

Reflections



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

A Newsletter from the Vocation Office

April 2004

Celebrating Men and Women in Consecrated Life

At the North American Vocation Congress in April 2002, Fr. Donald Senior posed the question: "Has there been a time in our memory when the need for consecrated life was more urgent?" Fr. Senior continued: "To demonstrate in a world filled with violence and with increasing chasms of hostility between cultures and races and ideologies, that it is possible for people to live together in harmony and love – that human and Christian community is possible through God's grace?... To be willing to take up the missions that so often governments and private agencies are tempted to abandon: working with victims of AIDS, feeding the hungry, throwing one's lot with the homeless and abandoned, demonstrating for peace? To represent in the life of the church that charismatic dimension of God's spirit that must not be suppressed?"

"These are some of the reasons the Church desperately needs vocations to the consecrated life."

Yes, our world needs the sisters, brothers and priests who live and work within religious orders. This edition of *Reflections* will look at consecrated life (also known as religious life), how it has changed over the years, the vows of consecrated life and what they mean.

The Vocation Office is a resource not just for men thinking about diocesan priesthood, but also for people considering consecrated life. As vocation director, I often meet with individuals at the early stages of exploring a possible vocation to consecrated life, assist them in searching for a suitable religious community and in seeking a spiritual director to help them with discernment. In doing so, I often liaise with my counterparts – the vocation directors of the religious communities within our Diocese. We consider ourselves partners in supporting vocation ministry.

Our entire Church needs to be involved in supporting these vocations in a variety of ways, particularly through prayer. On May 2, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, let's remember to celebrate and pray for the women and men in consecrated life.

Fr. Mark Gatto, Vocation Director, Diocese of Hamilton



Consecrated Life

Then and Now: Vows haven't changed, but putting them into practice has



Sister Margaret Kane

Sister Margaret Kane considers herself lucky to have entered consecrated life just as it was about to undergo dramatic change.

The General Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton joined the religious order in 1960 and by 1962 was, with the rest of her congregation, eagerly reading the documents stemming from the Second Vatican Council, popularly known as "Vatican II."

Vatican II was a special council initiated by Pope John XXIII, convened from 1962 through 1965. It had far-reaching implications for the Catholic Church around the world. Changes stemming from Vatican II included the use

of the vernacular in the Mass, the increased recognition of the vocation of laity (rooted in baptism), more emphasis on social needs, the universal call to holiness and more.

The impact on religious communities, such as the Sisters of St. Joseph, was striking. While the vows of consecrated life – poverty, chastity and obedience – didn't change, Vatican II called for these communities to focus more on the spirit of the vows as opposed to their 'textbook' application.

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The Vows of Consecrated Life: What Do They Mean?

People entering consecrated life as sisters, brothers or priests take vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Here we take a look at what the vows mean, through the perspective and practice of a priest, brother and sister.



Father Jim Profit

Poverty: Father Jim Profit likes to joke that he is the only "profit" on the large organic farm at the Ignatius Jesuit Centre north of Guelph. Operated by a Jesuit congregation since 1913, the farm sells vegetables, apples and beef to the general public and also provides food for the congregation itself.

The vow of poverty is expressed in the communal lifestyle shared by religious communities such as the Jesuits. "I don't have anything I own personally – all of our material goods are shared," Fr. Profit explains. "It's a way of reminding us that we are part of a larger whole. To live in community means that we take care of everyone in the community.

"And for me, an important part of the vow is the struggle to live simply in an age of consumerism, and also live in an ecologically responsible way."

Fr. Profit emphasizes that the desire to live simply is not about rejecting the outside world, but instead is a "commitment to say that what I'm about is more than simply material. As a Jesuit, in fact, I'm encouraged to experience God in all things, including the broader community, but my focus is on God and I think that's what the vow of poverty helps me to do."



Brother Ed Benson

Obedience: The vow of obedience challenges the 'cult of the individual' so prevalent in society today, says Brother Ed Benson, a member of the Congregation of the Resurrection in Waterloo. "Our culture says, be in charge. But that's not our congregation's approach – we reflect our leader, Christ, and how he lived his life. His obedience was to His Father and He gave His time to people who needed it."

The vow of obedience has its practical elements as well, Br. Ed notes. "Sometimes the history of the Church is about expedience as much as spirituality – the fact is, you get a group of people living together within a community, it's like the army – you need some kind of structure."

Obedience isn't about blindly following the rule of the congregation, Br. Ed believes, although that's truer today than it was in previous generations. "You were told by your leaders where to go and what to do – today, there's a much greater sense of collaboration in living the vow of obedience.

"It's a question of balance – you don't want people in lock-step. We now have more discernment, discussion and collaboration, but if I'm directed by my superior then I have to give myself up.

"The vow of obedience calls us to put aside our personal wishes and always think of the greater good instead of making our own wishes foremost."

Chastity: Thirty-one-year-old Sister Elizabeth Marie, who made her final vows with the Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate just three years ago, believes that the vow of chastity is often misunderstood.

"Some people focus more on what they think we're being deprived of – we don't marry and have children – but the greater understanding of the vow is that it is not a form of isolation. The main focus is that it gives us greater freedom to pursue our love for Christ."

In her order, a recently formed community of just 15 sisters based in Cambridge and Nova Scotia, Sister Elizabeth Marie's role is to give formation to the novices. Discussion of the three vows and what they mean is part of that formation instruction.

"In a marriage setting, when a woman marries a man it implies that other exclusive relationships are out of the question, because the commitment is to one person. For people in religious life, we give that exclusive love and commitment to Christ alone. And our love for Christ is expressed in our chaste love for other people."



Sister Elizabeth Marie

A Prayer

to Know One's Vocation

Gracious God, You have called me to life and gifted me in many ways. Through baptism You have sent me to continue the mission of Jesus. Strengthen me to respond to Your call each day. Lord, here am I. What would You like me to do with my life? Inspire me to make a difference in other's lives. Open the hearts of all to listen to Your call. Fill all with Your holy spirit that we may have listening hearts and the courage to respond to You. Enkindle in my heart the desire to make the world a better place. Call many to serve the Diocese of Hamilton in the priesthood, the consecrated life and various forms of lay ministry. Amen.

Faith, goodwill and generosity, an ability to live with others, a desire to grow in a life of prayer and a commitment of service to those in need.

Sister Margaret Kane

"We were called to return to what was the essence of our congregation as opposed to the 'rules' of how to live – the external things," says Sister Margaret. "We re-connected with why we were founded – we were to be with and among the people."

The Congregation of St. Joseph was founded in France in 1650 and came to North America in 1836 to work in schools and care for the sick, the aged and orphans.

Sr. Margaret says Vatican II brought changes to the Sisters of St. Joseph from the 1960s onwards. The "order of the day" changed, and instead of all sisters being required to congregate at fixed times every day for prayers, schedules became more flexible. "It used to be the schedule was the same for everyone, regardless of what your responsibilities were. With Vatican II, prayer, spirituality and preparation for ministry received a new emphasis.

"As our ministries changed, we had to adapt our lives to meet new schedules and responsibilities. We have always maintained a strong value on community life but had to discover new ways of living community in a changed context."

Fifty years ago, Father Bernie Hayes joined the Congregation of the Resurrection, an order of brothers and priests founded in France in 1836 by a Polish layman. He has experienced changes similar to those of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton.

"I think today's seminarians are a lot more free to choose paths for service on their own," he explains. "When I first joined you were automatically geared to education or to parish ministry – there certainly wasn't much choice as regards the direction."

Fr. Hayes, who works in parish ministry at St. Louis Parish in Waterloo, said his order gradually "de-emphasized" its monastic elements. "The rule for our order was originally very monastic, with set times for everything – prayer, meals, recreation – and you had a strict obligation to be there."

The application of the vow of poverty has also changed. In the early years, Fr. Hayes had no bank account but was given an "allowance" of \$5 per month. In that sense, he says, "any initiative or responsibility in observing that vow was taken away – the vow was being lived for you."



Father Bernie Hayes

Today, members of the Congregation of the Resurrection are allowed to have bank accounts. They provide a proposed personal budget to the Superior and each receives a maximum of \$5,000 per year.

Fr. Hayes agrees with Sr. Margaret that Vatican II was the driving force behind changes in his order. "We re-examined our roots and took an in-depth look at our community life."

But the changes experienced by men and women in consecrated life go far beyond just those initiated within their own communities. The increasing secularization of society, along with a host of other factors, has contributed to the well-publicized issue of dramatically reduced numbers in religious orders.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton has 88 sisters, with an average age of 73. "In the past five years we have buried 31 sisters," Sr. Margaret says sadly. But she remains upbeat and even philosophical about the smaller size of her order. "I'm not going to call it a crisis. We began in France with just six women; when we came to Hamilton in 1852 there were only three of us. We did good work in those days and we do it now." She also takes a global view of the issue: "This is a pattern across North America, whereas religious communities in Africa are growing."

Father Hayes takes a similar stance. "The vocation picture in Poland is still strong and is also getting very strong in Brazil. North America is a different story."

One thing that hasn't changed about consecrated life is the type of person that religious orders like the Sisters of St. Joseph or the Congregation of the Resurrection are looking for. Sr. Margaret sums it up: "Faith, goodwill and generosity, an ability to live with others, a desire to grow in a life of prayer and a commitment of service to those in need."



Celebration of Priesthood and Religious Life

A celebration of the priesthood and religious life was held April 21, 2004 with a dinner at Liuna Station in Hamilton. This new annual event recognizes religious sisters, brothers and priests celebrating 50 years of religious life, Diocesan priests celebrating 50 years of ordination, and those to be ordained to the priesthood.

Those recognized were: Sr. Mary Veronica Bajus, CSSF; Sr. Sharon Kroetsch, SSND; Sr. Val Leibel, SSND; Sr. Barbara Meinzinger, SSND; Sr. Teresa Prohammer, SSND; Sr. Anne Rektor, SSND; Sr. Denyse Beauchemin, Soeurs du Sacre-Coeur de Jesus; Sr. Joan Cummings, CSJ; Sr. Theresa Piva, CSJ; Sr. Jude Stradiotto, CSJ; Sr. Agnes Ward, CSJ; Fr. Bernard Hayes, CR; Fr. Ernest Varosi, CR; Sr. Jeanette Niedzwiedz, SSND (deceased March 2004), Fr. Stephen Sardo and Adrian Lee (see **On the Calendar** for information about Adrian Lee's ordination).

Serra Clubs from Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo organized the dinner.

On Vocation: "God calls all the souls He has created to love Him with their whole being, here and hereafter, which means that He calls all of them to holiness, to perfection, to a close following of Him and obedience to His will. But He does not ask all souls to show their love by the same works, to climb to heaven by the same ladder, to achieve goodness in the same way of life. Which is my road to heaven? In what kind of life am I to sanctify myself?... This question: 'What kind of life am I going to undertake?' is the question of vocation..." – Charles de Foucauld, 1858-1916

On the Calendar

May 1, 2004

Ordination to the Priesthood:

Congratulations to Adrian Lee, who is being ordained to the priesthood on Saturday, May 1st at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Hamilton. Everyone is welcome to attend the ceremony, which will begin at 11 am.

World Day of Prayer for Vocations:

The annual message of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations can be found at www.vatican.ca by going to the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II and clicking on Messages.

June 4 and June 18, 2004

Diaconate Ordinations:

Four seminarians from the Diocese of Hamilton will be ordained to the transitional diaconate as they continue their formation for the priesthood. Everyone is encouraged to join in the celebrations and to keep them in their prayers.

On Friday, June 4 at 7 pm, Jeff Bergsma and Mariusz Durbajlo will be ordained deacons at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Hamilton.

On Friday, June 18 at 7 pm, Tim Hingston and Wojciech Kuzma will be ordained deacons at St. Anthony Daniel Parish in Kitchener.

September 26, 2004

Third Annual Diocesan Vocation Mass:

Bishop Tonnos will celebrate this Mass at 3 pm at Immaculate Conception Church in Formosa, in Bruce County. Everyone is invited to visit this beautiful and historic church, one of the oldest in our Diocese, and join in this Diocesan time of prayer.

Fall 2004

Three Workshops for the Pastoral Plan:

The result of the 2002 Continental Vocation Congress was a Pastoral Plan for creating a vocation culture in North America. Three workshops are being planned in our Diocese of Hamilton so that people may discuss how to implement a vocation culture in their parishes, families, schools and organizations. Registration information is being sent out to parishes for the workshops, held in the morning on:

- **Saturday, September 25, 2004:**
Holy Rosary Parish, Burlington
- **Saturday, October 16, 2004:**
Sacred Heart Parish, Walkerton
- **Saturday, November 6, 2004:**
St. Agnes Parish, Waterloo

Glossary of Terms Used in Consecrated Life

Consecrated Life – Consecrated life takes many different and unique forms, but is characterized by living the Evangelical Counsels through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. It is also known as religious life.

Rule – A rule is a written plan of life and discipline, by which members of a religious order conduct their lives. Obedience to the rule is usually first followed after making a "simple" vow, and eventually taking a lifetime "solemn vow."

Charism – Every religious order (also known as a congregation or community) claims a special charism, a particular inspiration that gives cause to its existence for the good of the Church. The charism is what forms the community's identity and mission. For instance, a charism of the Order of Jesus (Jesuits) would be social justice.

Congregation – A particular form of religious life whereby men (priests or brothers) or women (sisters) live together and share a common commitment of ministering to God's people. Each member of a congregation takes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience while living according to a specific 'rule' for each congregation (see explanation of 'rule' above).

Contemplative Congregation – Contemplative religious spend a major portion of their day in prayer, separating themselves from the world in order to offer their prayers and sacrifices for the needs of the Church and the world. Contemplative women are called nuns and the men, monks. Prayer is often combined with manual labour of some type, such as farming or crafts.

Sister – A sister is a woman who is a member of an apostolic religious congregation.

Brother – A brother is a man who belongs to a religious order and chooses to remain in the lay state of Christian life (he is not ordained).

Novice – A person who has been admitted to the life of a particular religious congregation, prior to final vows being made. This period of intense spiritual formation is called the novitiate, a time period that is generally one to two years in length.

Formation – The process of theological education and spiritual development that takes place during the initial stages of joining a religious order. Formation is also used to describe the seminary training for men preparing for ordained ministry as priests.

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