



# 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

## Invite! Invite! Invite!

The five pastoral priorities of the 2002 Continental Congress on Vocations in North America were: to pray, to evangelize, to experience, to mentor, to invite.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops surveyed men ordained in 2003 and found that 78% of the men ordained said that a priest invited them. The survey also revealed that only 30% of priests in the United States (diocesan and religious) actively invite men to consider the priesthood.

The personal invitation is crucial. When priests invite young men to consider the priesthood in a personal, meaningful way, vocations are sparked. When they don't, very little else will work. The personal invitation is crucial.

It is a sense of mystery that attracts young people to priesthood and religious life. The importance of personal witness on the part of priests and religious to personally share the viability and meaning of the lifelong commitment they have made; this attracts, encourages and supports young people to do the same.

We have to ask ourselves as individuals – What am I doing for vocations? What is my witness to the life of a Basilian? When I am the only Basilian someone meets, what impression do I leave?

## The Millennial Generation

In an article in the Autumn 2005 edition of Notre Dame Magazine, William Schmitt refers to various traits and qualities of the Millennial Generation, those born since 1982. It is very helpful to us in promoting vocations to our congregation to be aware of the qualities and traits that apply to the generation from which our future Basilians will come.

Schmitt refers to *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, by William Strauss and Neil Howe, published in 2000. A section of the book is devoted to Millennials' religiosity:

- ▶ **“Millennials think and talk more about faith, and do more with it, than older people realize.”**
- ▶ **“When Millennials do get to church, they are preached at to behave more than to believe – a message they are taking to heart.”**
- ▶ **“Religion matters most to Millennials when they can apply it in the usual Millennial manner – by organizing it themselves, by forming clubs, by bearing witness collegially, by focusing on team deed-doing ahead of solitary spirituality.”**

Schmitt points out some new directions that are clear. “Millennials have been the recipients of strong parental protection. With a low child-to-parent ratio, Millennials generally have had close relationships with their parents and were raised to be ‘good kids’, shepherded to team sports by soccer moms. They have been governed by careful timing and thorough organization of their activities, all intended to yield good order, use time efficiently, avoid the ambient social chaos and ensure eventual high achievement.”

In fostering vocations we have to remember that candidates for the Basilians will not be “clones” of ourselves.

## Basilian Vocation Weekends

In past years, Basilian Vocation Weekends were held beginning on Friday evening and concluding on Sunday afternoon. Recently we have come to the realization that it is difficult for young people today to commit to a full weekend for a vocation retreat. At the same time there is interest on the part of young people to know more about religious life and priesthood. This year we had ‘Vocation Days’ in Toronto, Houston and Edmonton that were very successful.

The Toronto vocation day is actually being spread out over a number of Friday evenings. The group gathers for dinner and then celebrates Evening Prayer before hearing a presentation. The first gathering heard Wally Platt speak on prayer and spiritual direction and the second heard Tom Rosica on discernment. Other evenings are scheduled through the remainder of the academic year.

The Vocation Day in Houston was held on Saturday, February 18, at the Basilian beach house under the direction of Kevin Storey. Eleven young men gathered for the day and heard presentations by Andrew Leung, Morgan Rice and Dennis Kauffman. The day concluded with the celebration of the Eucharist with Kevin Storey presiding, followed by dinner.

The Vocation Day in Edmonton was held on Saturday, March 4, at the Basilian residence, under the direction of David Bittner. Giving presentations were Tim Scott, Morgan Rice, Dennis Kauffman, David Bittner and Steve Penna, a Saskatoon diocesan priest who teaches at St. Joe’s and lives with the Basilians. Six young men attended this day.

## NAVFD Conference (Canada)

The Canadian National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors (NAVFD) prepared for their annual conference with the stated purpose: to create the vision for a network committed to the advancement of a vocation culture in their Congregations and in the Church; and to identify the key directions for this network and the next steps in bringing it into being. Over one hundred members representing those involved in vocation and formation ministries as well as leadership ministry participated in the event which began on Sunday, March 12, at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel in Toronto. Sister Elizabeth Davis, RSM, facilitated the conference.

The group made connections with the events of the past four years which had relevance for the work of the conference: The Third Continental Conference on Vocations in Montreal in 2002; the NAVFD Conference in 2005; the three-year Reflection Process led by the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) – year one: religious life in a changing world, year two: religious life in a changing church, and year three: the changing face of religious life – culminating in the Canadian Religious Forum in Montreal in June 2005; and the NAVFD survey distributed to religious congregations related to inter-congregational collaboration.

The participants were invited to consider the qualities they felt could characterize a vocation culture in the church in Canada by the year 2016, if steps in cultural transformation were taken. Among the ideas presented were:

- Families know and support all vocations, inviting children to listen to God’s call
- Different parish life: recognize baptismal vocation as central, intergenerational activities, opportunities to hear how others live vocations, religious as part of parish activities, reflect the diversity present at the 2002 Congress (laity, Bishops, priests, religious, youth)
- Greater use of technology to support vocation culture
- Inclusion of vocation culture in Catholic school curricula in all grades
- People live out of baptismal commitment
- Decisions permeated by gospel values
- Sense of discernment in all aspects of life
- Mission of Jesus primary
- Youth involvement
- Openness to diversity

- Vision articulated, claimed, lived
- Bridges formed with bishops and priests
- Religious more visible in promoting ways their life makes a difference
- Intercongregational living and ministry
- Bishops recognize validity of vocation culture
- Preferential option for youth
- NAVFD include single persons, young adults, chaplains, youth ministers – become large, more diverse
- Women and men religious risking to be in places where people most vulnerable.

In small table groups the participants reviewed all of the qualities and ideas and identified the threads that they felt would be most effective in achieving the vision by 2016. This ended with the following key directions being identified:

- Parish and families as locus for vocation culture
- Baptismal call to all, equal expressions
- Option for youth, ministry with youth
- Discernment
- Witness
- New expressions of religious life
- Intentional circles of communion (family, parish, religious community, bishops)
- Creation of new communities
- Re-evangelization of our own communities
- Conversation with the Bishops
- Conversation with Canadian culture
- Inclusive stance re all creation
- Passion for peace and justice
- Visibility

Table groups were then invited to submit the top three qualities they felt would be most effective and should be the focus of NAVFD’s energy over the next few years. The following were given priority:

**Highest level: visibility, option for youth, and intentional circles of communion**

**Next level:** baptismal call to all with equal expressions, discernment and conversation with the Bishops

**Third level:** parish and families as locus for vocation culture, witness and conversation with Canadian culture.

Names were surfaced for the leadership team that would have among it’s responsibilities taking the key directions affirmed by the conference and providing guidance on how they will be implemented in the organization over the next two years. **Dennis Kauffman** was endorsed and accepted nomination and is now a member of the Leadership Team of NAVFD.

As things develop with this initiative they will be communicated to the community.

## **NRVC (United States) Religious Priesthood Committee**

The purpose of this committee, initiated by the National Religious Vocation Conference, is to respond proactively to the unique issues and challenges related to promoting the vocation of religious priesthood. This committee was formed because the identity and perception of the religious priest is often obscured by the identity and perception of the diocesan priesthood. The committee will provide a forum for discussing the unique issues and challenges related to religious priesthood that are at times lost in discussions with mixed religious life groups. **Dennis Kauffman** serves on this committee of the NRVC that had its initial meeting in September 2005.