijo esto a VISION: “La semana pasada cené con 17 personas que se planteaban la vida religiosa o el sacerdocio. Creo que pudieron ver la felicidad que he encontrado en esta vida. Hay tanta riqueza en conocer a Dios y dar tu vida a la comunidad— no sólo ‘Dios y yo’, sino Dios trabajando en mí por el bien de la comunidad. ¿Por qué no darle tu vida?”

**UNA HERMANA SE APOYA EN LA COMUNIDAD**

Hermana Teresa Maya, CCVI

UNA SOLA ETIQUETA no es suficiente para definir a la Hermana Teresa Maya, CCVI La hermana se encuentra actualmente en un año sabático después de haber servido en el liderazgo de su comunidad. Sin embargo, desde que se unió a las Hermanas de la Caridad del Verbo Encarnado en 1994, se ha puesto muchos sombreros. Comenzó como maestra, se desempeñó como directora, dictó cursos de historia en la universidad, fue líder de su propia congregación durante 14 años y dirigió un grupo de hermanas líderes durante 14 años.

Durante su variado servicio, ha abogado por los inmigrantes, ha propiciado una iglesia multirracial e intercultural, y ha instado a abrazar
la vida religiosa en un momento en que las comunidades religiosas están experimentando un cambio demográfico dramático.

Uno de sus pilares ha sido la comunidad: “No hay nada más importante, más radical, más necesario para nosotros que apoyarnos en nuestro llamado apostólico para nutrir y alentar la comunidad dondequiera la encontremos, dondequiera que estemos, con cuantos medios tengamos,” dijo a la Conferencia de Liderazgo de Mujeres Religiosas durante un discurso.

También ha hablado y dirigido talleres sobre “interculturalidad,” una forma de vida en la que personas de diversos orígenes progresan junto a personas de culturas dominantes. En una entrevista con MessyJesusBusiness.com, Maya habló sobre la forma de llevar a la iglesia hacia una forma de vida intercultural más holística: “Tenemos que volver a Jesús. Si volvemos al Evangelio, vemos a Jesús frecuentando a mucha gente diferente: mujeres, gente considerada impura, leprosos, recaudadores de impuestos.” También animó a los Católicos a conocer gente diferente a ellos asistiendo a misa con personas de otros idiomas y tradiciones.

**UN HERMANO MANTIENE EL FUEGO ENCENDIDO PARA LOS JÓVENES CATÓLICOS**

*Hermano Javier Hansen, F.S.C.*

¿QUÉ ESPERAN los jóvenes católicos de la Iglesia? Esta fue una de las preguntas planteadas hace varios años a los jóvenes católicos que eran delegados en un encuentro internacional que precedió a un “sínodo” (o reunión) de obispos para tratar el tema de los jóvenes, la fe y el discernimiento vocacional.

El Hermano Javier Hansen, F.S.C. fue seleccionado para ser delegado de jóvenes adultos, representando a los Estados Unidos junto con una joven y un joven laicos. Varios años después, la experiencia sigue siendo importante en su vida, y continúa viviendo las lecciones que aprendió.

“Perteneco a los Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas, y nos dedicamos a la educación de los jóvenes, así que para mí no fue un encuentro ocasional,” dice. Como profesor de religión en el instituto St. Paul de Covington (Luisiana), Hansen se esfuerza cada día por transmitir la fe. “Intento profundizar en la cultura del lugar donde enseño,” señala, para conocer personalmente a los alum-
Hay tanto sufrimiento en el mundo de hoy. Saber que Dios está ayudando (a la gente) con nuestras oraciones, es una gran alegría para nosotras.

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“la Iglesia, dice Hansen, “me gustaría que la Iglesia abordara estas cuestiones nuevamente cada año... Como dijo el Papa, los jóvenes no son el futuro de la Iglesia, son el presente.”

UNA MUDANZA
GENIAL POR EL BIEN COMÚN
Las Hermanas de la Adoración Perpetua

LA VIDA CONSAGRADA hace hincapié en la apertura para ir adonde sea que te llamen. Monjas de dos monasterios diferentes de México
han hecho precisamente eso, respondiendo a una llamada dentro de otra llamada. Siete monjas de la tropical Guadalajara, México, dejaron su convento y se trasladaron a Anchorage, Alaska, por invitación del arzobispo Francis Hurley en 1985. Hurley quería establecer la presencia de oración de las Hermanas de la Adoración Perpetua, dado que había crecido cerca de uno de sus monasterios en Estados Unidos.

En 2013, otra comunidad Mexicana de las Hermanas de la Adoración Perpetua—ubicada en Nuevo Laredo, (cerca de la frontera con Texas)—envió a seis hermanas para reforzar el reducido número de miembros del monasterio de Alaska.

“Somos el único monasterio de vida contemplativa de Alaska,” afirman las monjas en su página web. “Nuestro Señor nos ha confiado la gran misión de ser un apoyo, a través de nuestra oración, dedicación, sacrificio, generosidad y alegría, no sólo para nuestra Iglesia Arquidiocesana, sino para toda Alaska, y ofrecer nuestras vidas a Dios por la salvación de todos...”

Las monjas se levantan temprano cada día y dedican la mayor parte de su jornada a la oración, la meditación y la adoración del Santísimo Sacramento, incluso turnándose en la oración ante el Santísimo Sacramento durante la noche. En su horario diario tienen tiempo para aprender inglés, cultivar un huerto y participar en actividades recreativas y pasatiempos.

“Hay tanto sufrimiento en el mundo de hoy”, dijo la hermana Alicia Valencia, A.P.S.S., al Anchorage Daily News. “Saber que Dios está ayudando (a la gente) con nuestras oraciones, es una gran alegría para nosotras.”

ESTAS TRES hermanas llegaron a Alaska desde sus monasterios en México para establecer y mantener la única comunidad monástica del estado.
Como abogados de inmigración que trabajamos con organizaciones religiosas y trabajadores religiosos internacionales de todo el mundo, conocemos las complejidades que implica seguir una vocación de vida consagrada en los EE.UU. si no se tiene la ciudadanía.

No siempre sabes dónde te llamará Dios a servir. Una llamada a la vida consagrada es una invitación a seguir a Cristo con todo el corazón, amándolo a Él y a los demás como Él nos amó. La obediencia a esa llamada puede ser a veces un desafío si te envían a servir lejos del país en que naciste. ¿Tu vocación religiosa te llama a...
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Cualquiera sea el propósito que lleve a una persona religiosa a los EE.UU., hay muchas opciones de visa a considerar.

Los Soñadores y otras personas sin residencia legal

Veamos primero una situación común, la de los Soñadores: los nacidos en otro lugar, traídos al margen de la ley a Estados Unidos y criados aquí. Además de los Soñadores, existen otros adultos que ya están en Estados Unidos, pero no tienen residencia legal.

Por desgracia, no hay soluciones fáciles para resolver los problemas de la situación de inmigración ilegal. El programa de Acción Diferida para los Llegados en la Infancia (DACA, por sus siglas en inglés), establecido en 2012, ha brindado alguna protección legal a ciertos inmigrantes jóvenes, pero los desafíos legales han limitado el programa por el momento. Su futuro también es incierto. Independientemente de los limitados recursos disponibles, sigue siendo importante que esas personas hablen con un abogado experto en inmigración o un especialista que pueda examinar a fondo sus antecedentes para asegurarse de que consideren todas las opciones posibles. Además, aunque no parezca posible en la actualidad, todavía hay alguna esperanza de que el Congreso actúe para atender a los millones de miembros de nuestras comunidades y sus familias que, a pesar de su condición migratoria, benefician a nuestro país.

A veces, una persona en discernimiento o formación inicial con un instituto religioso internacional podrá proseguir sus estudios y formación en su país de nacimiento. Sin embargo, esta opción tendría un alto costo si la persona no puede volver a entrar legalmente en los Estados Unidos. Esta opción puede no ser aconsejable para muchos debido a los riesgos y presiones que supone para el discernimiento y la formación de la persona.

Visas de turista

Además de los Soñadores y otras personas sin residencia legal, hay quienes viven fuera de Estados Unidos, pero quieren venir aquí para ingresar en un instituto religioso. Una forma de por lo menos iniciar este proceso—trabajando estrechamente con una comunidad religiosa, por supuesto—es obtener y utilizar una visa de turista. Cada año, millones de visitantes viajan a Estados Unidos por motivos muy diversos. Algunos vienen a visitar a familiares y amigos, otros a estudiar y otros a trabajar. Para los que aspiran a la vida consagrada, existen varias opciones de visa, incluyendo la más común: la visa de turista.

La visa de turista también se conoce como visa B1/B2. Antes de la pandemia, el Departamento de Estado de EE.UU. concedía regularmente más de cinco millones de visas B1/B2 cada año a quienes deseaban visitar EE.UU. para una estadía temporal. Al tramitar este tipo de visa, el solicitante debe demostrar que sólo tiene intención de visitar el país de forma temporal y que regresará a casa. Es importante saber que la visa B1/B2 no da permiso al visitante para trabajar o ser empleado en los Estados Unidos.

Por ejemplo, supongamos que la hermana María, de Ecuador, desea reunirse con sus hermanas en Estados Unidos para celebrar el jubileo de su comunidad. El visado B1/B2 sería adecuado. Supongamos que la hermana María tiene una prima, Daniela, que está interesada en conocer la orden y seguir una vocación religiosa en los EE.UU. Daniela podría utilizar un visado B1/B2 para esa visita inicial y un breve periodo de discernimiento.

Visas de estudiantes

Otras veces—con permiso de su superior religioso—las personas que se convierten en religiosas, hermanas o sacerdotes pueden estar interesadas en asistir a un centro o universidad
de EE.UU. como parte de su formación o educación religiosa. Primero deben ser aceptados en el colegio o universidad. A continuación, un funcionario de la escuela debe entregar al estudiante un formulario para solicitar una visa de estudiante F-1. Al igual que con la visa de turista B1/B2, los solicitantes deben demostrar su intención de visitar temporalmente y regresar a su país al final del programa académico. Además, el estudiante debe estar cursando un programa de tiempo completo para mantener la condición de estudiante F-1 durante su estancia en Estados Unidos.

Por ejemplo, supongamos que Alex, de Filipinas, ha sido aceptado en un seminario de EE.UU. para comenzar su educación y formación para ser sacerdote. La visa de estudiante F-1 le permitiría entrar en EE.UU. y estudiar allí durante cuatro a seis años. Supongamos que la Hermana Mónica, de Ghana, ha recibido instrucciones de su superiora para obtener un máster en educación en EE.UU. Podría utilizar un visado F-1 para cursar sus estudios.

**Visa para trabajador religioso**

Por último, hay ocasiones en que religiosos (o personas que pasan a formar parte de una comunidad religiosa) que viven en otro país son llamados a ejercer su ministerio en EE.UU.

El programa de visa para trabajador religioso R-1 fue creado para trabajar religiosos internacionales asignados o llamados a servir y trabajar para una organización religiosa sin fines de lucro, como un instituto religioso, arquidiócesis, diócesis o parroquia en los EE.UU.

A través de este programa de visa, a una persona que se convierta en hermana, hermano, ministro Católico u otra ocupación religiosa tradicional se le permite venir a los Estados Unidos temporalmente para ser empleado por la organización religiosa y seguir su vocación religiosa. Por ejemplo, la hermana Reina de El Salvador ha recibido instrucciones de su superiora para unirse a su convento y comunidad en Texas para enseñar educación religiosa en una parroquia local durante los próximos tres años. La visa R-1 sería necesaria para que ella enseñe y sería adecuada para su situación. Roberto, de Italia, es un novicio que ha sido asignado para completar su año de noviciado en el monasterio del instituto en EE.UU. antes de hacer los primeros votos. Podría usar una visa R-1 para completar esta parte de su formación antes de tomar sus votos.

No obstante, el proceso de la visa R-1 no siempre es fácil. La organización religiosa debe presentar primero una petición al servicio de inmigración. Una vez aprobada la petición, el trabajador religioso puede solicitar la visa R-1. Puede haber retrasos en la tramitación de los documentos de inmigración aquí en EE.UU. y en las embajadas o consulados de EE.UU. en el exterior. El programa también incluye visitas del servicio de inmigración y mayor vigilancia. Sin embargo, si todo va bien, el trabajador religioso obtendrá una visa R-1 y se le permitirá permanecer en los EE.UU. por un plazo temporal (2,5 años y luego otros 2,5 años si se solicita una prórroga).

Cualquiera sea el propósito que llee a una persona religiosa a los EE.UU., hay muchas opciones de visa a considerar. Lo más importante es que el visitante conozca los límites y permisos de su visa y sepa cuánto tiempo puede permanecer legalmente en los EE.UU. Recomendamos a todas las personas religiosas que hablen con un abogado o especialista en inmigración para que comprendan plenamente los límites de la visa que usan.

La vida consagrada ha tenido un aspecto internacional durante siglos, por lo que estas cuestiones de traslado, estudio y ministerio a través de las fronteras estarán presentes en el futuro previsible. Si estás en discernimiento con un instituto religioso con sede en EE.UU. y tienes dudas sobre la ciudadanía o las visas, es bueno que hables de estos temas con tu ministro de vocaciones o de formación o con tu superior religioso. Te deseamos paz y bendiciones en tu deseo de seguir la llamada de Dios. ✝️

La información contenida en este artículo no pretende ser asesoramiento jurídico y no debe considerarse como tal.
PREGUNTAS COMUNES

¿Cómo puedo ingresar a la vida religiosa y cuánto tiempo lleva?

Ingresar a una básica son: postulación, noviciado y votos. Además, para llegar a ser sacerdote religioso hay que cursar cuatro años de estudios universitarios, seguidos de varios años de seminario, una institución que prepara a los hombres para el sacerdocio.

¿Cuán importante es la oración?

La oración es fundamental en la vida religiosa, tanto en soledad como en comunidad. Muchos religiosos dedican unas dos horas al día a orar en Misa, recitar la Liturgia de las Horas y el Rosario, lecturas sagradas o reflexión sobre las Escrituras. Cualquiera sea la forma que adopte, la oración es una manera de mantenerse en comunicación con Dios y ofrecer alabanzas y agradecimiento, buscar el perdón y pedir por las necesidades del mundo.

¿Trabajan los hombres y mujeres religiosos?

Al igual que la mayoría de los adultos, las religiosas, religiosos, sacerdotes y monjas dedican una parte del día a trabajar—algunos en trabajos remunerados relacionados con el carisma o espíritu de su comunidad; otros en los ministerios de su instituto religioso. El trabajo de los religiosos suele centrarse en servir a los demás. Los religiosos se esfuerzan por compartir sus vidas con los demás y revelar a Cristo en todo lo que hacen.

Después de ingresar a la vida religiosa, ¿qué ocurre si las personas se sienten atraídas por otras de modo romántico?

Hermanas, hermanos, sacerdotes y monjas tienen necesidades, sentimientos y deseos humanos normales. Como personas célibes, eligen canalizar esos sentimientos en otras direcciones saludables. Trabajan para mantenerse fieles a sus votos de castidad a través de la oración, la cercanía con Jesús, las buenas acciones que engendran, la vida de oración y contemplación. No siempre es fácil mantenerse fiel a los votos, cualquiera sea la vocación. Hacer frente a los desafíos con honestidad puede fortalecer una vocación.

¿Puedo pasar tiempo con la familia y amigos después de ingresar a la vida religiosa?

Cada comunidad religiosa tiene sus propias políticas, y algunas, sobre todo las de clausura, son bastante restrictivas. No obstante, todas las comunidades reconocen que el apoyo de los seres queridos es crucial tanto para los novicios como para los miembros con votos, y alientan el contacto con familia y amigos.

OTRAS VOCACIONES

DIOS NOS LLAMA a todos a ser fieles a nosotros mismos y a vivir de manera que nos dé la mayor alegría, sea dentro del matrimonio, en la soltería, las órdenes consagradas, la vida consagrada u otras vocaciones, como:

¿Cuándo puedo iniciar la vida religiosa?

Ingresar a una básica son: postulación, noviciado y votos. Además, para llegar a ser sacerdote religioso hay que cursar cuatro años de estudios universitarios, seguidos de varios años de seminario, una institución que prepara a los hombres para el sacerdocio.

ORACIONES POR LA VOCACIÓN

SEÑOR, ayúdame a:

CON VALOR tomar las riendas de mi vida, aspirar a las cosas más bellas y profundas, y mantener puro mi corazón.

RESPONDER a tu llamado, con la ayuda de guías sensatos y generosos, y confeccionar un plan acertado para mi vida a fin de alcanzar la verdadera felicidad.

SOÑAR grandes sueños y preocuparme siempre por el bien de los demás.

ESTAR contigo al pie de la cruz y recibir el don de tu madre.

DAR TESTIMONIO de tu Resurrección y de la esperanza que trae consigo.

SER CONSCIENTE de que estás a mi lado mientras te proclamo gozosamente como Señor. AMÉN.

—PAPA FRANCISCO

Oración para centrarnos

SEÑOR, centra en ti mi fe. Como a María, Virgen Santísima, ayúdame a ver las grandes cosas que has hecho por mí. Por tu misericordia me elevas y sacias mi hambre. Te glorifico.

SEÑOR, centra en ti mi esperanza. Como al Apóstol Pablo, ayúdame a concentrarme en todo lo que es verdadero, honorable, justo, puro, amable y bondadoso. Te alabo.

SEÑOR, centra en ti mi amor. Como a Juliana de Norwich, doctora de la Iglesia, ayúdame a estar seguro de que todo irá bien. Muéstrame tu intención en todas las cosas, que es el Amor. Te doy gracias. AMÉN.

—VISION VOCATION GUIDE

RECURSOS ADICIONALES

Encuentra más información sobre vocaciones religiosas, vida religiosa hoy, y discernir un vocación como hermana, monja, hermano o sacerdote Católico en VocationNetwork.org/es/articles/archive

Términos básicos | Formas | Estilo de vida | Proceso

« Vocación \ SUSTANTIVO: un llamado o fuerte inclinación a un estado o curso de acción particular, especialmente a la vida religiosa; una respuesta al llamado bautismal a seguir a Jesús como discípulo en una vida de santidad y servicio. Del latín vocatio (llamado) y antes vocare (llamar) de vox (voz). »

MUJERES Y HOMBRES EN LA VIDA RELIGIOSA

HERMANA. Religiosa que profesa votos públicos en un instituto religioso apostólico o activo, distinta de la monja, que lleva una vida de clausura, contemplativa. Las hermanas tienen el legado de dedicar su oración y ministerio al servicio de los más necesitados, especialmente los abandonados, olvidados y carenciados.

MONJA. Si bien los términos monja y hermana se usan a menudo indistintamente, una monja pertenece a una orden contemplativa, vive en clausura y dedica la mayor parte de su tiempo a la oración por el bien del mundo.

HERMANO. Un hermano profesa públicamente votos a Dios y modela su compromiso sirviendo a los demás como ministro de misericordia y compasión de manera que exprese el carisma de su instituto religioso. Intentando imitar a Cristo, un hermano se relaciona con los demás como lo hizo Jesús, como un hermano para todos.

SACERDOTE. Un sacerdote religioso profesa sus votos en un instituto religioso y es ordenado mediante el sacramento de las Sagradas Órdenes. Un sacerdote religioso, o de una orden, es responsable ante su superior mayor y los demás miembros de su comunidad, como también ante el obispo local y las personas a quienes sirve en su ministerio. Los sacerdotes religiosos hacen votos de pobreza, castidad y obediencia, y los votos adicionales de su comunidad. Un sacerdote diocesano es ordenado mediante el sacramento de las Sagradas Órdenes para servir a la Iglesia local principalmente a través del ministerio parroquial en una diócesis/arcidiócesis específica. Es responsable ante su obispo y las personas a quienes sirve. Un sacerdote diocesano hace promesas de obediencia y celibato a su obispo, pero no votos de pobreza o de vida comunitaria.

FORMAS DE VOCACIÓN RELIGIOSA

APOSTOLICA. Las comunidades religiosas apostólicas se dedican principalmente a ministerios activos. Si bien la oración y la comunidad son elementos importantes de su vida, los miembros sirven de muchas formas, como la educación, el ministerio parroquial y juvenil, el cuidado de la salud, el trabajo social y la atención de pobres y ancianos.

DE CLAUSURA. Las comunidades religiosas contemplativas suelen estar total o parcialmente recluidas, es decir, viven separadas del resto del mundo para centrarse más en la oración. Como religiosos de clausura, rara vez salen de sus monasterios, y todo o casi todo su trabajo se realiza dentro del propio monasterio.

CONTEMPLATIVA. Las comunidades religiosas contemplativas se centran en la oración comunitaria diaria, especialmente la Misa y la Liturgia de las Horas, y en la oración individual, como la lectio divina, que es la lectura de las Escrituras en oración. Viven en relativa soledad para poder dirigir mejor su oración y trabajo hacia la contemplación, aunque algunas de estas comunidades se dedican a ministerios apostólicos activos.

MONÁSTICA. Los monjes y monjas valoran mucho la oración y la vida en comunidad, pero muchos también se dedican a ministerios activos, como el trabajo social, la enseñanza y la dirección espiritual. El monasticismo se centra en la vida comunitaria, el trabajo y la oración común e individual.

MISIONERA. Las comunidades misioneras se centran en promover el Evangelio en otros países o zonas de su propio país donde la Iglesia aún no está presente de forma robusta. Los misioneros sirven en muchos lugares diferentes en ministerios como la prédica, la enseñanza, la ayuda, los servicios sociales y otras formas de testimonio.

ESTILO DE VIDA

CARisma. El espíritu, la forma de vida y el enfoque de una comunidad religiosa, que surge de su historia, sus tradiciones y su fundador. Del griego charisma, que significa “don,” el carisma orienta las decisiones sobre la misión y el ministerio.

VOTOS. Los miembros de las comunidades religiosas —sacerdotes, hermanas, monjas y hermanos— y otras personas de vida consagrada, como los miembros de institutos laicos, hacen votos de pobreza, castidad y obediencia. Muchas comunidades añaden un cuarto o quinto voto relacionado con su carisma, como la estabilidad, la hospitalidad o el servicio a los pobres. En la mayoría de las comunidades religiosas, los nuevos miembros hacen votos temporales por un tiempo determinado y pueden renovarlos. El último paso vinculante es profesar votos perpetuos o definitivos.

PROCESO PARA INGRESAR

DISCERNIMIENTO. El proceso de reflexionar y orar sobre cómo responder al llamado de Dios a seguir a Jesús como discípulo en una forma particular de vida. Este tiempo implica a menudo oración, dirección espiritual, consejo sensato y lectura sagrada.

FORMACIÓN. Educación y desarrollo espiritual que tiene lugar tras el ingreso en una comunidad religiosa.

POSTULANTE. Candidato que aspira a ingresar en una comunidad religiosa antes de convertirse en novicio. El periodo de formación postulante suele durar de seis meses a dos años, durante los cuales el candidato vive en la comunidad mientras continúa su educación o experiencia laboral.

NOVIO. Un nuevo miembro que participa en la etapa inicial de ingreso en una comunidad religiosa. El novicio suele participar en actividades de discernimiento y formación, que incluyen el estudio del carisma, la historia, la constitución y el estilo de vida de la comunidad, a la vez que aprende más sobre sí mismo y su vida de fe. Este período de noviciado suele durar de 12 a 24 meses. A continuación, los novicios pueden hacer su primera profesión de los votos de pobreza, castidad y obediencia.

PROFESIÓN. Rito religioso por el que una persona entra formalmente a una comunidad religiosa haciendo votos públicos de pobreza, castidad y obediencia, entre otros. Normalmente, los religiosos hacen la primera profesión y de tres a nueve años después, la profesión perpetua o los votos perpetuos.

EN ESPAÑOL: BASES DE LA VOCACIÓN

Cronología de la vida religiosa

PRIMER MILENIO

33 | Jesús comienza su ministerio público e invita a todos los que encuentra: “Vengan, siganme” (Lucas 18:22).

50-65 | Las Cartas de San Pablo aluden a distintas agrupaciones en la Primera Iglesia, entre ellas grupos de mujeres y hombres celiembros dedicados a la oración y la caridad.

251-356 | San Antonio el Grande responde a la llamada evangélica de vender todo lo que tiene, servir a los pobres y vivir una vida de ascetismo. Se instala en el desierto Egipcio para vivir en soledad y oración. Su historia inspira a otros hombres y mujeres a vivir como ermitaños, del que se instala y vive en un monasterio. Es uno de los muchos religiosos y religiosas que han sido nombradas santa patrona de las monjas.

VI | San Basilio establece grandes comunidades de monjes en Asia Menor (actual Turquía). Como obispo de Cesarea, Basilio hace que sus monjes se dediquen a la labor apostólica de la enseñanza y la atención pastoral.

IX | San Jerónimo, erudito y traductor de la Biblia, se traslada a Belén, donde se instala y vive en un monasterio. Es uno de los muchos religiosos y religiosas que han sido nombrados doctores de la Iglesia por sus aportes a la teología y a la práctica espiritual.

292-348 | Pacomio, un contemporáneo de San Antonio, crea un modelo de vida cenobítica, o común, basado en las primeras comunidades Cristianas que compartían los bienes comunes y rezaban juntas. El primer verdadero monasterio se establece en Tabenna, Egipto.

329-379 | San Basilio establece grandes comunidades de monjes en Asia Menor (actual Turquía). Como obispo de Cesarea, Basilio hace que sus monjes se dediquen a la labor apostólica de la enseñanza y la atención pastoral.

347-420 | San Jerónimo, erudito y traductor de la Biblia, se traslada a Belén, donde se instala y vive en un monasterio. Es uno de los muchos religiosos y religiosas que han sido nombrados doctores de la Iglesia por sus aportes a la teología y a la práctica espiritual.

VII | Santa Brígida funda en Irlanda la abadía de Kildare, un monasterio de monjes y monjas.

480-547 | San Benito de Nursia funda monasterios y escribe su regla para los monjes que aún se utiliza actualmente. La hermana melliza de Benito, Santa Escolástica, dirige una comunidad de mujeres. Más tarde es nombrada santa patrona de las monjas.

800-900 | En Europa, los Monasterios mantienen la literatura del mundo antiguo, y las escrituras Cristianas se conservan. Los monasterios más grandes son centros de actividad cultural y económica, y albergan escuelas, hospitales, casas de huéspedes y granjas.

1050-1150 | San Romualdo (en Italia) y san Bruno (en los Alpes franceses) fundan monasterios Camaldulenses y Camaldulenses y Camaldulenses.

SEGUNDO MILENIO

910-1050 | La abadía Benedictina de Cluny en el centro de Francia, encabeza la reforma de la Iglesia medieval y produce líderes que se convierten en obispos y papas.

1098-1300 | La orden Cisterciense aumenta enormemente en número e influencia con la ayuda del monje francés San Bernardo de Claraval. El primer monasterio Cisterciense femenino se establece en Dijón, Francia, en 1125.

1121-1134 | San Norberto combina un régimen monástico con el trabajo parroquial, anticipando la llegada de las órdenes mendicantes y su servicio en las ciudades. Se establece en Prémontré, Francia, un monasterio doble de clérigos y monjas. Se funda la Tercera Orden Norbertina o asociación laica, la primera de este tipo. A menudo denominadas asociadas, terciarias, laicas asociadas o terciarias laicas, estas asociaciones continúan existiendo hoy en día.

1150-1244 | Senigen surgen las órdenes mendicantes. En contraste con el énfasis anterior en la vida contemplativa y la estabilidad, los miembros son libres de viajar para predicar el Evangelio y responder a las necesidades de los pobres. Las cuatro órdenes mendicantes más importantes son los Carmelitas (1150), los Franciscanos (1209), los Dominicos (1216) y los Agustinos (1244).

Cronología de la vida religiosa

1209 | San Francisco de Asís funda una nueva orden. En 1212 Santa Clara se une a él y establece una comunidad para mujeres (Clarisas). Es la primera mujer que escribe reglas para la vida monástica. A lo largo de los siglos surgen diversas comunidades Franciscañas masculinas y femeninas, cuyos miembros ejercen influencia como misioneros y evangelizadores y promueven prácticas piadosas, como el pesebre de Navidad, el Ángelus y el Vía Crucis.

1242 | Santo Tomás de Aquino ingresa a los Dominicos. Entre los más grandes teólogos, el estudio de sus obras es obligatorio para quienes aspiran a la ordenación o al ingreso en la vida religiosa.

Sé quien Dios quiere que seas y prenderás fuego al mundo.
---SANTA CATALINA

1368 | Catalina de Siena entra en la vida pública después de años de soledad como terciaria Dominica. Defiende la reforma espiritual y la unidad de la Iglesia y es escuchada por el Papa. Es nombrada Doctora de la Iglesia, una de las cuatro mujeres que lo han sido.

1517 | El sacerdote Agustino Martín Lutero propone sus 95 Tesis para la reforma de la Iglesia en Wittenberg, Alemania, lo que causa su excomunión e inicia simbólicamente la Reforma Protestante y la consiguiente agitación social y religiosa.

1534-85 | Santa Teresa de Ávila y San Juan de la Cruz, místicos y escritores influyentes, inician la reforma de la orden Carmelita en España.

1809 | Santa Elisabeth Ann Seton funda en 1809 la primera comunidad apostólica de mujeres en Estados Unidos.

1850-1919 | El Concilio Vaticano I establece la primera comunidad religiosa femenina Afroamericana en 1891; Charles Uncles es el primer hombre negro ordenado en Estados Unidos y funda la orden Josephina en 1893. La encíclica Rerum Novarum (1891), documento fundacional de la doctrina social Católica, insta a clérigos, religiosos y laicos a abogar por la justicia y la igualdad social. Con 180.000 religiosos y 42.000 hombres, en 1965 los religiosos estadounidenses alcanzan su cifra máxima.

2013-23 | El Papa Francisco, Jesuita, llama la atención sobre la vida religiosa cuando es elegido en 2013. Es uno de los 34 miembros de institutos religiosos que se convierte en Papa. La Iglesia designa 2015 como Año de la Vida Consagrada, y en 2018 Francisco convoca un sínodo internacional de obispos sobre “Los jóvenes, la fe y el discernimiento vocacional.”

ERÁ DE LA INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL: Responsabilidad, Transformación, Dignidad Humana

EN ESPAÑOL: BASES DE LA VOCACIÓN

What Catholics believe about the Eucharist

by Alice Camille

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. —John 6:51

Our participation in the supper of the Eucharist transforms us into the Body of Christ for the world right now. That's some statement!

The centrality of Eucharist to Catholic life can't be overemphasized. It's the “source and summit” of Christian life (Lumen...
Gentium, no.11). This means our life as disciples begins at the Table of the Lord and always returns here.

Eucharist means thanksgiving. Eucharist refers to the ritual of the Mass as a whole, or it can be shorthand for the Body and Blood of Christ we share in Communion. The Eucharist reminds us that what brings us together is gratitude. What are we grateful for? For many things personal and communal, but in the Mass we’re especially focused on the mystery of Christ who has died, is risen, and will come again in glory. This past, present, and future reality of Christ includes us in its magnificent unfolding. We’re not bystanders at a miracle, but participants in a never-ending feast.

Like many of our Protestant sisters and brothers, Catholics celebrate Eucharist as a memorial of the Last Supper Jesus shared with his friends. However, we also believe this sacrament renews the sacrifice Jesus makes of his life expressed in his words: “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body… Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood….” What was, now is.

When the Early Church gathered...
dangerous memory” contained in our Eucharist. Christ’s Passion points to the reality of unjust suffering, the need for its redress, and the hope of transcendence from a world marred by sin and death. Our Eucharist reminds us that the call to justice sounds every time we “proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.”

Real means real

A question some wonder about is what Catholics mean when they talk about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The clearest answer is the official one: Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in his Body and Blood, humanity and divinity, under the forms of bread and wine. The church teaches that this presence is
Learn more about the Eucharist

SCRIPTURE
  1 Corinthians 11:23-26

ONLINE
- Mysterium Fidei, encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Holy Eucharist: vatican.va
- "What is the Eucharist?" by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: usccb.org/eucharist
- "Why do Christians believe Jesus is God incarnate?" by Alice Camille: VocationNetwork.org

BOOKS
- The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World by Monika K. Hellwig (Paulist Press, 1976)
- The Eucharist: A Mystery of Faith by Joseph M. Champlain (Paulist Press, 2005)
- The Eucharist and Social Justice by Margaret Scott (Paulist Press, 2009)
The elements of bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ—as do we—in our participation in this sacrament.

nineth century when it was suggested that the bread and wine were not physically changed but only signs of the presence of Christ among us. In response, the church formulated the idea of transubstantiation, in which the elements of bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ—as do we—in our participation in this sacrament.

This teaching is the basis for practices like Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, prayer before the Eucharist, and processions that feature the Real Presence carried in a monstrance. Not all accepted this teaching, which influenced the reaction of the Reformation movement and the development of other ideas about the Eucharist among Protestants, largely accentuating its symbolism.

Return to our roots

In 1965 Pope Paul VI reiterated that Christ is present in prayer, works of mercy, preaching, teaching, sacraments, and uniquely in the Eucharist, “a way that surpasses all others” (Mysterium Fidei, no. 38). In 2022, the U.S. bishops organized the National Eucharistic Revival, which will include a national Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July 2024. The culmination will be a year of “going out on mission” nourished by the Body of Christ. On eucharistirevival.org the bishops explain why Catholics return again and again to this central sacrament:

Scandal, division, disease, doubt. The Church has

not a metaphor, it’s a reality. Real.

But how do we arrive at this idea? Jesus himself promises to be with us “always, to the end of time.” He promises to be present when two or more gather in his name, in the forgiveness of sins, and in the suffering world: “Whatever you did for one of these least . . . you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). Jesus promises to be really present in many ways throughout the gospel. He’s most explicit about being with us, however, in one profound way: “Take it; this is my body” (Mark 14:22). “I am the bread of life. . . . Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (John 6:35, 54). For nearly a millennium Christians didn’t dispute this understanding. The controversy began in the
withstood each of these throughout our very human history. But today we confront all of them, all at once. Our response in this moment is pivotal.

In the midst of these roaring waves, Jesus is present, reminding us that he is more powerful than the storm. He desires to heal, renew, and unify the church and the world.

How will he do it? By uniting us once again around the source and summit of our faith in the celebration of the Eucharist. †

Parts of this article were originally published in “Questions Catholics ask,” a section of vocationnetwork.org.

Related article: VocationNetwork.org, “Ten great things about being Catholic.”

DOG GONE?

People sometimes wonder about having a pet once they enter religious life. Every community has its own approach about newcomers bringing a personal animal, but certainly many religious communities do have pets. At left is Sister Maria Eden, O.S.C. with Lady, part of the Franciscan Monastery of St. Clare in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.
One of the most enlightening descriptions of the saving power of faith is Luke’s account of the woman with the hemorrhage. Jesus and his disciples are making their way through a crushing crowd when Jesus suddenly asks, “Who touched me?” Seriously? his disciples must have thought. Peter finally states the obvious, “Master, the crowd is pushing and pressing on you.” But Jesus
isn’t satisfied. “Someone has touched me; for I know that power has gone out from me.” The woman with the debilitating hemorrhage finally comes forward to admit that she is the one who touched the tassel of Jesus’ cloak—and was immediately cured in the process. Jesus says simply, “Daughter, your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 8:46-48). It was the faith that Jesus sensed in her touch that drew the healing power from him.

Tapping into Jesus’ healing power is exactly what a billion Catholics do at every Mass in every corner of the globe when they recite the Creed—our well-honed profession of faith:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

In other words
Many Christians can recite these words (or a previous version of the Creed) by heart, but many of us might stumble if we actually had to explain the
meaning behind this compact statement of belief.

The Nicene Creed, which is the Creed Catholics recite at Mass, was initially formulated at the Council of Nicea (in modern Turkey) in 325 and completed in 381 at the Council of Constantinople. Its main concern was to counter the Arian heresy, which denied the full divinity of Jesus and the triune nature of God.

Thus, in the Creed we state our belief in one God, the Father. In Jesus Christ, who is “consubstantial with the father,” and the Holy Spirit, “who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

The members of the Council were particularly concerned with anticipating any loopholes that would allow unorthodox teachings to prevail, so they included extensive descriptions of Jesus: the only Son of God, born of the Father before all ages . . . God from God . . .

Saint Athanasius, who played a key role at the Council, is credited with the beautiful image of Jesus as Light from Light, true God from true God, which draws from an analogy common among Athanasius and his followers that compared God to the sun and Jesus to the sun’s rays. The

Scriptural roots of the Creed

Scripture is filled with professions of faith that gradually helped shape the Christian concept of God. Here is a sampling:

DEUT. 6:4: Hear O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.

MATT. 16:16: Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

MATT. 28:19: Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit.

JOHN 6:68-69: Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

JOHN 20:28: Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

1 COR. 8:6: Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist.

1 COR. 12:3: Therefore, I tell you that nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, “Jesus be accursed.” And no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the holy Spirit.

1 TIM. 3:16: Undeniably great is the mystery of devotion, Who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed to the Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

1 JOHN 4:2: This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God.
argument went something like this: The sun’s rays are derived from the sun (not vice versa), but there was never a time when the sun existed without its light. So, too, Jesus exists through the Father but there was never a time when the Father existed without the Son. Thus, they argued God and Jesus are co-eternal, and Jesus is, as we say in the Creed, “true God from true God.”

We believe, too, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son (this line is a sticking point for Orthodox Christians, who insist that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone—but that is another day’s argument).

Mainly we believe that our God is Father, Son, Spirit, or said another way: Our God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all life. All that exists comes through this triune God. That is why we believe creation is ultimately good, and all God’s creatures are worthy of dignity and respect.

Finally we believe that the church, the community of faithful, is one (united), holy (of God), catholic (universal, encompassing all the local churches), and apostolic (active and communal). In other words we believe that to be Christian is not just to follow a set of rules or adhere to a set of beliefs; being Christian by its very nature means being part of a community that traces its roots to the earliest Christian communities. It means sharing God’s word, breaking bread together, and living out the gospel in fellowship with others.

You are loved

The Creed took centuries to develop and will take more than the lifetime of each believer to fully comprehend, but its main truth is disarmingly simple: You are loved. You were created out of love, your life’s purpose is to love and be loved, and nothing can separate you from your one true love, who is eternal, real, steadfast, and ever-present.

The details of how that love gets expressed are unique to each believer—some may choose to live their lives in service to the poor; others to fight social injustice; still others to teach and offer counsel. Some may choose to commit to a celibate lifestyle and live in a religious community while others may choose different forms of consecrated life, Holy Orders, Matrimony, or single life. All ways are holy, yet not all ways are right for each of us. Our main pur-
Though our lives will contain many sorrows, Christians are not a sorrowful people. We are God’s children. God expects us to delight in life.

Pose as Christians is to find the best way to live out God’s call to love. Our path is not always apparent, but we are not without help along the way. We have the church, consisting of the community of faithful, the magisterium (the pope, cardinals, bishops, and so on who make up the teaching church), scripture, and tradition, all of which point to the many ways people throughout salvation history have accepted and expressed God’s love. We also have God in the person of Father, Son, and Spirit continually drawing us into Divine goodness.

Live joyfully

One thing is certain: No matter which way we turn, no matter where we put our focus and energy and commitments, our lives should lead to joy—deep, satisfying, life-giving joy. Confusion and doubt are part of the process, even a little anguish and sense of loss for the paths we could have taken, but our overriding spiritual and emotional state should be one of joy as we journey toward God.

We are part of the light of the world—this light is our origin and destination. Though our lives will contain many sorrows, Christians are not a sorrowful people. We are God’s children, not his crabby, fretful

Understanding the Creed in the light of faith

The Church hands down her memory especially through the profession of faith. . . . Let us look first at the contents of the Creed.

- It has a trinitarian structure: the Father and the Son are united in the Spirit of love. The believer thus states that the core of all being, the inmost secret of all reality, is the divine communion.
- The Creed also contains a christological confession: it takes us through all the mysteries of Christ’s life up to his death, Resurrection, and ascension into heaven before his final return in glory.
- It tells us that this God of communion, reciprocal love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, is capable of embracing all of human history and drawing it into the dynamic unity of the Godhead.
- The believer who professes his or her faith is taken up, as it were, into the truth being professed. He or she cannot truthfully recite the words of the Creed without being changed, without becoming part of that history of love which embraces us and expands our being, making it part of a great fellowship, . . . namely, the church.
- All the truths in which we believe point to the mystery of the new life of faith as a journey of communion with the living God.

—From the 2013 Encyclical Lumen Fidei
next-door neighbors. God expects us to delight in life. A look at the holiest people in history or in your own backyard gives witness to this delight. “Cheerfulness strengthens the heart and makes us persevere in a good life,” said Saint Philip Neri, known as the “Saint of Joy.” “Therefore the servant of God ought always to be in good spirits.”

So when you find yourself at a crossroad, at a time of major decision and transition, instead of succumbing to angst and fear, it is wise to go back to the basics, just as a Golfer breaks down the elements of his swing or a ball player goes over the fundamentals of the game. Try reciting the Creed and remind yourself of the core beliefs of Catholic faith that tell you why you are here (because God created you out of love) and what your purpose is (to give and receive love). Most of all remember that you are not alone. A billion other souls are on a similar spiritual journey. Together we draw on the saving power of Christ’s love. May this power be with you as you discern your call.

A version of this article originally appeared in Vision 2006.

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### U.K./IRISH COMMUNITIES
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  - vocationnetwork.org/community/602

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- **LifeChoices®**
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- **Apostolate for Family Consecration (A.F.C.), Catholic Corps**
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### RESOURCES
- **TrueQuest Communications**
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### SECULAR INSTITUTES
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### SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS
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- **House of Discernment**
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- **National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations (NFCRV)**
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- **Vocations Ireland**
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HH. QUIET. BE STILL. LISTEN. These are standard directives in meditation and contemplation to focus the mind and heart on a wide world that goes beyond words.

“In silence and quiet the devout soul advances in virtue and learns the hidden truths of scripture” promises Saint Thomas à Kempis in Imitation of Christ. Insight and enlightenment are just preliminary riches received as we progress toward what Saint Teresa of Ávila calls the Prayer of Quiet, which offers the “greatest peace, calm, and sweetness in the inmost depths of our being.” Indeed, silence has significant physical and spiritual benefits. Our blood pressure lowers, our focus increases, and we become more mindful of who we are and where we belong. These are just the assurances we are seeking as we discern our vocation. In a world of relentless noise and distraction, finding space in our day for hushed solitude is a challenge. But silence is a spiritual imperative. For “it is in silence,” Saint John of the Cross tells us, that God’s one Word, his Son, “can be heard by the soul.” Find a quiet corner and listen to what God’s Word is whispering to you.

Patrice Tuohy is publisher of VISION on behalf of the National Religious Vocation Conference, and CEO of TrueQuest Communications.

Enter the silence

Water’s Soul, by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa, sits on the edge of the Hudson River in Jersey City, New Jersey, facing New York City. It is made of resin, fiberglass, and marble dust. Plensa, known for monumental art installations, says the message of this 2020 sculpture is “to keep silent . . . to listen to the profound noise of the water talking to us.”
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Check out page XX for an up-close look at how Glenmary serves.

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