



Discernment Group Curriculum

Year I: Religious Life



I n t r o d u c t i o n

Brothers in Holy Cross,

Thank you for being willing to lead a vocational discernment group. While a call to priesthood and religious life in Holy Cross only comes from God, that call is usually nurtured in the context of a relationship. A young man is able to clarify that call and respond to it when they get to know Holy Cross religious, as well as other young men discerning a call to Holy Cross. Therefore, your work in building relationships with them, and helping them get to know one another, is critical to our vocational efforts. The hope of the Office of Vocations is that this resource makes your work a little easier.

How to Use This Resource

This guide is in the form of a 3-year curriculum, with 12 meetings for each year. The first year covers Religious Life, the second year covers Priesthood, and the third year covers Holy Cross. This should allow you some flexibility in case the same young men attend your group for consecutive years. By the same token, you will notice some repetition from year to year, to ensure that certain key topics will be covered for everyone.

This guide can be as flexible as you want it to be. If you don't have much time to prepare for your meetings, you can simply use the meeting outlines verbatim, allowing you to put your time where it is spent best: inviting men to the group, and engaging them once they are there. If you want to modify the content in the outlines, or even add or eliminate meetings, that is fine, too. We understand that you know these young men well enough to know what kind of gatherings will benefit them the most. Hopefully this guide makes it a little easier to get started.

Objectives of Vocation Groups

The goals of vocation groups in a parish or campus are to:

- Promote vocations and create greater visibility for Holy Cross in its institutions.
- Create an entry point to which we may invite men whom we think might be interested in discerning.
- Provide a consistent point of contact for us with men who are already discerning.
- Allow discerning men to come into regular contact with other discerning men.
- Pave the way for more formalized, one-on-one contact with men who may be interested in investigating the seminary.

The Office of Vocations will work with you to make sure our efforts complement each other. We'll refer young men in your area to your group, and you'll refer them to us when it seems they are ready for more formal contact with us.



Starting a Group

Inviting young men to participate in a vocation group is the most important, and often most intimidating, part of launching and maintaining a group. While parish bulletins and Mass announcements are important, there is no substitute for personal invitations. We encourage you to call young men whom you think might benefit from this group and extend the invitation personally. (If you are working with minors, you should call their parent or guardian before you contact the minor, and keep them in the loop throughout the process.) If you are able to establish a core group of young men who attend consistently, you might seek their assistance in identifying and inviting new men to join. Don't be afraid to cast the net wide. The worst that can happen is that people tell you "no," but you never know who might need a little nudge in order to finally take steps towards exploring their vocation.

Suggested General Structure of Meetings

As stated earlier, the outline that we've attached is flexible and can be adapted however you think best meets the needs of your group. The outlines that we've written contain the following elements, and they are written under the assumption that each meeting will last about an hour.

- **Theme of the Day:** A brief summary of the topic for the day; useful for advertising or communicating with the participants in advance.
- **Reference:** Each of the sessions is based on some outside reading, primarily "Vita Consecrata for Religious Life; Pastores dabo vobis for Priesthood"; and "The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross for Holy Cross." Group facilitators are encouraged to read through these readings ahead of time, although you can certainly facilitate the meeting without them if you wish. You can also make these available to participants ahead of time (as all readings are available online) if you think they would wish to prepare before the meeting. Again, the outlines are designed so that advanced preparation is not required.
- **Prayer:** It is recommended that each meeting begin with a substantial experience of prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is strongly encouraged.
- **Reading:** Each meeting then begins with a passage from Scripture. You may wish to allow them to have some time to pray with this passage as they begin the meeting, or you might even make this passage available ahead of time for their personal prayer.
- **Reflection on the Theme for the Day:** This brief talk will be given by the group facilitator. The idea is not to make the meeting into a classroom-style lecture, but these reflections should provide the background material necessary to make discussions more fruitful. This reflection can be read by either the facilitator or the participants, or the facilitator could use it as a springboard for his own thoughts on the theme of the day.
- **Personal Witness:** While the background information above is important, participants are usually hungry for an idea of what these topics actually look like when put into practice. The Personal Witness is designed to put a human face on the theme of the day. It is also a great opportunity to bring a guest speaker into the meeting, perhaps a pastor or visiting seminarian.
- **Group Discussion:** Group discussion is probably the most vital part of



the meeting, as it gives participants a chance to offer their thoughts and ask their questions, and it also gives the facilitator a chance to see how engaged the participants are. Considerable time (25–30 minutes) should be left for group discussion.

- Takeaways: Suggestions have been offered to allow participants to reflect on the theme for the week(s) after the meeting so that additional fruit may result.
- Closing: The facilitator will be responsible for closing the meeting and setting the next meeting time.

If there are any additional ways that the Office of Vocations can support you to make these meetings more fruitful, please let us know. In the meantime, know of our gratitude for your vocation and for your willingness to invite others to consider sharing our life in Holy Cross.

Fraternally,

Rev. James T. Gallagher, C.S.C.



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Theme for the Day:

Every Christian is called to follow Christ with all their heart, but for some people this means taking a more radical step: religious life.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of John 17: 6 – 21

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Session One:

Called to Take Some Further Step

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
Paragraphs 6-7, 12

“I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Every Christian is called to follow Christ, not just priests and religious. Vatican II referred to the “universal call to holiness” for which all people are responsible. So striving for holiness does not necessarily mean becoming a priest, brother or sister.



God has a unique vocational path for every person, and for most people this involves marriage and family life.

However, God does call some people to follow Him in a more explicit way. This has been true since the very beginning of the Church. There have always been people who have left everything behind to follow Jesus more closely—hermits, monks, consecrated virgins, to name a few. Religious life has always been a reminder of what Jesus says in the Gospel reading we just read from St. John, that we are in the world but not of the world.

Today God still calls people to follow Him through a life of poverty, chastity and obedience (the “evangelical counsels”), and consecrated religious are still a vital part of the Church. Some serve the Church as “apostolic” religious – religious who are engaged in active ministry. Others serve as “contemplative” religious – religious whose primary apostolate is prayer. Each religious order or congregation has a particular “charism,” a particular gift that they offer to the Church. Although they share much in common, each community lives its life and ministry in a distinctive way.

Therefore, a young man who senses a call to priesthood and/or religious life must also discern the “call within a call” so that he may see which particular community he is being called to serve.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on your discernment of a call to religious life in Holy Cross.

- Before entering religious formation, how did you come to realize that striving for holiness as a layman was not quite enough, and that you needed to take some further step?
- When did you first recognize a call to religious life? (If the speaker is a priest or a seminarian), how did you distinguish a call to religious life from a call to diocesan priesthood?
- What exposure to religious priests and brothers did you have before entering Holy Cross? Were there parts of their life that inspired you to follow them?
- After discerning a vocation to religious life, how did you come to discern a vocation to Holy Cross?
- While in the seminary, how did you come to realize that Holy Cross was a “fit”? How did seminary formation challenge you to grow and develop?
- What advice would you give to a young man who is in the early stages of discerning a call to religious life?



Discussion Questions

- Describe a priest, brother or sister who has been a positive influence or role model for you. How has their example helped you become a better Catholic man?
- Why isn't there just one type of Catholic priest? Why might God will there to be many religious orders in service to the Church?
- Why might God call some men to be religious brothers, who take vows but are not ordained to the priesthood? What special role might they offer in service to the Church?
- Why are there multiple vocations (priesthood/religious life, marriage, single life)? How should these vocations complement each other?
- Why do you think we have a shortage of priests and religious today? What factors might prevent young people from recognizing or responding to God's call?
- When someone recognizes the first stirrings of a call, what do you think they should do to begin investigating it?

Take aways

Find a priest, brother or sister you admire and talk to them one on one about their life. Come prepared with questions, and ask them for a few pieces of advice on how you can take another step further in your relationship with Christ.

Closing...



Theme for the Day:

One reason religious men and women take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience is because that is how Jesus chose to live while on earth. Understanding His poverty, chastity and obedience can help us to understand and live the vows better.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Philipians 2:6 – 11

“Though he was in the form of God, (Jesus) did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Reflection on the Theme of the Day


People who live vows of poverty, chastity and obedience take these vows as a way of seeking a special and deep relationship with Christ. All people are called to follow Jesus, but a few are called to do so in a radical way, by conforming their whole lives to His. This not only helps themselves, by drawing them into a deeper relationship with the Lord. It also helps others, by being a “sign and prophetic statement” that should help others draw closer to Christ. Religious men and women do this by trying to imitate Christ’s poverty, chastity and obedience. The Philippians Canticle is a beautiful reminder of Christ voluntarily accepting a life of poverty, chastity and obedience for our sake: “He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” He did not live a life of wealth, pleasure and power, but rather of poverty, chastity and obedience. Although He is God and has the entire universe at His command, He became poor. He took on a human body, with all its limitations and weaknesses. He entered the world not as great king, but as a helpless infant. He lived a life of material poverty and died at the hands of His own people. “Coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance,” He lived a life of celibate chastity, forsaking marriage and family in order to offer Himself completely to the Father. He became “obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” Even though all human beings owe complete obedience to Him, He chose to be obedient

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Session Two:

Jesus,
the Poor,
Chaste and
Obedient
One

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
Paragraphs 14-16



to human beings, beginning with Mary and Joseph; then to legitimate religious and civil authorities; and ultimately to His Father's will, even though it meant accepting a shameful death.

Therefore, consecrated religious try to imitate Christ's life through our vows. We believe that by imitating His life, we may deepen our own relationship with Christ and increase His presence in our world.

Personal Witness

This talk should give participants an idea of how the life of a Holy Cross religious is modeled after the life of Christ. Focus on how your living of poverty, chastity and obedience have brought you closer to Him.

- When did modeling your life after Jesus become important to you?
- What are some ways (big or small) that you tried to imitate Him, even before you started thinking about a religious vocation?
- When did you start to realize that you were called to imitate Him in a more radical or explicit way, i.e., through the evangelical counsels? What did that process look like for you?
- How have poverty, chastity and obedience brought you closer to Christ?
- How have you found satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment through a life of poverty, chastity and obedience?
- Are there stories of how you've been able to help other people come to know Christ better by how you've lived your vows?

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Jesus chose to be poor, chaste and obedient?
- When most people think about the vows, they immediately think of them as a sacrifice, an act of giving up a lot of good things. Jesus, however, never acted like a life of poverty, chastity and obedience was a thankless burden. How did Jesus's practice of these virtues seem to bring Him freedom and joy?
- How is every Christian – by virtue of their baptism – called to imitate Jesus's poverty, chastity and obedience? How might this look for a husband and father? A committed single man?
- Name one way that you have consciously tried to imitate Jesus more explicitly in your own life. What were the



challenges and rewards of this process? What do you feel is the next step for you, as you try to continue to model your life after His?

- The vows aren't supposed to be merely a rejection of money, sex and control. They are supposed to free us up so that we are free to embrace other good things. What are some ways that a man could experience freedom by living religious vows?

T a k e a w a y s

In your journal, write down some ways that you practice a spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience in your life currently. Discern one more concrete step you could take to model your life a little more closely after Christ's.

Closing....

Theme for the Day:

Vows of poverty, chastity and obedience may not make much sense to the secular world, but they serve an important purpose for the Church. Beyond purely practical considerations, they are an indispensable aid in building the Kingdom on earth.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Colossians 3:1 – 2 a, 12 – 14

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly ... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

A lot of people think of the vows in very practical terms. Poverty keeps a religious from being distracted by worldly things as they try to minister to God's people. Chastity (forgoing marriage and family) keeps a religious from having their attention divided, so that they have more time to devote to ministry. Obedience makes a religious mobile, so they are free to go wherever they are needed most.

There is nothing wrong with these aspects of the religious vows, but practical considerations have never been sufficient to justify the sacrifices required by the vows. Instead, the Church recognizes a "higher good" that is achieved by a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. As we see in the passage from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians which we just read, the vows are a way of life that is designed to keep our thoughts focused on heavenly things instead of worldly things. Therefore, we believe there is value in poverty, chastity and obedience in and of themselves, even before they have any impact on our ministry.

St. John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata*, notes three different theological dimensions of the vows, which make this life good in itself even before any ministry is performed:

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Session Three:

Why Consecrated Life? Reasons for the Vowed Life

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
paragraphs 17-28




- Christological: We live as poor, chaste and obedient religious because Jesus lived as a poor, chaste and obedient man. During His life He also called others (not everyone, but certain people) to follow Him closely and imitate His way of life. Therefore, religious live the vows as a way of growing in intimacy with Christ by making a total gift of themselves to Him.
- Eschatological: We live as poor, chaste and obedient men in order to “foreshadow eschatological perfection” (i.e., offer a glimpse into heaven). There will be no possessions, or marriage, or domination in heaven, so we live lives that offer a glimpse of heaven to people on earth. Hopefully this helps remind people of their ultimate goal, and helps them keep earthly concerns in their proper perspective.
- Trinitarian: The vows are intended to be an earthly expression of the love of the Trinity. If the Trinity is a perfect exchange of love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the vows should make that love visible in the world. Chastity should free a person to love with an undivided heart, which is a reflection of how God loves. Poverty should express that the only treasure we need is God Himself. By abandoning all to God, we make ourselves a total gift to Him, which reflects the complete self-gift of Trinitarian love. Obedience is not an act of humiliation but an act of trust. This complete trust in God reflects the perfect harmony that exists among the three Persons of the Trinity.

It is important to understand the higher meaning behind the vows so that we can live them to their fullest. Therefore we don't just live them when they are practical; they become a way of life that makes our life an offering to God and a witness to the world.

Personal Witness

This talk is designed to give the participants an understanding of the vowed life in general. Given the higher purposes of the vows described in the previous reflection, this talk should help them to understand what these vows look like when they are lived in the real world.

- When you were first discerning a call to religious life, what aspects of poverty, chastity and obedience did you find most appealing?
- What aspects of the vows did you find most intimidating, and how did you deal with these fears?
- How has the vowed life been different than you thought it would be?
- What have been some unexpected joys that have come from each of the vows?
- How do you deal with challenges in living the vows?

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- Tell a story of how one or more of the vows have freed you for a powerful encounter in ministry that might not have happened otherwise.
 - How does someone make sure they are not just “going the motions” but rather are living the vows intentionally?

Discussion Questions

- Our culture tends to view the vows strictly in terms of sacrifice, and it tends to view sacrifice as undesirable. Have you gotten any comments to this effect when you tell people you are thinking about priesthood and religious life? How have you responded to them?
- Have you ever made a sacrifice that really made you feel liberated (i.e., it produce a desirable outcome in the end that made it worth it)? Describe that experience.
- What qualities does someone need to have in order to make sacrifices with great joy?
- Why do you think the Church needs both diocesan and religious priests? What do religious priests add to the life of the Church?
- When you think about what it would be like to take religious vows, what aspects do you find most appealing? Most daunting?

Take aways

Identify one sacrifice you feel God is asking you to make, that perhaps you are hesitant to make at this time. In prayer, try to recognize what is holding you back, and try to discern if God is calling you to do something about it.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Part of discerning a vocation involves understanding the respective vocations to apostolic and contemplative life, and what these vocations contribute to the Church.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Corinthians 12:4-31

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Session Four:

Work and Prayer - The Apostolic and Contemplative Lives

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
paragraphs 8-9

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share



its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way.


Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Religious communities are not all alike, and that is by design. St. Paul's exhortation in the passage we read from First Corinthians talks about the value of different people and different groups contributing different gifts to the life of the Church. This is certainly true when you look at the diversity of religious communities in the Church.

While each religious congregation or order is unique in its own way, they may generally be thought of as either contemplative or apostolic. Contemplative religious typically devote themselves to prayer as their primary ministry. Their lives are often lived in monasteries, where they try to imitate Christ, who sought opportunities to go up the mountain and pray by Himself. It is common for contemplatives to pray all hours of the Liturgy of the Hours in common. Considerable time is devoted to personal prayer. Most communities also have to do some kind of income-producing work in order to sustain themselves. Some will also engage in apostolic work. Each community will have its own balance between prayer and labor.

Apostolic religious typically devote themselves to active ministry. Their lives imitate Christ, who went among the people to heal the sick, feed the poor and proclaim the Kingdom of God. The particular ministry of a community depends on its charism (the gift that it offers to the Church, usually tied to the reason for the community's foundation). Apostolic ministries can include education, work with the poor, parish work, hospital work and mission work, to name a few. Each community will also have its own expectations for common prayer.

Every religious, though, has both a contemplative and an apostolic side. Different communities merely strike a different balance between the two. Contemplatives must work to support themselves, but they also must be aware of the needs of the world so that they can pray for them. Apostolic religious must be steadfast in prayer in order to sustain themselves in ministry. Work is never a substitute for prayer. The balance of contemplation and apostolic work that seems most natural



to you will be a valuable clue to your discernment. So part of your discernment is discovering if your deepest attraction is to a life that is primarily contemplative, or whether you are more attracted to a life of active ministry.

Personal Witness

Since every apostolic religious also has a contemplative side, this talk should help participants understand that choosing an apostolic vocation does not force them to abandon their contemplative side, and vice versa. Therefore this talk should elaborate on how you nurture both of these aspects of your spirituality.

- How you have learned to nurture your contemplative side:
 - Before entering seminary formation, how did you pray? What kind of discipline were you able to maintain in your prayer life? What types of prayer did you enjoy the most? What gaps do you now recognize that you had in your prayer life at that time? How did your relationship with Christ change?
 - Once you entered formation, how did you adjust to the increased prayer schedule, both common and private prayer? To what new forms of prayer were you exposed?
 - What does your prayer life look like now? How does your prayer life relate to or affect your apostolic work?
- How you have learned to nurture your apostolic side:
 - Before entering seminary formation, what kind of service work did you do? Did you enjoy service? What are some uplifting experiences you had in service, and how did these strengthen your relationship with the Lord?
 - What experiences did you have with apostolic ministry while you were in the seminary? Which ones were the most enjoyable? Which ones were the furthest out of your comfort zone? Were there any ministries that had a particularly important impact on you?
 - What kind of apostolic work are you engaged in now? What joys or consolations do you experience from ministry, and what motivates you to get up each day and work as hard as you do?
- How you discerned an apostolic vocation:
 - As you realized the importance of both sides (contemplative and apostolic) how did you discern that you were attracted to apostolic life?
 - What do you find to be the most rewarding parts of



apostolic religious life?

- How do you nurture your contemplative side even in the midst of busy apostolic work? How do you find rest and refreshment?

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think contemplative orders are needed in the Church? Why do you think apostolic communities are needed in the Church?
- What kinds of personal prayer do you enjoy right now? What do you enjoy about silence and contemplation? Is there anything about this type of prayer that is uncomfortable or intimidating?
- What are some kinds of service work that you enjoy right now? What qualities do you have that make you good in ministry? What qualities do you lack that you would like to develop to become even more effective in ministry?
- How has your experience doing service work strengthened your faith in Christ?
- What are some experiences you've had in ministry that have had a big impact on you? Are there any particular experiences that contributed to a feeling that perhaps God is calling you to apostolic religious life?
- How do you incorporate consistent prayer into your busy schedule? Are there concrete steps you'd like to take to deepen your prayer life?

Takeaways

Make it a point to tie your prayer life into your service work. If you're currently involved in regular service work, make it a point to pray before you begin, as well as after you've finished. If you're not doing any regular service at this time, spend some time praying for guidance in finding one service opportunity in which you could become involved.

Closing....

Theme for the Day:

Consecrated religious profess a vow of poverty, by which they affirm that their greatest treasure is God alone.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Mark 10:29 – 31

Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and (the) last will be first."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Consecrated religious take a vow of poverty, renouncing the goods of this world. There have always been men and women who left material wealth behind in order to follow Christ more closely, as St. Peter does in our reading from the Gospel of Mark. But just as Jesus assured Peter that he would receive far more in return than whatever he sacrificed, so we also believe that giving up material wealth out of love for Christ will yield great rewards in our lives.

If you remember the three theological aspects of the vows (Session Four), you can examine the rationale for a vow of poverty:

- Christological: Christ "though he was rich became poor." He accepted voluntary poverty, giving up His exalted state so that He could walk among people who were both materially and spiritually poor.
- Trinitarian: Since Jesus was poor in His earthly life, He received everything He needed from the Father and gave everything back to the Father. Religious poverty is our attempt to do the same. Poverty becomes "an expression of the total gift of self which the three Divine Persons make to one another."
- Eschatological: Vowed poverty is a sign of the Kingdom to come. In heaven, our joy will not come from material

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Session Five:

The Vow of Poverty

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
paragraphs 16, 21, 26, 87



possessions but from union with God. The example of those vowed to poverty should remind others about this reality so that they can keep material goods in their proper perspective.

The vow of poverty is not a rejection of material goods, condemning them as bad. Instead, it relativizes them, putting them back in their proper place so that they don't become idols. Each religious community will have their own distinct way of living the vows, ranging from the austere to the more moderate, but they will usually have certain elements in common. For instance, religious should be models of simple living. Religious should live in such a way that reflects their commitment to live simply for the sake of the Kingdom. Their life should be an outward sign that they are not enslaved to creature comforts or the latest gadgets. Religious poverty should also involve some renunciation of material goods. In some communities, this means that religious own absolutely no goods in their own name. In other communities, there are some goods in their name, but their use may be restricted. In either case, religious are expected to get their sustenance from the common purse, which means that religious will hold goods and money in common, taking from the common purse to meet their own needs, and contributing to it according to their ability.

In Holy Cross, we take a simple vow through which we hold all goods in common. For us, poverty does not necessarily mean material destitution. Instead, it means we have what we need to do ministry well, and we turn all of the income from our labors back into the community to aid the common mission. In this way, poverty should free us from worrying about possessions and chasing after money, so that we are free to focus on loving God and serving His people.

Personal Witness

This talk should provide a general overview of your experience living the vow of poverty as a Holy Cross religious:

- Before you entered religious formation, what was your attitude towards material possessions? Were you overly captivated by them? Did you make any attempt to practice simplicity of life?
- When you took a vow of poverty, what was the biggest adjustment that you had to make? Was this vow different than you expected?
- In your life as a vowed religious, how has this vow been freeing for you? Are there ways that it has helped you grow in your relationship with the Lord and your ability to minister in His Name?



- How do you practice simplicity of life beyond what is explicitly required of you in our Constitutions? What are some temptations that you have to deal with to avoid making harmful compromises in how you live this vow?
- How has this vow impacted your understanding of poverty in our society? Has it made you more empathetic or broad-minded in any way? Illustrate with examples from ministry.

Discussion Questions

- What are some examples from Scripture of Jesus being poor? What are some examples of Jesus associating with the rich, or enjoying the material pleasures of life? How do you reconcile these two aspects of His earthly life?
- Name some examples of an unhealthy attachment to material possessions that you've witnessed among your peers. Name some examples of a more healthy simplicity that you've seen among your peers.
- Name some examples that you've witnessed of wealthy people who seemed to have a healthy, Christian attitude toward their possessions.
- Have you ever experienced any kind of freedom or joy from denying yourself of any material goods or physical pleasures?
- What attitudes and qualities do you think a religious needs in order to live poverty in a way that is healthy and life-giving?
- What do you think a healthy detachment from material possessions might look like for someone who is not in vows, perhaps a husband and father?
- What are some non-material things (i.e., time, relationships, popularity) to which we can become attached? How can detachment from material possessions help with these areas?

Takeaways

Use some of your prayer time to examine your own use of material goods. Is there anything to which you are attached in a way that is excessive or unhealthy? Think of one simple, concrete change that you can make in order to cultivate a healthy detachment from material possessions.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Consecrated religious profess a vow of chastity, by which they seek wholehearted intimacy with Christ.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 22: 23–32

On that day Sadducees approached him, saying that there is no resurrection. They put this question to him, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up descendants for his brother.' Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died and, having no descendants, left his wife to his brother. The same happened with the second and the third, through all seven. Finally the woman died. Now at the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had been married to her." Jesus said to them in reply, "You are misled because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven. And concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

All Christians are called to be chaste, but consecrated religious live our chastity as celibates, forgoing marriage and family for the sake of the Kingdom. If you remember the three theological aspects of the vows (Session Four), you can examine the rationale for a vow of chastity:

- Christological: Christ chose to forego marriage and family and instead gave Himself wholeheartedly to the Father and His people.
- Trinitarian: Chastity is supposed to free us to love God with an undivided heart. This total gift of self to God is an earthly reflection of the total self-giving love of the Trinity.
- Eschatological: As in the reading we just read from Matthew's Gospel, marriage will not exist in heaven. The witness of celibates should remind people of their ultimate destiny so that they can view their sexuality in the proper light.

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Session Six: The Vow of Chastity

*Reference: Vita Consecrata,
paragraphs 16, 21, 26, 87*



The vow of chastity is not intended to communicate that sexuality is bad; in fact, it's designed to communicate exactly the opposite. It is intended to remind people of the true beauty of our sexuality, which has been twisted and perverted by original sin. It is a sign of the sacredness and joy of authentic sexuality in a culture that has accepted a selfish counterfeit vision of sexuality. The fact that someone professes a vow of chastity does not mean that they stop experiencing the temptations and attractions experienced by all human beings. It simply means that we have to learn how to integrate these feelings and attractions in a healthy way. Ultimately, chastity should free us from enslavement to our possessions, and it should free us to love all people, since our love is directed at all of humanity rather than to an exclusive relationship.

Personal Witness

This talk should provide a general overview of your experience living the vow of chastity as a Holy Cross religious:

- What was your view of celibate chastity before you entered religious formation? Was this something that attracted you to religious life, or was this something that intimidated you?
- If you experienced a legitimate attraction to both religious life and to marriage, how did you come to discern that you were called to religious celibacy?
- What are some of the biggest misconceptions about celibacy in popular culture, or even among Catholics?
- In what way has the vow of chastity been joyful and life-giving for you? Are there ministerial encounters that you think might not have occurred if you were not a vowed celibate?
- Since you don't have an exclusive relationship or physical intimacy in your life, how do you make sure that you have meaningful intimacy in your life? What do you do with those legitimate intimacy needs that cannot be met in the celibate state?
- What are some tips that you would recommend to others on how to live a healthy celibate life?

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the comments you hear from family and friends when they hear that you are discerning life as a celibate?
- In order to be a healthy celibate, a person needs to understand the true beauty of human sexuality. What does a healthy, life-giving sexuality look like for a married couple?
- Popular culture tends to think that celibacy is a rejection of



sexuality, implying that it is bad. How would you respond to this? How do the celibate and the married vocations complement each other?

- What are some of the challenges that people face in daily life that make a healthy view of human sexuality difficult? What are some ways that you have been able to maintain a healthy and Christian view of sexuality, even when bombarded by the opposing view offered by our secular culture?
- What are some examples of how “unhealthy celibacy” might look, even for a religious who is keeping the letter of the law?
- What are some qualities and habits that a man should incorporate into his life in order to be a healthy and joyful celibate?

Take aways

Since the sexual temptations and frustrations you experience would not vanish if you were to enter religious formation, spend some time in prayer examining how you deal with them. In what ways do you need to grow in order to embrace chastity according to your current state of life? Identify a few concrete steps that you could take to grow in your love of chastity.

Closing....

Theme for the Day:

Consecrated religious profess a vow of obedience, which places their complete trust in the Holy Spirit to guide their lives.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Luke 22: 39–46

Then going out he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. When he arrived at the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not undergo the test." After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.) When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

By the vow of obedience, religious seek to follow God's will for their lives rather than their own will. This will is mediated through another human being, a religious superior who holds authority over the religious and his assignments. If you remember the three theological aspects of the vows (Session Four), you can examine the rationale for a vow of obedience:

- Christological: Christ delighted in doing the will of the Father. By imitating His obedience, we seek to imitate His complete trust in the Father. We see in our reading from Luke's Gospel that Jesus remained obedient to the Father's will even when it resulted in great suffering.
- Trinitarian: Obedience should visibly represent the divine harmony among the three Persons of the Trinity, as it requires a type of dependence which is not like that of a servant, but rather like that of a beloved child. Thus the obedient religious and their superior are called to a deep and abiding trust.
- Eschatological: Obedience is an explicit way in which we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, trusting that if we do, all other things will be added. We

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Session Seven:

The Vow of Obedience

*Reference: Vita Consecrata,
paragraphs 16, 21, 26, 87*



are a sign that if we tend first to the things of heaven, the Father will not neglect what we need here on earth.

The vow of obedience is not a rejection of free will. Instead, it is a way that we express our complete love and confidence in the Lord by recognizing that His will really is our surest path to eternal happiness. Obedience should free us from worrying about the future so that we might be fully present to our current assignment and the people we serve.

In Holy Cross, obedience is done in dialogue. Superiors who make assignments discuss these assignments with each religious, and the religious is supposed to offer his insights and opinions, while ultimately assenting to the will of the superior.

Personal Witness

This talk should provide a general overview of your experience living the vow of obedience as a Holy Cross religious:

- What were your thoughts on religious obedience before you entered religious formation? What aspects of it appealed to you, and what aspects did not?
- What has obedience looked like in your vowed life? What is an example of how you have had to put your own will aside and accept a decision or assignment that you would not normally want to accept? How did you deal with that situation?
- Have there been times when you have found this vow to be liberating? How so?
- What challenges do you face in trying to live this vow to the best of your ability? How do you accept the will of God when you know it is being mediated through very imperfect human beings?
- One could interpret the letter of the law to mean that obedience simply involves allowing your superior to assign you where he sees fit. What do you feel obedience calls you to beyond this understanding? How do you live a spirit of obedience on a daily basis?

Discussion Questions

- What are some examples of Christ being obedient in the Gospels? To whom was He obedient? Why do you think He did this, especially in cases where He was obedient to human beings, who by nature are imperfect?
- To whom are you obedient in your daily life? In what ways do you find this obedience difficult? Fruitful?
- What do you think is the difference between a fruitless blind obedience, and a fruitful, liberating obedience?
- The Church has said that there is no conflict between



obedience and freedom. What do you think this means?
How do you think that obedience could be liberating?

- What virtues do you think a man needs to have in order to live obediently without becoming bitter and cynical?
- How do you think you would relate to someone who at the same time is both your superior and your brother in community? What special challenges might this present?

Take aways

Think of one relationship in which you are obedient to someone (a boss, parent, teacher, etc.) Think of a relationship in which someone else is obedient to you. Spend some prayer time examining these relationships. Am I living them in a way that glorifies God? Is there something I should change that would enable these relationships to glorify Him more?

Closing....

Theme for the Day:

One important function of religious vows is the prophetic witness they provide for the world. In a world that values wealth, pleasure and power, vowed religious exemplify the beauty of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Phillipians 2: 13-16

For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work. Do everything without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world, as you hold on to the word of life, so that my boast for the day of Christ may be that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

The consecrated life does not only exist so that a certain select few people can grow in holiness through it. It is supposed to have a "sign value." As St. Paul states in our reading from his Letter to the Philippians, our vows are supposed to be a light to the world that guides other people to Christ. Our way of life as consecrated religious is supposed to share in Christ's prophetic office, witnessing to timeless truths that apply to all Christians. This is especially necessary because, more and more, God is being removed from sight in day-to-day life. The witness of our life should make it easier for people to recognize Him in the world. This demands a radical consistency between the faith we proclaim and the way we live our daily lives.

Our contemporary culture offers many challenges to Christians. Among these challenges, we live in a hedonistic culture that views sexuality as "a mere diversion and consumer good." We are immersed in "a materialism which craves possessions." We are also raised with a conception of freedom which ignores any universal truths or moral norms, but is instead oriented toward individual gain.


Religious life is supposed to offer a reply to all of these challenges. Before we even speak a word, our very lives should offer a witness that these ideas of hedonism, materialism and individualism are not inevitable and are not effective or upright ways to find the happiness that we seek. In a world

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Session Eight:

The Vows as a Counter- Cultural Witness

*Reference: Vita Consecrata,
paragraphs 84-95*



obsessed with wealth, pleasure and power, our lives show that these pleasures are fleeting and empty. We do without these things to show others that the source of happiness for all Christians lies in God alone.

Personal Witness

This talk should give participants an idea of how religious vows can do more than just help a person grow in holiness, but rather can be a sign that helps others grow in holiness as well. Therefore, the talk should focus on the more public aspects of your vowed life, and how your vows have been a prophetic sign in the world.

- How have you been a “public person” as a vowed religious? Are there any parts of the public nature of this life that were surprising, or difficult to get used to?
- Have there been instances where the public nature of religious life has enabled you to challenge some troubling aspects of the secular culture? Describe one or two of these experiences.
- Has anyone ever approached you and said that the way you’ve lived your vows has been a positive influence on them?
- How has your wearing of clerical or religious garb in public been a witness? Has it stimulated any encounters with people that have been particularly meaningful?
- How do you avoid buying into the secular values of about money, sexuality and autonomy? What habits have you cultivated so that you can continue to live the vows with integrity?

Discussion Questions

- How have you observed a disordered view of money and possessions in our world? What are some ways that religious poverty can offer an effective reply to the world?
- How have you observed a disordered view of sexuality in our world? What are some ways that religious chastity can offer an effective reply to the world?
- How have you observed a disordered view of individualism and autonomy in our world? What are some ways that religious obedience can offer an effective reply to the world?
- How would a religious (or any Christian, for that matter) have to live in order for their lives to be an effective counter-sign against these false values? How could an inauthentic living of the vows hurt their prophetic value?
- Have there been examples in your own life where the witness of a religious (or a committed Catholic layperson) has caused you to rethink your view of some of the ideals of



Take aways

Spend some of your prayer time examining if there are any areas of your life in which you are hesitant to live your faith publicly. Examine the reasons for your hesitation, and identify some small steps that you can put into place to live your faith more consistently.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Becoming a vowed religious requires a special and intense period of preparation, called formation, in which a young man is called to grow to be a holy Christian man who is knowledgeable about his faith and able to live in imitation of Christ.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 19: 16–26

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, " 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for the one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Even if we are completely certain that we are called to religious life, and even if we already strive to have a Christian attitude towards wealth, sexuality and power, none of us is ready to walk into a formation program and immediately take final vows. We all have areas in which we need to grow, much like the rich young man in Matthew's Gospel. There is a process that prepares a man to become a religious priest or brother by allowing our whole selves – in every aspect of our personality and behavior – to be molded and developed so that we can be the men God calls us to be. That process is called formation.

The name formation gives a good insight into what this process is. It is not about putting us into a cookie-cutter mold

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Session Nine:

Preparing for Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

*Reference: Vita Consecrata,
paragraphs 65, 67-71*



so that we all turn out the same. It is not about changing us into a new person. It is about growing in virtue, dying to sin, developing our gifts and talents, and growing out of old habits or behaviors that prevent us from growing closer to God. Discernment is a part of seminary formation, as there is a certain level of discernment that can only be accomplished in a seminary.

Formation is a lifelong process, since none of us reaches perfection in this life; but the process of initial formation is the structured process of training and apprenticeship in the vows that prepares a man to make perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in a religious community. Formation trains you to live in an apostolic community, so that community life and apostolic work enrich and strengthen each other. Formation should also prepare you to take responsibility for your religious life. The formation process begins with a great deal of structure, but by the time you profess final vows, you should be ready to live religious life with integrity without close supervision. Ultimately, formation can be thought of as an apprenticeship in the vows, where by living them day after day, you learn not only to live them well but also to internalize them so that they become a part of who you are.

Personal Witness

This talk should give an overview of your own experience in formation, particularly how your formation helped you grow into living religious vows.

- Describe the overall structure of your experience in formation. What did your life look like before entering formation? What did your life (daily routine, physical setting, etc.) look like during your time in formation?
- What was your relationship like with the formation staff? What were the other resources that helped you make the most of your experience in formation?
- What were the biggest adjustments you had to make in order to settle into formation? Was the seminary different than you expected?
- How did formation develop your gifts and talents? Did you discover any gifts and talents that you didn't realize you had?
- How did formation challenge you to smooth out your rough edges? Were there any parts of formation that were especially challenging or difficult? How did you navigate these?
- Looking back, what are some specific ways that you grew as a result of the formation process? For what aspects of your formation are you the most grateful?
- If formation is a lifelong process, then how do you



Discussion Questions

- Has anyone ever visited a seminary before? What was the experience like? If not, then what would you expect it to be like?
- What are some areas in which a man would need to grow in order to be ready to profess final vows?
 - Academically / intellectually?
 - In prayer or spirituality?
 - In ministerial experience?
 - In human qualities and virtue?
- Do my family and friends have any preconceived ideas (positive or negative) about what a seminary might be like?
- What are some parts of seminary life that might be especially challenging for me? What are some things that I might have to let go of in order to dive into seminary life?
- What parts of seminary life would be most exciting for me?

Take aways

Go to the Holy Cross website and read the interviews with the newly ordained priests: http://vocation.nd.edu/assets/130411/2014_ordination_choices_low_res.pdf. See if there are any parts of their stories that resonate with yours.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Apostolic religious life is geared toward the mission. Our vows should free and strengthen us to work tirelessly for the Kingdom.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Luke 10: 1-11

After this the Lord appointed seventy (-two) others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.' Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day


Every religious community exists for the sake of mission, which consists not only of its external works but also of the witness it offers to the world. Ever since Jesus sent out His first disciples on mission, He has been sending out men and women to minister in His name. We do this work more effectively if we imitate Christ not only in His works, but also in His virtue. "The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all."

In order to carry out their mission effectively, religious communities must have a deep relationship with the Lord and a deep understanding of the challenges of the world. Religious communities are always supposed to discern the signs of the times and look for new ways to respond to social problems,

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Session Ten: The Mission of Consecrated Religious

*Reference: Vita Consecrata,
paragraphs 72-74*



but they always do so in communion with the rest of the Church.

Religious communities all arise in response to some need in the world. Holy Cross, for instance, was founded to respond to the pressing needs in France in the period after the French Revolution. Since the Revolution had suppressed the Church and decimated the educational system, there was a generation of French who had not had basic catechesis or adequate education. Fr. Moreau combined a group of auxiliary priests (whom he had assembled to preach parish missions in an attempt to re-evangelize his diocese) with a group of teaching brothers (whom the diocese had formed to establish parish schools) in response to this situation, and this group became the Congregation of Holy Cross.

Other groups have been organized around different charisms: preaching (Dominicans), working with youth (Salesians), working with the poor (Vincentians), working with the sick (Camillians), to name a few. Some religious communities are founded to respond to a specific need and die out, while others endure, but all of them contribute in some way to the overall work of the Church. By virtue of our different charisms, the various apostolic religious communities all take a small share in the work of Jesus Christ, trusting that our combined efforts can be a help to the Church's mission of building the Kingdom here on earth, in anticipation of the Kingdom that is yet to come.

Personal Witness

This section should focus on the ministerial work you have done as a Holy Cross religious, so that participants might begin to understand the ministry of professed religious in a more concrete way.

- What kind of work have you done during your time in Holy Cross? What kind of work are you doing now? How do you see this work contributing to the larger mission of the Church?
- How do you think that Holy Cross can make a special contribution to the larger mission in the Church?
- What do you love most about the work that you do?
- Have there been times when you've experienced unexpected graces, particularly when you've had an assignment that wasn't your choice, or for which you doubted that you had adequate skills? Describe this experience.
- How do your vows strengthen me and make me more effective in your apostolic work?
- How do community life and the support of your brothers make me more effective in your apostolic work?



Discussion Questions

- What are some experiences of ministry and service that have been meaningful for you?
- What makes the work done by a religious “ministry” instead of merely social work?
- Much of our work involves tasks that are not explicitly ministerial (i.e., administration, meetings, etc.). Should priests and brothers bother doing this type of work? How can this type of work be a part of their ministry instead of a distraction from it?
- How should the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience make a religious more effective in the work they do?
- How should community life and brotherhood help a religious be more effective in the work they do?
- What makes the work of a religious “prophetic”? For a parish priest? For a professor or university administrator? For a campus minister in a university or high school?
- What types of work attract you the most to priesthood and religious life? Why?

Take aways

Spend some time imagining what life might look like if you were a professed religious. What types of work seem most fulfilling to you? What skills do you possess that could make you effective in this type of work?

Closing....

Theme for the Day:

Consecrated religious live in community. Community life is an important way we are strengthened to grow in holiness and become more effective in mission.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2: 41–47

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day


Jesus and His Apostles are the model for community life. Jesus chose to minister as part of a fraternal communion. After His death, His followers continued to form communities, as seen in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, rather than merely following Him as individuals. A Christian community is more than just a group of people who happen to live and work together, because Christ's presence is able to transform human relationships and make them into something more.

Professed religious typically live in community, that is, sharing their daily life and work with other religious from their community. Community life should both renew each individual religious and also help them better accomplish their apostolic mission in the world. This goes even beyond the religious community, as professed religious seek to live their life in union with the universal Church and with their particular Church (diocese). Consecrated religious are also called to be "experts in communion," showing the world that it is possible for people to live together in harmony and mutual respect. Religious should be an example of people who use dialogue

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Session Eleven: Holiness through Brotherhood

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
paragraphs 41–55



to resolve differences, hoping that this example can provide a path to peaceful conflict resolution in the world. Therefore, community life itself is part of the mission of any religious community; our common life has witness value even before we perform any ministry.

In Holy Cross, there are several aspects to community life:

- Common life: we are rarely assigned to live alone. The norm is that we live and work with other Holy Cross religious.
- Common prayer: every religious house is supposed to set up a schedule so that they stop what they're doing twice a day to pray together.
- Common table: religious houses should make a point of taking a break from their apostolic work to sit down and eat together.
- Fraternal relationships: religious should be attentive to the religious they live with. They should also seek out deep relationships in community that can serve as important means of support. They should also stay connected to the wider community through larger community gatherings (ordinations, assemblies, etc.) and solidarity with the international mission of Holy Cross.

Given the importance of community life to our personal holiness and to the effectiveness of our mission, it is essential for us to put a lot of effort not just into our apostolic work, but also into the way we live our common life together.

Personal Witness

This talk should be a general overview of your experience of community life in Holy Cross, particularly since many participants may be unfamiliar with what community life in a religious congregation looks like.

- What was your experience of community life before entering Holy Cross (i.e., family, work, social groups)? Why did you want to live in community rather than pursue a more solitary vocation?
- How has community helped you grow in holiness as a Catholic man? How has it made you a kinder, more responsible and more empathetic man?
- How has community helped you deal with loneliness or other personal struggles?
- Describe some times when the support of a brother in community was particularly helpful.
- What do you love most about community life? What do you find most challenging about community life? What makes community life worth all of the work and sacrifices it requires?

- How has community made you more effective in ministry?

Discussion Questions

- What makes a community Christ-centered? What's the difference between a men's religious house and a fraternity house?
- What different communities are you a part of? What benefits do these communities give you? What do you have to do in order to get the most from them?
- Sometimes we speak of a man as being "good in community." What do you think this means? What qualities does a man need to live well with others?
- How could community life help a man grow in holiness? How could they help a man live poverty, chastity and obedience more fruitfully?
- How would you compare the fruits of an exclusive relationship (i.e., marriage) with the fruits of a more communal/fraternal relationship? How would a celibate meet his needs for intimacy in community (whether local community or a wider community)?
- In a parish or educational setting, how do you think community life could help religious minister more

Take aways

Examine the sources of community you currently have in your life. Give thanks to God for particular relationships that have helped you grow in faith and virtue. Identify any relationships that you think deserve more attention, and choose a few small things that you can do to be more intentional about these relationships.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Consecrated religious have an important role to play in the new evangelization called for by our recent popes.

Begin with Prayer....

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 28: 16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day

Professed religious have always had an important role in evangelization (spreading the Gospel). Often they have been the ones to introduce Christianity to new parts of the world, and they are often on the front lines where the needs of the poor and oppressed are the greatest. In all of this, they are merely being faithful to Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all the nations, confident that He will be with them always, until the end of the age.

Just as religious played an important role in the first evangelization (bringing the Gospel to people who had never heard of Christ), we have an important role in the new evangelization (re-proposing the Gospel to lands that have fallen away from their faith). Even though there are fewer and fewer areas that have never been exposed to the Gospel at all, the needs of the world are still great. Evangelization is needed to respond to many challenges that the world faces today, such as secularism, relativism, poverty/injustice, violence/sectarianism, to name a few. Religious are supposed to offer an effective response to these and other challenges, both by our actions and by the very way we live.

Holy Cross was founded in an era much like the present day. Fr. Moreau founded Holy Cross to minister to a generation that was largely uncatechized. He ministered in an era when secular morality was dominant, rather than Christian values, and when

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Religious Life

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The Future of Consecrated Life

Reference: *Vita Consecrata*,
paragraphs 75-83



the secular government often had a hostile attitude towards the Church. Therefore, we are confident that our charism is just as relevant in the modern Church as it was when we were founded. We never forget that the work we perform in Holy Cross is ultimately done in service to the universal Church. Our work is our response to Christ's command to make disciples of all nations.


Personal Witness

In our culture, we are bombarded with messages in the secular media that make the Church look antiquated and superfluous, and her future bleak. Your talk should help the participants realize just how needed and relevant the Church remains, and how being a religious in the 21st century gives us an exciting chance to offer the Gospel to people who really need to hear it.

- Discuss some of the changes that have occurred in the Church and in the world during your time in religious life. Which of these have been the most significant? How have you responded to them? Have any of these developments surprised you?
- In what ways have you been called to evangelize in your various assignments as a religious?
- Have you experienced uncertainty in your future, or doubts about the Church's ability to respond effectively to cultural changes? How have you dealt with these feelings? How have you seen divine providence at work in the Church and in Holy Cross during your time as a religious?
- What do you think some of the key issues facing the Church will be going forward? What are some of the key social issues that the Church will be forced to respond to in the world in the near future? How do you think we can respond effectively?

Discussion Questions

- What is the dominant image of the Catholic Church that you see portrayed in the media? Do they typically portray the Church as a vibrant institution with a bright future? Do you agree or disagree with their assessment?
- What are some sources of anxiety that young people feel as they look toward their future? Is there any way that the Catholic faith can offer a meaningful response to those anxieties?
- What does the secular culture preach as the recipe for a happy and successful life? In what ways is this flawed? How can the Church convey a deeper and more substantial path to happiness and fulfillment?

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- How are young people especially poised to inject new life and vitality into the Church? What opportunities exist in the new media and social networking to evangelize?
 - What are some meaningful ways that we can introduce the faith to people who have never been catechized, or who believe themselves to be “post-Christian”? How can the Church reach such people?
 - As you look to the future of the Church (and to the possibility of serving as a vowed religious), what parts of the future give you the most hope and excitement? What do you think our biggest challenges will be?

T a k e a w a y s

Find a reliable Catholic news source and resolve to keep up with it on a regular basis.

Closing....

