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Obedience to bishops, religious superiors leads to a unique kind of freedom for priests and consecrated men and women.

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A simple life that comes with the vow of poverty allows priests and religious to focus more on their spiritual lives.

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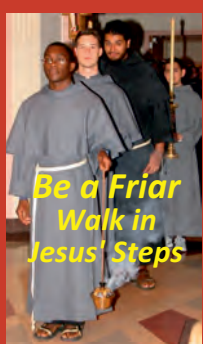
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OBEDIENCE



Pope Francis uses incense to bless new priests before their ordination Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in this 2014 file photo. CNS photo/Stefano Rellandini, Reuters

Obedience for priests, religious leads to a unique freedom

By Patti Maguire Armstrong

In our culture, obedience is largely thought to be the opposite of freedom — something to escape through adulthood, no longer being under the authority of parents and school. The Catholic Church, however, teaches that obedience is a good and holy thing.

Vocations to the religious life actually require a vow or promise of obedience. It is the cultural view of obedience that once pitted Father Joshua Ehli, rector of Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck, North Dakota, against school and parents when he was an adolescent. He used to skip Mass and frequently got into trouble at school. By high school, the administration at St. Mary's Central High School informed him that if it continued, he would not be with them for long.

"That jarred my soul," Father Ehli said. "The fun from doing my own little will was beginning to have greater and greater consequences. I started cleaning up my life, and spiritually, there was growth in virtues and obedience."

The lessons he learned from

his two priest religion teachers began to affect him on a deep level. "Once I understood the elements of the Faith, it impacted me," Father Ehli said.

By senior year in high school, he felt an inkling that he was called to be a priest, and he ran from it. "I didn't have a deep desire, but there was this voice that I never could completely escape," Father Ehli said. Finally, to "scratch that itch," he entered the seminary after college, assuming it would confirm that the priesthood was not for him. He soon realized, however, that it was a perfect fit — even the promise of obedience to his bishop.

"Instead of it being a concern, I realized the promise of obedience was a source of great freedom," Father Ehli said. "I don't have to wonder if I'm doing God's will." And so it was easy for him. Until it wasn't.

Father Ehli was ordained in 2009 and served as a parish priest until 2015 when he was assigned to Rome to serve with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, assisting the cardinal prefect to administer in mission territories on

behalf of the pope. Father Ehli loved Rome and found his work interesting and rewarding. He was also working on a doctorate degree. Then in October, with a year and a half still remaining in his assignment, the bishop reassigned him to a parish in need of a priest.

"I said yes out of love for my bishop and his role, not out of my own desire," Father Ehli explained. "It was an invitation to a deeper trust in the Lord, which is what the Church teaches." Ironically, it was the very topic Father Ehli planned for the dissertation he now had to abandon — discerning personal freedom within the context of obedience.

"I understood the topic, but now I actually had to do it," he said. "It took me about a month of working it out with the Lord to come to terms with it. I prayed for God to help me depart from my will and provide for me in the next opportunity. Once you get through that and trust grows, excitement comes waiting to see what you are going to do. My initial resistance

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Women religious from the Diocese of Metuchen, N.J., pray during a Mass of consecration at the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi in Metuchen Dec. 12, 2019. CNS photo/Mike Ehrmann, The Catholic Spirit

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seems infantile now," he said. "I am very happy here."

Bishop's perspective

According to Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki of the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois, obedience is related to mission. "Obedience is not an arbitrary exercise of power where a bishop orders a priest to do something to show that I am the boss," he said. "It is related to mission. If I ask a priest to take an assignment, it is because I need that priest in this parish. The bishop is matching a priest's abilities with the needs of a parish."

He noted that the word obedience itself comes from the Latin *oboedire*, which means to listen. "So obedience," Bishop Paprocki said, "means, who do you give ear to? Are you listening to yourself, to the culture or peer pressure, or to your bishop or superior?"

For diocesan priests, he explained, there is a promise of obedience to the bishop. "A religious order priest vows obedience to his religious superior and to his community and to his bishop," he said. "When I assign a religious priest, I have to work through his religious superior."

Naturally obedient

Growing up in San Antonio, Mother Madonna, prioress of the cloistered Carmelite Monastery in Wahpeton, North Dakota, actually liked being obedient in order to please her parents. But in second grade, when she announced that she wanted to become a religious sister, her parents told her never to speak of it again. They expected her to eventually get married, have children and live

next door to them.

After high school, she felt drawn to enter the Air Force while continuing to discern. She was stationed in England.

"From there, I was able to find out who I was apart from my parents," she said. She became certain that God was calling her to the religious life. Mother Madonna was accepted into the Carmelites and welcomed the vow of obedience. "I wanted it so bad I was willing to do anything," she said.

She did not expect, however, that "anything" would include leading the sisters in Gregorian chant. "I was so scared," Mother Madonna recalled. "The sisters have beautiful voices and I don't even want to listen to myself. I sounded horrible, but I did it. I felt Our Lord was saying to me, 'It's going to be your greatest cross, but it's also going to be your greatest gift to me.' It hasn't been easy, but this is what I can give to him."

As a prioress for the last six years, Mother Madonna said her job is to serve the other sisters, and she must still be obedient to her bishop and Carmelite superior.

Soon to be ordained

Deacon Brother Daniel Maria Klimek, assistant professor of theology at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, is a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular from the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. He is scheduled to be ordained a priest on May 23.

"I believe that as a religious, I am called to 'die' so that the flock may have life," he said, "But that 'dying' is a beautiful gift of self to Jesus and Mary made in relationship to them."

According to him, Pope St.

John Paul II taught that dying through the gift of one's will unites us to the obedience of Jesus on the cross and the Blessed Mother's spiritual crucifixion at the foot of the cross.

"Sister Clare Crockett, a young Irish sister who died in an earthquake in Ecuador in 2016, put it beautifully," Brother Klimek explained. "She said that every day she gave Jesus and Mary a blank check, explaining that they have the right to change her plans for the day and request of her whatever they would like."

Obedience conquers the vices of individualism, pride and self-centeredness so that freedom and virtue flourishes, Brother Klimek said. "The three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are meant to reflect the most perfect conformity to the life of Jesus Christ," he said. "By living the vows, we are not only serving the kingdom of God, but are also radically emulating the life of Jesus, our savior."

Brother Klimek pointed to St. Paul's words: "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). "One's will becomes so absorbed with Christ's will," he said, "that every divine request brings joy and every opportunity to act on the vow of obedience feels like it is a part of the individual's own desire and disposition."

It can be difficult, Brother Klimek said. "But it is also deeply life-giving, helping one to live in accordance with eternity, with what matters most in the long term through a sacrifice of one's will, personifying crucified love for him who deserves all of our love."

Patti Maguire Armstrong writes from North Dakota.

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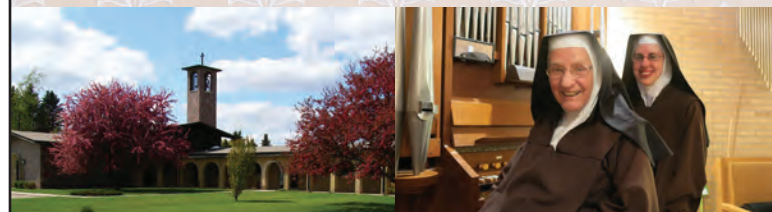
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LAY RELIGIOUS

Secular religious live out the charisms of consecrated life

By Brian Fraga

They may not wear habits or live in community, but the lay Catholics who have been formed in the spirituality of a religious order look to embody the evangelical counsels as best they can in the secular world.

By committing themselves to obeying the Church and its teachings, being chaste in accord with their state of life and being poor in spirit, lay Catholics who are secular and Third Order members of religious orders present a striking Christian witness to their families, friends and neighbors.

"We realize we're in the world. We're not cloistered — far from it," said Mary Ellen Bakken, a Secular Discalced Carmelite who lives in Westford, Massachusetts.

In living the evangelical counsels in a lay context, Bakken said Christ is the "perfect model" for poverty, obedience and chastity in the world, though she and the other members of her secular community know they will always fall short in comparison.

"We know we'll never be perfectly like him, but he lived the evangelical counsels when he was here on earth," Bakken said.

'We're bearers of peace'

Whether one is a Dominican tertiary, a secular Franciscan, a member of the Servite Secular Order or a Benedictine oblate, the lay Catholics who have undergone a period of study and formation before making formal promises or professions with those orders in effect extend the spirituality of the monastery, convent or friary into the secular world.

"The basic rule of life as a lay Franciscan is bringing life to the Gospel and the Gospel to life, and to do it through peace, harmony and not getting involved in too much confrontation," said Philip Papa, 74, a secular Franciscan who lives in Putnam County, New York.

"We follow a rule of life which basically says we're bearers of peace," Papa told Our Sunday Visitor. "We try to seek ways to unify through dialogue, trusting that God is everywhere, in everyone you look at and see. We just look for Jesus in everybody."

On obedience, Papa said secular Franciscans like himself



Bakken

promise not to challenge the Church's moral teachings. With poverty, they may not dress in rags and beg for alms, but the lay members of Papa's secular Franciscan community try to live simply and be detached from material belongings. They also look to identify with and help the poor and homeless in their midst.

"We do mission work, and we're involved in helping the homeless and working on immigration issues," Papa said, adding that he and his wife were first drawn to the Franciscans after getting involved in a social justice ministry that the order ran in their parish.

'Using those gifts to serve the Lord'

Also in New York, Elizabeth Scalia, a Catholic author and blogger who works as the editor-at-large for Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, lives out her vocation as a Benedictine oblate.

"It's the whole sense of taking what you have, recognizing your gifts and using those gifts to serve the Lord, but also making your own way to God, which appeals to me because I'm very much a lone wolf," said Scalia, 61, who became an oblate about 18 years ago.

As an oblate, Scalia promised to conform her life as much as she could to the monastic ideal, which in a Benedictine context entails balancing prayer and work (*ora et labora*) throughout her day. She prays the Liturgy

of the Hours, attends Mass as often as she can and tries to squeeze in spiritual reading and *lectio divina*.

As far as embodying a spirit of poverty goes, Scalia noted that she has worn the same pair of black shoes since 2007.

"The more I don't have, I find that the more I don't need," Scalia said.

'You can't go there and leave the same'

Karen Fenker does not usually drive fast, but finds that she needs to put her car in cruise control whenever she gets near the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Bardstown, Kentucky.

"I just can't get there fast enough," said Fenker, 55, a resident of Spencerville, Indiana, who for the last 30 years has regularly been visiting the Cistercian monastery.

This September, Fenker will return to the monastery to make her formal commitment as a lay Cistercian of Gethsemani Abbey.

"You can't go there and leave the same. You just can't," said Fenker, a married mother of five grown children who attended her first silent retreat at the abbey 30 years ago. The experience changed her life.

Fenker has since returned to the monastery on an almost annual basis, savoring the solitude, peace and silence at Gethsemani. More and more, she yearned to hold on to that tranquility after returning to her normal everyday life.

Along with regular spiritual reading and Scripture study, Fenker makes it a priority to have at least a half-hour every day of silent contemplation.

"I crave that quiet place, even if I have to go out on a walk," Fenker said. "I feel like I'm calmer. I feel like I'm much more positive, and more peaceful."



Fenker

Brian Fraga is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.



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POVERTY

Spiritual detachment is key to a life of poverty

By Brian Fraga

The religious priests, brothers and sisters who live the evangelical counsel of poverty did not vow to be destitute, to live in squalor or dress in rags. They also never promised to forego the occasional glass of wine or fine meal.

In living out their vow of poverty, the religious have resolved to live simply and forego certain privileges — such as owning their own home and keeping their own salary — that many lay Catholics may take for granted.

"I have a checking account with money the community gives me, but it's rather limited," said Jesuit Father James Bretzke, who teaches moral theology at John Carroll University in suburban Cleveland. His teaching salary goes to his Jesuit community, which gives him about \$9,000 — for the whole year — for his own personal spending.

"If you had to live on \$9,000, I think you'd be pretty careful," Father Bretzke told Our Sunday Visitor. He said the evangelical counsel of poverty is intended to free religious priests like him for apostolic endeavors.

"Poverty is also meant to mortify us," he said.

Practicing detachment

In that context, "poverty" translates to a spirit of detachment from material goods and creature comforts. For example, a Franciscan friar may need to drive a car or use a computer for his ministry, but knows that he can go without the latest iPhone — and he is OK with that.

"There has to be some level of prudence in how we use the different things that are at our disposal," said Franciscan Father Emanuel Vasconcelos, the associate pastor at St. Anne Church in Columbus, Georgia.

Father Vasconcelos — "Father Manny" to his parishioners — told Our Sunday Visitor that the evangelical counsel of poverty will be lived differently in each religious community, depending on its charism, the ministry it is engaged in and the culture where the community is located.

"On a day-to-day basis, we have to rely on a number of

things," Father Vasconcelos said. "Some might look at the fact that we have computers, a nice living space, cars — those are things that may make people question, 'Where is the poverty in that?'"



Father Vasconcelos

"That's why an understanding of detachment is so important," Father Vasconcelos added. "We need to use certain things in order to minister effectively. If we were to take poverty fundamentally or literally, then it would be impossible for us to

have any connection with people outside of our parish realm."

In living out the vow of poverty, many religious communities in the modern world often deal with a tension in carrying out their ministry and simple living. Discernment is an essential feature of engaging that tension. Communities have to be honest with themselves in determining if something as basic as owning a television may weaken their resolve to be poor of spirit.

"It's more than just not owning stuff. There is an inner relationship with the things of this world that we're always struggling with."

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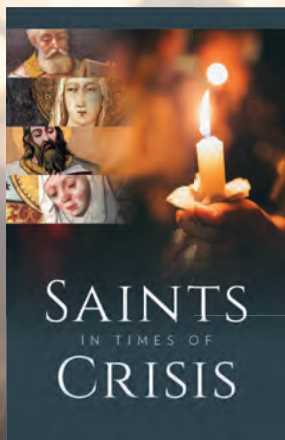


Father Bretzke



A religious sister provides food to a needy family at a Catholic Charities program. CNS photo/Elias Kontogiannis, courtesy Catholic Charities USA

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gling with,” said Pauline Sister Rose Pacatte, the founding director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles.

Sister Rose’s ministry involves millions of dollars worth of expensive media equipment, which is obviously very different from how a cloistered religious community in a rural monastery would live out its vow of poverty.

“In order to carry out our apostolate, we have to use the means necessary,” said Sister Rose, who also told Our Sunday Visitor that she sees personal, communitarian, spiritual and ecclesial dimensions to the vow of poverty.

“With the vow of poverty, we’re following closely in the footsteps of Jesus’ example,” Sister Rose said. “He lived a poor, simple life, and that’s what we aim for as well. By poor, spiritually, it’s that lack of attachment to goods.”

Living in community

While they vary by charism and mission, there are some common features of how the different religious communities live out their vow of poverty. In living together, they share almost everything in common. The communities cover their living expenses and the tools and supplies for their ministries.

Some religious have their own bank accounts — even credit cards — but they are completely dependent on their communities for whatever personal discretionary funds or “pocket money” they may receive. Any money they spend for official business has to be strictly accounted for.

“I have to bring the receipts and explain,” Father Vasconcelos said. “It’s a way of keeping ourselves accountable. And being aware that our use of money is a great spiritual practice. When I review where I’m spending money, I see what I’m valuing.”

Meanwhile, in Kent, located in southeast England, Benedictine Sister Mary Walburga Paget lives in Minster Abbey, where she and the other nuns hold all goods in common.

“That means that I don’t

own anything. We share everything,” said Sister Mary, 39, who added that there are some things for her own exclusive personal use, such as her habit and toothbrush.

Ten years after she entered the monastery, Sister Mary admitted that she still finds the vow of poverty difficult in some ways.

“I still find it hard to have no ‘buying power’ of my own, to have to ask for what I need. It is a radical dependence on the religious superior that helps us to understand, to feel our dependence on God. But that isn’t easy,” Sister Mary said.

“People come to the monastery from all kinds of backgrounds,” Sister Mary added. “Sometimes it is a poverty in itself to accept the communal way of living poverty and not have to impose my own agenda.”

Caring for creation

Another modern feature of how religious communities are living their vow of poverty today involves an ecological dimension, which the Church in general has become more aware of since *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on integral ecology.

The communities are quite mindful of sustainable living, reusing what can be recycled — such as mending their own habits — and eliminating waste, which they see as compatible with living simply and against the grain of the materialistic culture.

“Part of our simple lifestyle is to be aware of creation and to use the things that God has given us well,” said Sister Mary, who noted that St. Benedict wrote that the cellarer, the person in a monastery who is responsible for the provisioning of food and drink, should “regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar.”

“We clean tools after we have used them, store them away, use things gently so as to prolong their life,” Sister Mary said. “We try to limit the harmful chemicals we use and choose ecological alternatives whenever possible.”

Brian Fraga is a contributing editor for *Our Sunday Visitor*.



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CHASTITY

Celibacy is more a grace than sacrifice, religious say

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

When Jack Sidler's wife, Dee, was losing her battle with cancer in 2008, he told her, "You can't die, because who will I love?"

She said, "Jack, you'll find somebody to love."

After her death he asked God what he should do. The answer came at a Mass when he realized that he wanted to be on the other side of the altar.

He was 66 when he entered Sacred Heart Seminary in Hales Corner, Wisconsin. He was 70 in December 2014 when Bishop Anthony B. Taylor of the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, ordained him to the priesthood. He's now pastor of St. John Church in Russellton, Arkansas.

After being with a wife and their three children for 45 years, he felt that God called him to a chaste life where he would love differently.

"When you get married, you say to the person, 'I dedicate my life to you,'" he said. "When you're ordained a priest, you dedicate your life to God, and he becomes No. 1."

Father Sidler understands family life from personal experience. Being a priest gives him a different kind of joy.

"In being married to Dee,

I found happiness. In being a father and grandfather, I find great happiness," he said. "In serving God, I have found my happiness on this earth. When you find that purpose for your happiness, you find the balance that it takes to be a priest, to be a good husband and to be a good father."

'Within the folds of family'

There's a human need for family, Sister Mary Norbert Long said, and she found hers 63 years ago with the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.



Father Sidler

"I always had the feeling of being welcome within the folds of families no matter where I served," she said. "I taught school or was an administrator. I found a lot of satisfaction and supportive Christian love with interaction with adults in the early years of the cursillo movement."

SCster Mary Norbert, 80, finds freedom in the vow of chastity that makes her available for God's plans.

"If I were married, my first obligation would be to God, then my husband and children and extended families," she said. "Not being married, I can go wherever the need is."

She finds love in seeing each person as a child of God.

"We are made in the image and likeness of God," she said. "You really have to think about that. With the graces of my religious vows, I've been able to do that and to accept each person for who they are, not who I want them to be."

Intimacy in religious life

Jesuit Father Bill Johnson was totally open to marriage at one time, and as one of nine children, he was used to companionship.

God called him instead to become a Jesuit. He entered the novitiate in 1980 and is now vice president for mission and identity at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Milwaukee.

"The fraternity of brotherhood was important when I was growing up, and I have that brotherhood from my community," he said.

He finds intimacy and understanding in his religious order, and with the men and women in his birth family, at work and in friendships. Like traditional families, they support each other through struggles and conflicts.

Father Johnson recommits to his priestly vows every day.

"You have to do that in all walks of life, and in marriage,"

Continued on Page 17



Father Bill Johnson teaches at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Milwaukee. Courtesy photo

Continued from Page 16

he said. “You have to be plugged into your commitment. There’s loneliness in all walks of life, and there’s restlessness in all our hearts.”

By and large, he added, chastity is a “huge blessing” and a privilege. “I need those friendships,” he said. “I need reconciliation and people who are open to forgiving me and giving me another chance.”

‘His love is worth everything’

Sister Mary Gemma Harris, a Third Order Regular of St. Francis, was drawn to the white gowns when she went with friends to outfit a bridal party. As she ran her hands over the satin and lace, she heard an inner voice say, “This is not for you.”

She grew up daydreaming about the man who would sweep her off her feet, their wedding and their eventual children. That changed in her freshman year at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio, when her prayer life drew her closer to Jesus.

“I would have loved to be in a relationship and falling in love, but the deeper desire was that the Lord would give himself to me entirely, and I would give myself entirely to him,” she said. “I realized that my call was to get as close as possible to God.”

Sister Mary Gemma, 31, professed her final vows on July 6, 2019, with the Franciscan Sisters TOR of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother in Toronto, Ohio. They are a contemplative-active community with a full prayer life and ministries that make known God’s merciful love. Her assignments are in multimedia, coordinating the newsletters and working part-time in the vocations office.

Her work in campus ministry and with other young people gave her a sense of spiritual motherhood. Sometimes she sees the fruits of her work with them, and sometimes, she said, the fullness of that labor won’t be known until she’s in heaven.

“Jesus has given me the grace, this gift of celibacy and chastity to help me get close to God,” she said. “His love is worth everything. That’s why I said yes to this life.”



Sister Mary Gemma

Mapa left a seminary in the Philippines after his third year, became a nurse and came to the United States. He felt called again to vocation while working in an emergency room with the Sisters of Mercy.

But he didn’t want to give up nursing to become a priest.

“I love nursing,” he said. “We minister to people in their most vulnerable times. We are the ones directly involved in care, in body, mind and spirit.”

He found his calling with the Congregation of Alexian Brothers in the Immaculate Conception Province in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. Their ministries are in health care and serving the elderly, homeless and marginalized.

“Being chaste is far greater than how we loosely associate chastity,” he said. “It’s a kind of disposition Chastity has to do with our inner beliefs and life witness in how we view the world, how we view human beings as holy, as God’s creation. We have that awareness and respect for all life.”

Now 60 and the vocations director, he talks to potential candidates about their capacity to live with the vow of chastity.

The Alexian Brothers accept candidates up to age 55, including ones who are widowed or divorced with annulments.

“There are so many graces in real fatherhood that these fathers can bring to religious life,” Brother Exequiel said.

Alexian Brother Daniel McCormick, the community’s provincial, was divorced after 19 years of a marriage that was annulled. He raised his two children alone.

“I knew that I wasn’t going to get married again,” he said.

He took his final vows with the Alexians in 1999 and worked as a drug rehab counselor, a chaplain and developer of their AIDS ministry. He got a degree in psychiatric social work and served in a behavioral health hospital.

“If anybody had told me 30 years ago that I was going to find fulfillment and meaning in my life as a celibate, broke and obedient Catholic male, I would not have believed them,” Brother Daniel said. “I love this life.”

A different view of chastity
Alexian Brother Exequiel

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller
writes from Pennsylvania.

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PRAYER



Sister Mary Kathleen Ronan, right, poses with Sister Marysia Weber. Courtesy photo

A strong prayer life is the ‘lifeblood’ of vocations

By Patti Maguire Armstrong

Prayer is the lifeblood of vocations — both discerning one and living it out. If a strong prayer life fades away, so, too, does the vocation, according to Msgr. John Esseff, a priest in the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who was a spiritual director to St. Teresa of Calcutta.

Msgr. Esseff explained in an interview with Our Sunday Visitor that he could have lost his own vocation during the 1960s if not for what he felt were the proddings of the Blessed Mother and a spiritual director who helped him to see that he was letting his many activities push prayer out of his routine.

“We hear that we are in a crisis with the sexual problems or the financial crisis and the vocation crisis,” Msgr. Esseff said. “But I really believe that we do not have any crisis except for prayer. We have a prayer crisis. Those who set prayer aside abandon the most important part of their vocation.”

Prayer is about building and maintaining one’s relationship with God and listening to him, Msgr. Esseff said. “Jesus said, ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will

be done.’ The relationship that Jesus had with his Father was primarily listening. He came to do the will of his Father who sent him.”

Building a strong prayer life, therefore, begins not with self-reliance but with receiving from God, Msgr. Esseff explained. “Only the Father gives. Jesus received from the Father. Jesus said, in John 14:20, everything that he was, he received from the Father. And in Matthew 11:27, Jesus said: ‘No one knows the Son except the



Msgr. Esseff

Father, and no one knows the Father except for the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’ Without Jesus and without prayer, I can’t do anything,” he said. “And because Jesus prayed, I pray.”

Prayer makes perseverance possible

Father Donald Calloway, vocations director of the Marianists of the Immaculate Conception and author of the book “Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual

Father” (Marian Press, \$17.95), described prayer as essential to preserving one’s vocation.

“Through a prayer life, the Holy Spirit fills you with that ability to go forward even in the midst of great difficulty,” he said. “I see people that leave the priesthood or have a crisis in their vocation also have a prayer life that went to pot at the root of it.”

When speaking with young men discerning a call to the priesthood, Father Calloway tells them to continue what they are already doing.

“Most people discerning a vocation have a prayer life or they would not be able to hear that call,” he said. “I encourage them to also have a devotion to Our Lady and pray the Rosary every day and spend time before the Blessed Sacrament.” He warns them to expect discouragement from the devil who will try to tempt them away from a good relationship with the Lord. “Prayer,” he said, “helps to persevere through it.”

For those excited about a recent conversion or reversion,

Continued on Page 19



Father Calloway

Continued from Page 18

Father Calloway points out that there is a natural honeymoon stage that does not last forever.

"I had a radical conversion, and it was wonderful, but then I had to go through the daily decision to continue the relationship even when it did not feel good. That is where love is tested and proven."

Prayer helps discernment

Sister Mary Kathleen Ronan of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan, is the director of the lay formation program for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. She has been a sister for more than 50 years. Sister Mary Kathleen recalled the old Baltimore Catechism's question, "Why did God make me?" The answer is: "God made me to know him, to love him and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in heaven."

"But how do you share in his life if you don't even say hello?" Sister Mary Kathleen said. "In every time and every place, God calls man to seek him, to know him and to love him." It is prayer, she explained, that makes that possible.

It was through prayer, that she discerned her own vocation, although initially she resisted.

"I went to confession to a priest who told me to pray and say to God, 'Show me your will and then give me the strength to do it.' He also encouraged me to go to daily Mass." She credited prayer and the Eucharist as giving her the strength to say "yes" to God.

"I was sure I would be miserable, but once I entered the convent, I never regretted it for an instant," she said. "Prayer helps to form our hearts. It gives a greater freedom from my own self-love through the very contemplation of the Lord."

Sister Mary Kathleen also said that pondering the life of Jesus through Scripture and prayer enables her to persevere. She learned that lesson many years ago from a sister she thought was very holy yet still asked for prayers.

"That sister understood: 'Lord, I am persevering today by your grace, and by your grace, I will persevere tomorrow. She knew she needed prayer for that.'"

Developing prayer habits in seminarians

According to Father Carter Griffin, rector of St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C., and the author of "Why Celibacy?: Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest" (Emmaus Road, \$24.95), the entire priesthood revolves around union with Jesus through prayer.

"Prayer enlightens our mind, strengthens our will and increases our thirst for souls," he said. "A priest who doesn't pray is like a soldier going into battle empty-handed."

The highest prayer of the Church and the very source of its life is the Mass, and the sacraments are the arteries of grace both for priests and for the people he serves, Father Griffin explained. Thus, a priest should pray the Mass daily, and he recommends weekly confession.

"A seminarian should also have a vibrant interior life fueled by personal mental prayer, which most spiritual masters agree should be at least an hour a day," Father Griffin said. Ideally, he said that would be in front of the Blessed Sacrament in adoration.

"Finally, a priest will generally have two other practices built into his day: spiritual reading and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary," he said.

When seminarians first arrive, Father Griffin said that the hour of adoration each day can seem difficult to some, but over time, they begin to take on even more practices of prayer expected of a priest, such as a daily Rosary and all five "hours" of the Liturgy of the Hours.

"We spend a lot of time teaching them ways to use that time in adoration well, how to handle the usual distractions in prayer and how to find time for mental prayer even when away from the seminary, such as at home on break."

By the end of their first year in seminary, Father Griffin said they have grown to love their quiet time with the Lord.

"Even when it is difficult or dry, there is something so beautiful and peaceful about just sitting or kneeling in the presence of the Lord," he said. "It's like radiation therapy, just receiving his love."

Patti Maguire Armstrong writes from North Dakota.



Father Griffin



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PERMANENT DEACONS



Deacon John Failla, center, prays with fellow deacons of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y., during a Sept. 27 Mass at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Brookville, N.Y. marking the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order in the United States. CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

A deacon's ministry centers around selfless service of others

By Brian Fraga

A permanent deacon will almost always volunteer his time if someone asks him to help out with something around the parish.

"If someone says, 'Deacon, can you come do this?' Our first reaction is gonna be, 'Sure.' By nature, none of us is going to say no to anything," said Deacon William Ditewig, a permanent deacon in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

That spirit of selfless service is part of a deacon's vocation, but it sometimes gets him in trouble, especially if he's married.

"If you ask my wife, she would say one of the biggest problems I cause is that I do not set aside a day where I say, 'Nope, this is our day,'" said Deacon Don Weigel, who was ordained a permanent deacon for the Diocese of Buffalo almost 10 years ago.

Family, job, ministry

Deacon Weigel, who is assigned to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Clarence, New York, told Our Sunday Visitor that he has tried to carve out a day off for himself and his family, but often slips back into the habit of saying "yes" to everything.

"It's something I'm aware of. I owe that to our marriage," Deacon Weigel said.

Balancing one's responsibilities to his wife, children and a full-time job is not something the celibate priests in the Latin-rite Church have to worry about. But for permanent deacons, who are often married when they get ordained, carrying out their ministry and being an attentive husband and father can be a tough juggling act.

"When I was in formation, some people used to say that your priorities should go like, 'Your family first, your job second and your ministry third,'" Deacon Weigel said. "Well, that's just not true. That's just not how it works."

Deacon Greg Kandra, who is in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, recalls hearing similar advice when he was in formation about 15 years ago.

"Every deacon knows it doesn't always work out that way," Deacon Kandra said. "Very often that order gets shuffled, and it's challenging to really find that balance. It takes a lot of prayer, a

lot of understanding from your spouse, your family and sometimes your boss to make it all work."

Service in charity, word and liturgy

Many Catholics may not understand the nature of the permanent diaconate. It's possible that they may see the deacon as an exalted lay minister in robes, someone who is not "fully ordained" to celebrate Mass like a priest but wields a little more authority than a lector or and extraordinary minister of holy Communion.

However, joining the permanent diaconate is not to become a second-class clergyman. Permanent

deacons are ordained into the Sacrament of Holy Orders. By virtue of their ordination, they are called to a threefold ministry of service in charity, word and liturgy. By being approachable men of prayer, they are called to be examples of Christlike service.

"It's important for people to

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The Love Of Christ Urges Us On!

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know that we are ordained, and not just for a particular parish, but for the entire diocese, for the entire local Church," said Deacon Ditewig, 70, who was ordained a permanent deacon in 1990.

Obedience

Deacon Ditewig, who headed the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' diaconate office before retiring, said a permanent deacon at his ordination makes sacred, lifelong promises of obedience and respect to his bishop who decides how he will be of service to the local Church.

"People understand obedience from a secular point of view, but there is a much richer, deeper, theological understanding to it," said Deacon Ditewig, who noted that "obey" is derived from the Latin phrase "to act because of what you hear."

"Basically, what we're saying is, 'We're hearing and listening for the word of God from you, Bishop, and I promise I will do the will of God,'" Deacon Ditewig said.

"But it goes deeper even than that. It's also establishing a new relationship between the deacon and the whole diocesan Church represented by the bishop," Deacon Ditewig said. "The deacon is promising obedience to the bishop's successors, to the whole local Church. You're becoming part of the fabric of the local Church. It's a very profound moment."

Deacon Kandra, 60, a former editor for CBS News, who publishes a popular blog, "The Deacon's Bench," said his promise of obedience to his bishop has so far not been that difficult because he has a good relationship with the bishop.

"However, if at some point, he wanted me to be transferred to another parish, I'd have to have a discussion about that and make sure it was OK with my wife," said Deacon Kandra, who added that the bishop would also be within his rights to tell him to shut down his blog if he felt it harmed the Church.

"And I would have to do that. I'm fully cognizant of that," Deacon Kandra said, adding that if he writes a book, he sends the unpublished manuscript first to the bishop for him to make sure that it contains nothing objectionable to the Faith.

"I haven't had any problems," Deacon Kandra said.

Men of prayer

Besides obedience, deacons promise to be men of prayer and to say morning and evening prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours. Carving out the time, especially if they have full-time jobs and young children to raise, is not always easy.

"I thank God for the New York City subway system, because that's where I do a lot of my praying," Deacon Kandra said.

"Personally, that's always been one of my challenges," Deacon Ditewig said. "When you come to the Liturgy of the Hours, it can feel like a personal devotion, especially if you're praying by yourself. But the fact is, this is the official prayer of the Church. So when I'm praying the Liturgy of the Hours, it's not just so my own spiritual life will be enhanced. It's for the good of the entire Church. And that's what always helps me to get back on track."

Spouse

A notable promise that permanent deacons also make at their ordination is not to remarry if their wives die before them. That condition, mandated by the Code of Canon Law, helps explain why candidates for the permanent diaconate tend to be older. For many younger married men, making such a momentous promise can be an obstacle.

"That's huge. A lot of guys struggle with that," Deacon Kandra said. "I know a lot of guys who dropped out of formation because they just couldn't imagine raising their kids without a mother."

On a related note, married men who discern the permanent diaconate are required to have the support of their wives because of the demands of the vocation. Deacon Ditewig said it is necessary for the deacon, his wife and children to grow spiritually together as a family.

"It's important the wife and the family somehow participate in his spiritual life to the greatest amount that they can," Deacon Ditewig said, "Mainly so everybody's growing together and having the same opportunity for growth."

Brian Fraga is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.



Deacon Kandra

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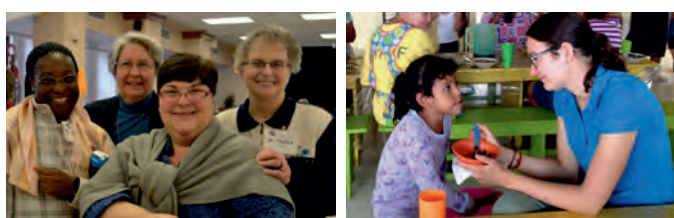
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RELIGIOUS CHARISMS

How different communities embrace their charisms

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

Religious communities are gifted with charisms that called their founders to serve God in different ways. Some teach, preach or serve the poor. Some have a life of prayer that beckons others to hear the voice of God and seek his graces.

The five friars at the Holy Dormition Byzantine Franciscan Friary in Sybertsville, Pennsylvania, follow the example of St. Francis to live the Gospel through preaching, prayer, poverty, fraternity and serving the poor and marginalized.

Their chapel is open during daylight for prayer, Divine Liturgies and Friday confessions. Their retreats and days of recollection are part of the Franciscan charism of preaching the Gospel.

Father Jerome Wolbert is guardian of the house and has a parish assignment.

"We live our charism in the presence of our friars in having the chapel open, and the ministry of keeping the place as a quiet refuge where people can encounter God in the peace of the land and in the sacramental presence of Our Lord," he said.

The friary is the only Byzantine Franciscan community in the United States. They're part of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province in Franklin, Wisconsin, which has nearly 90 Roman and Byzantine priests and brothers.

"I work at a food pantry a couple of times a month, and Father Jim Carroll, who also has a parish, helps collect food and gets it to the people who need it," Father Wolbert said. "A lot of people in our area are struggling to get by."

Brother Augustine Paulik, 80, is not as physically active as he once was, but he rises at 5 a.m. to be at chapel for 7 a.m. prayers. He's a good listener for visitors who need someone to talk to, and that's living the Gospel.

The friars embrace brotherhood in the spirit of St. Francis.

"We live without anything of our own," Father Wolbert said. "We come together for praying and for meals, and we support each other prayerfully and fraternally. So if I'm struggling with something, I don't have to deal with it on my own. I have my brothers to deal with it, too."

Dedication to the Rosary

The Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary in Summit, New Jersey, fully participate in the mission of the Dominican Friars of the Order of Preachers.

"We have a life of prayer, a life of penance and are witness to the reality of God and the primacy of God while living this life," said Sister Mary Catharine of Jesus Perry. "We make only one vow of obedience, and in that vow is this whole way of life that encompasses chastity, service and prayer."

The 18 nuns, ages 24 to 89, sing the full Divine Office seven times a day, attend daily Mass and have two hours of private prayer. Praying the Rosary during adoration is part of their charism.

Sister Mary Catharine, 51, takes care of their habits and manages the gift shop that sells their handmade soap, hand creams and candles. She felt called to God since she was a child but wanted to teach. After one college semester, she realized that what she truly wanted was to simply praise God.

"The monastery is really like a center point in the area," she said. "The chapel is open all day, and people come for prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We have people from all over the world asking us to pray for their intentions."

A volunteer recently told her how much the monastery meant, that its presence "offered a place where we can come and be with the Lord." The spontaneous comment touched Sister Mary Catharine. "That's what a monastery is



Father Wolbert

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Sister Joetta Huelsmann, second from left, poses with members of her order. Courtesy photo

Continued from Page 22

supposed to do, to point to something more, to our final end and what we are here for," she said.

An evolving mission

St. Catherine Kasper, founder of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit to discern how they were to respond to the needs of the poor in 19th-century Germany. She instructed the sisters to listen prayerfully, live simply and joyfully in loving service, and to be women of faith and vision who respond to the evolving needs of the Church.

When a handful of her sisters arrived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1868, they served in a parish, school and orphanage and nursed the sick. Their work was primarily in schools and hospitals when Sister Joetta Huelsmann, provincial of the community in Donaldson, Indiana, entered 51 years ago. There are now 65 sisters in the U.S. States Province, and 48 are at the motherhouse.

"What we do now is broader," Sister Joetta said. "We have the Sojourner Truth House where we work with women and children and have a day care center. We help the women to write resumes, learn how to dress for job interviews, and we help them find jobs and a place to live."

There's a retreat center on campus, MoonTree Studios for the arts, nursing home and independent living, housing for special needs and the elderly, preventive health services, food programs and services for immigrants. Babies with compromised health are cared for at a home in

East Chicago. Students at their Ancilla College gain agricultural experience at the Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm.

"We look at a person's gifts and where we can use those gifts," Sister Joetta said about their growing ministries and assignments.

The sisters pray together morning and evening, attend daily Mass if possible, have a personal prayer life and are encouraged to make at least a five-day retreat annually.

"We need that nourishment to renew our relationship with God," she said.

Hospitality and stability

More than a thousand people make retreats every year at St. Emma Monastery in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Thousands more attend their summer flea market, quarterly book sales, Christmas Shoppe and Christmas Open House. People shop six days a week at their Treasure Shoppe and gift and book store, and it's unknown how many visit the two chapels and the shrines to St. Walburga, Our Lady of Fatima, St. Pio, Jesus at the Last Supper, outdoor Stations of the Cross, or the Rosary path that winds through a corner of the monastery's 115 acres. They also run a bed and breakfast.

Hospitality is a Benedictine charism. Following the Rule of St. Benedict, the six nuns, one postulant and their volunteers welcome all guests as Christ.

"It's so humbling to hear back about how people are touched or

even changed when they come here," said Mother Mary Anne Noll, the prioress for 27 years. "They experience that God really does provide an oasis in the world. He really does touch their hearts."

The charism of *ora et labora*, Latin for prayer and work, is another Benedictine tradition.

"It's the love of God and love of neighbor that's infused in everything we do," she said. "We use the tools of the monastery as sacred vessels, and sacred vessels are spaces to be filled with a gift of self. Yesterday we had a water leak in the retreat house, and cleaning that up was a gift that we had that we gave to God."

The nuns' prayer life centers on daily Mass and Liturgy of the Hours seven times a day, and fulfilling prayer requests from people who visit, call and send letters or emails from nearly every state.

"I am so privileged when people pull the curtain back on their hearts and really share what's inside them, the struggles they've been through, and the graces," Mother Mary Anne said. "We are the nursing home out in the battlefield of life. ... [People] come here and God blesses them."

Benedictines additionally profess a vow of stability.

"This is not just my address for 57 years," she said. "Think of stability as blooming where you're planted."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.



Mother Mary Anne

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