



RELIGIOUS LIFE

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me...And I will change your lot.

- JEREMIAH 29:11-15 ^[1]

CLASS DISCUSSION

CHECKLIST: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE

On each of the items rate yourself on a scale of 0 – 5. A rating of 0 means you do not possess the quality at all. A 5 indicates that the quality is very evident in your life. The highest possible score is 90 in the main section and 10 in the second section. Be completely honest with yourself and rate yourself fairly. Don't be too lenient or too hard on yourself; remember that most candidates for religious life lack one or more of these qualities, at least initially.



[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>



CLASS DISCUSSION *continued*

1. ____ I feel a desire to be a religious, though it is sometimes stronger than at other times.
2. ____ I enjoy funny situations and good jokes; I can laugh at myself; I enjoy life, even with its ups and downs.
3. ____ I am able to accept both comforts and pleasures or to go without—without losing my peace.
4. ____ People who know me would say I am Christian lady/gentleman.
5. ____ I want to pray daily and try to and I want to keep growing in my prayer life.
6. ____ I have had others tell me that I should be a religious or that I would make a good religious.
7. ____ I want to be what God wants me to be.
8. ____ I can keep my promises, follow rules, and try to make things work—with situations or people.
9. ____ I have had events happen in my life that seem to be signs pointing towards religious life.
10. ____ I think that I have the physical, emotional and psychological stability to become a religious.
11. ____ I make it a point to avoid sin and occasions of sin and to try to live a holy life.
12. ____ Being a faithful Catholic is important to me; I love Jesus Christ.
13. ____ I don't get depressed or angry for a long time when things don't go my way; and I basically don't base my happiness on succeeding or getting my way.
14. ____ Prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture leads me to believe I might be called to be a religious.
15. ____ I can live with and get along with other people, even if they have different personalities, ages, educational levels, etc.
16. ____ I stick to commitments even when I lose interest or get bored—and I don't get easily bored or need new things to make me happy.
17. ____ I am able to take orders and to give them, with good will and cheer, even if I disagree with the order or don't want a position of leadership.
18. ____ I believe that I have a healthy psycho-sexual development and orientation.

____ **TOTAL**

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR TYPES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE:

Active

19. ____ I have a special compassion for those in need—the young, the elderly, the poor, the ill, or the dying—and I desire to be physically present to them and serve these needs.
20. ____ I have excellent physical health and am not overwhelmed by the sight of suffering.

____ **TOTAL**

Missionary/Teaching

21. ____ I have a thirst to bring Jesus and his teachings to the world.
22. ____ I have enough intelligence to complete graduate-level coursework and evangelize at this level.

____ **TOTAL**



A Salesian missionary sister

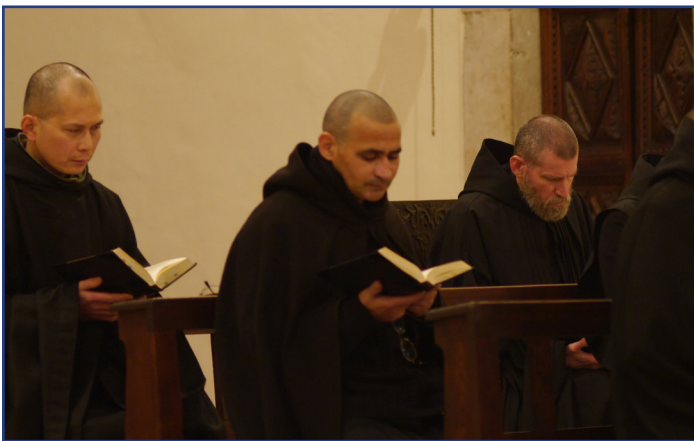
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CLASS DISCUSSION *continued*

Contemplative

23. ____ I am attracted to a life which serves others by “standing before God” and interceding and praying for them.
24. ____ I am able to be alone, to pray and attend the liturgy with attention and devotion for a long time without giving up.
- ____ **TOTAL**



Benedictine Monks

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Answer these questions after completing the checklist:

1. Which areas did I score the lowest? Are these things that I could work on—just to be better prepared whatever my vocation is?
2. Which areas could I work on and how?
3. Did I score higher for one kind of religious life more than another? Which? What attracted me to me one kind

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: BECOMING A RELIGIOUS

The following is a basic explanation of what goes into becoming a consecrated religious.

(Note: every religious order is different, and there are many different kinds of religious orders, so the process will vary for each order. This gives you the general idea of what someone pursuing a religious vocation could expect.

Religious orders are governed in different ways. In general, there are two types of hierarchy: some orders are more loosely knit collections of autonomous houses or communities which are related, but each house is governed solely by the local community superior; other orders are more tightly connected, and their individual communities are governed by a resident superior, but are ultimately governed by one major superior of a large province, or even the whole order.

While we refer to the “religious order” below, the discerner may be in contact with an individual religious community, or someone who is the director of vocations for a larger group of communities.)

1. Contact

- A. Because of the huge variety of religious life in the Church, one of the biggest initial steps in discerning a religious vocation is learning about religious orders and communities and deciding which might sound like a good fit for one’s interests, abilities, personality and spirituality.



Contact with religious communities is the best way to get to know which orders you might fit into.

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ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: BECOMING A RELIGIOUS *continued*

- B. When an order (or multiple orders) of interest have been found, initial contact is made. Some orders have a vocation director who will work with you. Contact information is usually found on their website, or published annually in the *Official Catholic Directory* (<http://www.officialcatholicdirectory.com/print-directory.html>) or online at *A Guide to Religious Ministries* (<http://www.religiousministries.com>).
- C. The order will usually suggest one or more visits or retreats, often referred to as a “Come-and-See”, to give the person a good idea of the community life, work and spirituality. They may ask you to complete a questionnaire or interview before extending an invitation to visit.
- D. You may also have an interview with the head of the order, vocation/formation director, or even a board of professed religious in the community. They will be looking for a number of qualities, such as mental and physical health, education, spiritual life, etc.

2. Application

- A. Once you feel called to a certain order and have given it some time and prayer, then request an application from the order you would like to accept you. Unlike with college applications, orders assume a certain level of seriousness and that you are applying to just the one order.
- B. Normal requirements include writing a personal statement and submitting academic transcripts, letters of recommendation, sacramental records, photographs, a recent physical exam, and a psychological exam.



Young women taking classes in preparation to become sisters

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- 3. **Formation** - When a candidate is formally accepted and notified, he/she begins formation which lasts around 5-7 years.

- A. **Candidacy/Postulancy**—a few months to a year of study, including theology and the particular spiritual life of the order, as well as full immersion into the order’s way of life, prayer, schedule.
- B. **Novitiate**—a 1-2 year period which begins a deeper period of study and prayer as the candidate prepares to profess and live the evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, and obedience).

- C. **Temporary Profession**—a three year period (minimum), during which the candidate professes and lives out the evangelical counsels in the community and continues to discern whether he/she is called to be a perpetual member. Study and prayer continue. Work in the order’s particular apostolate may begin at this time with mentoring by older professed religious. The vows are often professed annually during this period, though some orders profess temporary vows for several years at a time. At the end of this temporary profession, the candidate makes permanent vows.



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- D. **Perpetual Vows**—after initial formation and preparation, if a candidate and the community discern that it is God’s will that he/she become a permanent member of the community, he/she makes a perpetual profession. The liturgy surrounding this is very beautiful and attended by the whole community. A professed candidate is then a full-fledged member of the community. This joyful event signals the beginning of a lifelong dedication to Christ and His Church!



OPTIONAL READING/VIDEO

OPTION 1:

Watch Nodlaig McCarthy's 1974 interview with Mother Teresa on her active vocation and service to the poorest of the poor.



Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF5n4HScSP4>

OPTION 2:

Excerpt from *Strangers to the City* ^[5]

Michael Casey, OCSO is a Cistercian monk at Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia. He is the author of numerous books, including *An Unexciting Life: Reflections on Benedictine Spirituality* and *The Art of Winning Souls: Pastoral Care of Novices*. In his work *Strangers to the City*, Casey reflects on the fruit of committing to a religious community and living out his vows.

“A pure heart is able to find much joy in prayer, in fraternal communion, in the beauty of nature, and in the uplift from culture... ‘Let him be glad that he has, at last, found a dwelling place where he can live, not unwillingly, but voluntarily, for the rest of his life. Let him drive away every care about moving and let him make up his mind so that, being at peace, he can give himself only to the careful following of the exercises of a holy and well-trying way of life.’ [Anselm of Canterbury, Letters 1:21; PL 158, 1096-97]... This is where it

is possible for us to encounter God—even to struggle with God. This is more than a dwelling of bricks and mortar....

There is a certain beauty that is a consequence of spending most of one’s life in a single pursuit, attached to one place, and living with the same people. We are at liberty to be ourselves, no longer hiding behind facades or masks. Yet this self is more than the fleeting persona of this present moment; it is a self that stretches expansively over many years and decades, full of seeming contradictions and subject to so many vicissitudes. We are surrounded by so many memories of times past, of people now in heaven, of projects completed or left undone, of trees planted, of griefs and joys. As we pass through the monastery and listen to the echoes embedded in its walls, the refrain we hear is, ‘This is your life.’ Because of these voices we are compelled to live at a high level of truthfulness, since we cannot escape from what have been and still are. A strong sense of continuity develops, and a deeper feeling of acceptance. This is where I belong. This is my home. Here I live; here I will die. This has been the journey that God has called me to make, and throughout the various reversals of fortune God has never abandoned me. Here have I become a stranger to this earthly city only because I have become a citizen of the cloistral paradise. ‘This is truly an awesome place, the house of God, the gate of heaven’ (Gen. 28:17).”

HOMEWORK

- Fill out the Checklist again, check 2-3 of the “lowest scores” and think and write about why you answered as you did. Are these things that could be worked on? How? What are practical ways?
- Read short selection from *An Unexciting Life* and/or view video on Mother Teresa (whichever was not read/viewed during class) and answer this question: “Of the qualities listed on the checklist, which qualities would Casey and/or Mother Teresa have stressed as most important? Why do you say this?”

[5] Michael Casey, OCSO, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005), 185-187, 197-198