

Vocations Newsletter

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“To create a true “Vocation Culture”, vocation awareness needs to be a fundamental component of catechesis and faith formation at every stage of development.”

Conversion, Discernment, Mission
Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America

World Day of Prayer for Vocations Sunday, April 29, 2007

“The vocation to the service of the Church as communion”

This Sunday, April 29, is a special Easter celebration of Good Shepherd Sunday. In 1963 Pope Paul VI designated this as *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*. On this day we are asked to reflect on the Christian vocation we each have as a result of our baptism. On this day we are especially asked to pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. We should think about the young people we serve. Many will be called to marriage, but we should be open to the possibility that God may be calling some to serve in priesthood or consecrated life. We want the best for our young people and want to help them achieve happiness in life through the realization of their God-given potential. The priesthood and consecrated life are needed and valued in the Church. Our young people need to be encouraged to consider these vocations along with other life choices.

As Basilians we join with the universal church to ask for God’s blessings that we may be strengthened in our vocation.

If you have not yet done so, you may want to read Pope Benedict’s message for this celebration. It can be found at www.usccb.org/vocations/wdp.shtml.

A Reflection Piece

At the bi-annual convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference held last September in Irvine, California, Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX, gave one of the major addresses: “Jesus’ Deep Invitations to Contemporary Religious Life”. In the address he indicated “we can only call others—and attract others—to this life when we live it with compassion and self sacrifice.”

Sister Ellen Licavoli, IHM, the Associate Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Detroit, prepared a synopsis of Ron’s talk and added questions for reflection for a recent meeting of the Detroit Archdiocesan Vocation Association. The questions are good for both personal and communal reflection. With thanks to Ellen, and with her permission, I am making this available to Basilians as we prepare to celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

If anyone is interested in receiving Ron’s complete talk, please email me at vocation@basilian.org. and I will send it to you.

The following synopsis of Ronald Rolheiser’s address to the NRVC Convocation 2006 and the ‘Possible Question(s)’ were prepared by Sr. Ellen Licavoli, IHM, Associate Director of Vocations, Archdiocese of Detroit.

Jesus' Deep Invitations to Contemporary Religious Life Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

What are the deeper invitations of Jesus for us in religious life at this moment?

Background for our Conversation

- 1) The *Context* within which U.S. religious life exists:
 - greatest freedoms in history
 - laden with opportunities
 - these freedoms and opportunities are a gift from God
- 2) *Jesus' Mature Freedom*
 - Jesus was the freest person in the world
 - associated with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes
 - didn't sin
 - we need to incarnate this freedom of Jesus
- 3) What is needed to live in this freedom?
 - a deep grounding in the Spirit of Jesus to be powerful witnesses to the world
- 4) The *Challenge* Before Us
 - to live in the freedom of our times without denigrating it in any way
 - to learn and mature so that we can carry freedom into every dark place

The Intoxication of Western Secular Culture

The culture we live in is very intoxicating

Western culture is not all bad (i.e., death penalty abolished, poor and fragile well-cared for)

Our Question: How do I live in this culture, carry this freedom, walk in maturity, and do as Jesus did?

Jesus went to all the dangerous places in his own culture and remained without sin.

If we can answer how to do the same for our own times, then religious life can become vibrant again.

Possible Question(s) for Consideration

What do we think are the intoxicating cultural enticements for young people?

How can Jesus/the Church/the gospel be a meaningful alternative to the culture so that God is perceived as alive in our culture? How do we present this meaningful alternative to those who are looking at consecrated life?

Jesus' First Deep Invitation: Keep Turning Water into Wine

The Wedding at Cana.

Wine is something 'extra'. It is a symbol of celebration, of festivity.

There's a wedding here, Mary is saying, but there's no joy, no zest, no dancing, no deep life.

Jesus' response to Mary: I haven't put my life on the line yet. I haven't suffered yet.

A lot of times in life, there is no wine. We're flat, dead, going through the motions, hacking my vocation, technically faithful, doing what I'm supposed to do. But if Mary the mother of Jesus walked into my life, she'd say -- 'there's no wine'. He's doing it all, he's doing it right, but there's no life.

So often we look at our lives and say --- there isn't any wine. This is a reality that comes and goes. You can't crank up joy. It's a by-product of self-sacrifice. After we've walked the way of the cross there will be young adults coming and joining us because they will sense the joy that comes from a life given over in love and service.

Possible Question(s) for Consideration

How can I/do I, as a vocation director for my community, practically convey to those interested in joining us, the connection between spiritual joy and sacrifice that is ours as a result of our lives being given over in love and service?

Jesus' Second Deep Invitation: The Rich Young Man

Many of us escape the demands of discipleship through admiration. We look at Mother Theresa and say --- she was wonderful.

Jesus says to the rich man---to receive eternal life you need to sell everything and come follow me.

The rich young man is an advanced disciple. He's already well along the way, and he's doing 90% of what he needs to do in order to receive heaven. It's just the 10% that's holding him back. Scripture says that he went away sad.

The philosopher Leon Bloy says that at the end of our lives, ultimately there's only one sadness, the sadness of not being a saint.

If you're in this room today, you're a good person, a faithful follower of Jesus. But many of us are not great. We're 90% there, mostly there. What does it take to be a saint? It takes everything.

We have to give it all or we have the sadness of a good person who isn't a great person. Religious communities today are much like the rich young man. We're doing everything right. We're good. Like the rich young man, we want to know how to make the next step, to go from good to great. But there isn't a lot of wine. Saints produce wine.

The next step, the next level of discipleship calls us to walk in pure faith. You can't know heaven until you take the risk of selling it all. That's clearly where we are standing in religious life today. How do we bring ourselves to give God our remaining 10%? We need a baptism of fire.

Question(s) for Consideration

As we look at the physical diminishment of our communities, we have been invited to the work of calling others to walk with us in pure faith into an unknown future. As vocation ministers, how

do we invite others to think about becoming great, not just good, as they look at consecrated life? Where are we personally, and where' is our community on the continuum of greatness, on producing wine? What would a baptism of fire look like for religious communities today in order to move us into greatness?

Jesus' Third Deep Invitation: We Need a Baptism of Fire

John didn't want Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus came as a gentle, loving baby in the straw, and John wanted the Terminator.

There's a message here for religious communities. For the last 30 years, we've been very prophetic, and that's been great, but there's a missing piece---the fire. We know what's wrong in the world, and in the church. Yet we need fire to transform ourselves and the world. How do I give up my bad habits? How do I stop being angry? How do I stop my compensations? How can I forgive?

Only Jesus can take away the sin. We can condemn sin, but only Jesus takes it away.

The baby in the straw can melt a cold heart.

Question(s) for Consideration

Is tenderness evident in the invitation extended to others to come and follow Jesus?

Jesus' Fourth Deep Invitation: Continue to Sing Sacred Songs

Today, we are walking in flames. We don't walk in an easy time. This is a difficult time to be a religious; to keep vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

However, if we keep singing the sacred songs, as did Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, we won't get hurt. What are the sacred songs?

--Giving glory to God. When we stop looking up toward God, the flames are going to burn us.

--Staying connected to God. The rest of religion is not going to work if I'm not intimately connected to Christ. I can't live my vows if I'm not getting fed by Jesus at a deep, personal level.

Question(s) for Consideration

We are connected to God in a deep way through the consecrated life and vows of poverty, chastity (celibacy) and obedience. Is there a sense that others who are looking at consecrated life, do hear and listen to the sacred songs we are singing; and further, that they really appreciate the challenges of the vowed life and how we are walking amidst the flames unharmed? If this is not the case, how can this awareness be heightened, so that others see vowed life not only as a viable option but as the way to deepest meaning for human life.

Jesus' Fifth Deep Invitation: We Need to Wash Each other's Feet

John's main message in the washing of the feet is that Jesus is washing the disciple's feet as a gesture of compassion, and the cost of compassion. In John's day, the church was fighting about everything [especially about the Eucharist].

John was saying that the cost of compassion is this: we have to give up our right to be right. It's more important to be together than to be right. It's more important to be compassionate, to have community, than to be right.

In today's church, maybe John would tell us to wash each other's feet in the case of our many divisions.

That's a challenge. That's also the maturity of religion. To get to heaven, we have to go through dogma, and catechesis and liturgy; we go through prophecy, but at the end, if we want to be with the father, we have to have a heart like God's heart that is able to embrace everybody. It doesn't mean our boundaries disappear, or that we're wishy-washy, or we're no longer prophetic. It means that all of that is grounded in compassion.

Today, we really need religious communities that can radiate the wide, inclusive Catholicism, that takes us beyond liberal and conservative, beyond who's right and who's wrong. We need to see our Catholicism as a place with many rooms.

Joe Wallace, an Evangelical leader, tells people not to be liberal or conservative. Be a woman or man of faith. Be fully compassionate, and see where that takes you.

Question(s) for Consideration

There is a saying: Perception is reality. What are people seeing when they look at consecrated life?

Jesus' Sixth Deep Invitation: Speak with Authority

Religious communities today need to speak with authority. Christ spoke with great power. There are three different Greek words for power:

- 1) *Energia*---the power of youth, energy. Scholars never say that Jesus has that kind of power.
- 2) *Charisma*---dynamic power. Mick Jagger on stage.
- 3) *Exousia*---the word they use for the power of Jesus---vulnerability, innocence, the power of a baby, moral power, the power that can change you, melt your heart. Jesus had great *exousia* when he spoke.

Notice that when Jesus sent his disciples out to preach, he stripped them of everything---no money, no cloak, no sack (only *exousia*).

What gives us authority as members of religious communities is that we're under God. No matter how brilliant, bright, charismatic, or beautiful we care---and those are great things---we need to be under God. Our real source of power will be the vulnerability, the moral authority of God. We need to be this way in our religious orders. To be all about God, not about ourselves or even about our communities. When we can be firmly rooted in God, then we'll have the power to cast out demons.

Vocations have to be called. Somebody called us. If you have a real vocation, somebody

called you. But to be the person who calls, we must be vulnerable and committed enough to God to have a right to do that.

When we are people of profound faith---that's what gives us the authority to say: you should be a priest/sister.

When you've given your life away, then you have the right to say to someone else, you should give your life away. That power to call has nothing to do with how charismatic I am, or what a great speaker I am, or how well I plan a vocation event. The power to call comes from the authority of having given our lives away.

Question(s) for Consideration

When we are:

- 1) under God (vulnerable and with moral authority), we
 - 2) will have the power to cast out demons, and we
 - 3) will have the faith and the right to call others (when we've given our lives away).
- Does this resonate with your experience?

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A Few Pastoral Suggestions

To religious communities about new membership:

1. *We need to re-inflate the romantic imagination.*

Romantic imagination is different from intellectual imagination or theological imagination. We have enough great theology and great Scripture scholarship to save two worlds. But we don't have a great sense of romance these days.

St. Francis of Assisi was not a great theologian. He was a great artist. When he took off his clothes, and walked naked out of Assisi, that was worth more than a lot of books. He influenced the romantic imagination, and we've gotten 700 good years out of that bold action of his.

People have to fall in love with religious life. They have to fall in love with our communities. Very few people make a rational decision to get married; no, they fall in love. The same needs to happen with religious life.

Can you remember falling in love with your community? What were some of the signs? Who were some of the people in your life at that time who helped you read the signs? How can this recollection help you as you meet those who are showing an interest in your congregation?

2. *We need to re-inflate the religious imagination.*

Wendy Wright's religious imagination was kindled by reading the biography of St. Hubert. It amazed her that he was bi-locating, doing miracles, living discipleship in a very mystical way. The religious imagination is full of mystery, wonder and grace. We need to get back to that.

What in my religious community inflames the religious imagination, and can this somehow be shared with those who are looking at our life?

3. *We need to offer a religious life that shows the compassion of Christ.*

We need to live a compassion that is wide enough and inclusive enough that we won't have liberal models or conservative models---we'll simply have Catholic models.

Can you name 10 Catholic models of compassion right now? How is their compassion Christ-like? Is there a way to reflect on their lives and share the fruit of that reflection with those who are looking at our life?

4. *We need to offer practical community.*

Real, communal living for the people who are looking for it, and that's most of the people looking at religious life. We need to have actual community for them to move into. As the General Superior of the Oblates of Mary stated: 'I don't care how you're doing it---one roof or five roofs---but you need to be living a real, communal life.'

What could vowed community life offer to young people?

Do you see the availability of communities for those interested in joining, as a pressing need in your congregation? Why or why not? How does this knowledge impact those who might consider joining your community? What steps has your community made to deal with this issue?