

## Letter to Bishops on Society of St. Pius X Marriages

Cardinal Müller and Archbishop Pozzo

*Continuing initiatives aimed at a reconciliation with the Society of St. Pius X, Pope Francis has made it possible for bishops to ensure the validity of marriages celebrated in the traditionalist communities. A letter to bishops on Society of St. Pius X marriages published by the Vatican April 4 said the pope will allow Catholic bishops to appoint priests to assist at SSPX marriages and formally receive the consent of the couples, since marriages witnessed by SSPX priests have not been seen as valid by the Catholic Church. The nuptial Mass then would be celebrated by the SSPX priest. In addition, Pope Francis gave*

*“The Holy Father ... has decided to authorize local ordinaries the possibility to grant faculties for the celebration of marriages of faithful who follow the pastoral activity of the society.”*

*bishops the option of granting an SSPX priest the necessary faculties to officiate validly over the marriage rite “if there are no priests in the diocese” available to do so. The provisions are meant to ensure the validity of the sacrament and “reassure the conscience of the faithful,” said the letter published by the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei,” which is responsible for the Vatican’s ongoing talks with the Society of St. Pius X. The commission is led by German Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who signed the letter March 27 along with Archbishop Guido Pozzo, secretary of the commission. For decades, the Vatican and leaders of the traditionalist society, founded by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, have been seeking a way to fully reintegrate the members of the society into the life of the Catholic Church. The letter follows.*

**a**s you are aware, for some time various meetings and other initiatives have been ongoing in order to bring the Society of St. Pius X into full communion. Recently, the Holy Father decided, for example, to grant all priests of said society the faculty to validly administer the sacrament of penance to the faithful (*Misericordia et Misera*, 12), such as to ensure the validity and liceity of the sacrament and allay any concerns on the part of the faithful.

Following the same pastoral outlook which seeks to reassure the conscience of the faithful despite the objective persistence

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**April 13, 2017**  
**Volume 46**  
**Number 45**

The traditionalist Society of St. Pius X rejects much of the Second Vatican Council, particularly its documents on liturgy, religious freedom, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

In a 1976 letter to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the founder of the society, Pope Paul VI told the archbishop: "In effect, you and those who are following you are endeavoring to come to a standstill at a given moment in the life of the church."

The letter was sent to Archbishop Lefebvre one month after he visited the pope at the Vatican. The archbishop had publicly rejected Vatican II decrees and had been the object of widespread publicity as he celebrated Tridentine Masses in various parts of Europe.

In June of 1976 the archbishop defied a direct order from the pope not to ordain seminarians at the seminary he founded in Ecône, Switzerland. In his letter, the pope told the archbishop that while pluralism in the church is legitimate, it must be a licit pluralism rooted in obedience.

The pope said the archbishop, rather than practicing obedience, had propagated and organized a rebellion. This, he added, "is the essential issue" in the archbishop's regard.

In his letter, the pope outlined his conditions for rectifying matters with the archbishop, including a call for a declaration from the archbishop affirming adherence to Vatican II, a declaration that, among other things, retracts accusations or insinuations leveled against the pope.

"Letter to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre from Pope Paul VI" appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 6, No. 26, the edition dated Dec. 16, 1976.

A 1988 letter from St. John Paul II urged Archbishop Lefebvre to give up plans to ordain bishops. The ordinations, St. John Paul told the

*continued from page 705*

of the canonical irregularity in which for the time being the Society of St. Pius X finds itself, the Holy Father, following a proposal by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*, has decided to authorize local ordinaries the possibility to grant faculties for the celebration of marriages of faithful who follow the pastoral activity of the society, according to the following provisions.

Insofar as possible, the local ordinary is to grant the delegation to assist at the marriage to a priest of the diocese (or in any event, to a fully regular priest), such that the priest may receive the consent of the parties during the marriage rite, followed, in keeping with the liturgy of the *vetus ordo*, by the celebration of Mass, which may be celebrated by a priest of the society.

Where the above is not possible or if there are no priests in the diocese able to receive the consent of the parties, the ordinary may grant the necessary faculties to the priest of the society who is also to celebrate the Holy Mass, reminding him of the duty to forward the relevant documents to the diocesan curia as soon as possible.

Certain that in this way any uneasiness of conscience on the part of the faithful who adhere to the Society of St. Pius X as well as any uncertainty regarding the validity of the sacrament of marriage may be alleviated and at the same time that the process toward full institutional regularization may be facilitated, this dicastery relies on your cooperation.

The Sovereign Pontiff Francis, at the audience granted to the undersigned cardinal president of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* on March 24, 2017, confirmed his approval of the present letter and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, March 27, 2017.

Cardinal Gerhard L. Müller  
President

Archbishop Guido Pozzo  
Secretary

Titular archbishop of Bagnoregio ■

## Comments at News Conference on Archdiocesan Anti-Violence Efforts

### Cardinal Cupich

At an April 4 news conference, Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago announced an expansion of the archdiocese's anti-violence efforts. The city has seen a dramatic rise in gun violence over the past few years, with more than 4,000 people shot in 2016 and more than 700 killed, which is more than New York City and Los Angeles combined. Reporters were given maps showing sites where the archdiocese already has programs to address violence. Cardinal Cupich announced he would give \$250,000 from his charitable funds to start the Instruments of Peace Venture Philanthropy Fund. He said the archdiocese would expand successful programs such as one run by Father Michael Pflieger that helps unemployed at-risk young people get jobs. He also said the archdiocese would hold the first Scholas Occurrentes in the U.S. Pope Francis was instrumental in founding the pontifical foundation when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires. The cardinal said the program would bring "young people together for a week of encounter, discussion and problem solving." Cardinal Cupich noted that ridding society of racism will help greatly in reducing violence. He said, "Solving the problem of violence requires that we break the bonds of racism, person by person, heart by heart," and noted that "reducing the level of segregation in Chicago — which is the direct result of racism — to the national average level would reduce the Chicago region's homicide rate by 30 percent." The cardinal read a letter by Pope Francis lauding the effort at reducing violence in the city. Cardinal Cupich's remarks at the news conference follow.

ISSN 0093-609X, Origins, CNS Documentary Service, is published weekly (except biweekly during July, August and December's last week) by Catholic News Service, 3211 4th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100. Copyright © 2017 by Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Periodical-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Editor, Edmond Brosnan; Associate Editor, Mary Esslinger; Director and Editor-in-Chief of CNS, Greg Erlandson. Editorial: (202) 541-3284. Circulation: (202) 541-3290. Email: cns@catholicnews.com. Web: www.originsonline.com.

Subscriptions: One year, \$114; two years, \$199; three years, \$284; foreign postage additional. Single copy: \$8. Back issues: Inquire for availability and rates. Attach mailing label to change of address requests and subscription correspondence. Postmaster: Send address changes to Origins, CNS Documentary Service, 3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.

Documentation in Origins is selected on the basis of interest and usefulness in reference to current issues. Publication does not signify endorsement by Origins or its sponsoring body, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Some of you may recall that when I arrived at O'Hare to begin my work as archbishop of Chicago I was asked, "What are you going to do about the violence in the city?" I replied that it seemed to me that the issue was very complex; there are no easy solutions but that I was willing to partner with others, but I also knew I needed others to bring me up to speed on the situation.

I quickly learned that the archdiocese, through its many entities, was very present to areas marked by violence. Yet I sensed that there was a need to find out what exactly was being done, if these efforts were being well coordinated and also if we were reaching out to form partnerships with organizations of like interests beyond the archdiocese.

So last year I asked some of our leaders in social service ministries and academic institutions to compile a complete inventory of the things the church had in place to address the root causes of violence and to make suggestions about how we can increase our efforts but also build peace through greater partnerships with other organizations in the city.

I invited you here today to give you some insight into what I have learned about what the various entities of the archdiocese are already doing to build a culture of peace and nonviolence, and to outline some new initiatives we will add to those already in place.

The report I received detailed that much is already being done — you have a map of our sites of care — and there are parishes and schools dotting the city as well, most with food pantries and other outreach activities. Their work also revealed that we can not only better communicate and coordinate within the archdiocese but also yield better results by leveraging what we are doing to form partnerships with other groups.

We have set goals for our anti-violence initiative:

—To increase awareness of what is being done each and every day in this city by groups and individuals, civic, religious and business leaders to address the root causes of poverty as a way of encouraging greater civic pride and greater participation by our citizens in joining in the work of peacebuilding.

—To increase the capacity and reach of our current archdiocesan programs that address the root causes of violence.

—To identify and actively seek partnerships with like-purposed groups and individuals who are already doing so much.

—To actively seek out and invest in new approaches to breaking the violence-causing cycle of despair, racism and poverty.

As an example of the scope and depth of

our current programs, let me give you some sense of where the church is active in the near vicinity of where I stand today.

Let's start with this building, which houses the programs Drew described just now. The Peace Corner is meant to be a beacon on Madison Avenue, which is a dividing line between gang territories. The young people who come here need to be careful they aren't crossing gang lines on their way to the building. It is also a block away from one of the most dangerous street corners in Chicago, where men openly deal drugs throughout the day.

Yet, it is beautiful, open and bright by design. It's also LEED certified and has a green roof, teaching children that respecting our common home is an important element in transforming our culture.

The families we serve here and in St. Martin de Porres just behind us a couple of blocks and in the other sites of care do not have the luxury of moving to other neighborhoods out of harm's way. They stand at bus stops, trying to get to work or walk their children to school, never knowing if today is the day a bullet will find them. So we stand here, too.

The Catholic presence in Austin also includes Christ the King High School and Chicago Jesuit Academy. The academy is on lockdown four to five times a week, which means a shooting has occurred within two blocks of the school. Nearby on Jackson, Marillac St. Vincent provides comprehensive programs for more than 500 youth so they can make positive decisions about their own lives, keeping them off the streets, out of gangs and in school.

We are here because the kids are here, because the families are here and they deserve our support.

But we also are committed to expanding our presence on the West Side and partnering with businesses to stabilize communities. The Austin Bank Corp. recently generously donated their 25,000-square foot building on Lake Street and the adjacent property to Catholic Charities. What was once an anchor of commerce will become an anchor of hope for Austin. Catholic Charities has plans to provide social services there, including counseling, job training and placement, a senior center and a food pantry.

You no doubt are familiar with the efforts on the South Side where the faith community of St. Sabina, ably led by Father Pflieger, houses a program for at-risk 17-26-year-old men called Strong Futures. By February, 22 of the 50 men who started with the program last July had full-time jobs, 12 had part-time

*traditionalist leader, can "only look like a schismatic act."*

*A June 2 letter of Archbishop Lefebvre to the pope and the pope's June 9 response were included in a Vatican statement released June 16, the day after Archbishop Lefebvre announced during a press conference at his seminary in Switzerland, that negotiations aimed at a reconciliation with Rome had failed.*

*In addition to the two letters included in the Vatican statement, a chronology of events in the negotiations was provided, along with some commentary. The chronology summarized a statement called a protocol that was signed May 5 by Archbishop Lefebvre and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then-prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.*

*The protocol provided conditions under which a reconciliation with Rome would have taken place. But the following day Archbishop Lefebvre wrote to Cardinal Ratzinger insisting on points unacceptable to the Vatican, and the agreement began to break down.*

*In his June 2 letter to the pope, Archbishop Lefebvre said that the Vatican is "infested by modernism." He said "it is evident that the aim of this reconciliation is not at all the same for the Holy See as it is for us" and that it seemed preferable to him and to his followers in the Society of St. Pius X to "wait for a more propitious moment, when Rome returns to tradition."*

*"Vatican Statement on Breakdown of Reconciliation Attempt With Archbishop Lefebvre" appeared in Origins, Vol. 18, No. 7, the edition dated June 30, 1988. The protocol appeared in Vol. 18, No. 13, the edition dated Sept. 8, 1988.*

*"To all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical and disciplinary forms of the Latin tradition I wish to manifest my*

*will to facilitate their ecclesial communion by means of the necessary measures to guarantee respect for their rightful aspirations.” St. John Paul II wrote in a 1988 apostolic letter on the schism established by Archbishop Lefebvre’s ordination of four bishops on June 30 of that year.*

*While appealing to people linked to Archbishop Lefebvre in various ways to remain “united to the vicar of Christ in the unity of the Catholic Church,” the pope also cautioned that “everyone should be aware that formal adherence to the schism is a grave offense against God and carries the penalty of excommunication decreed by the church’s law.”*

*The pope said that the “root of this schismatic act can be discerned in an incomplete and contradictory notion of tradition.” He established the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei” to facilitate the full ecclesial communion of those who have been “until now linked” to Archbishop Lefebvre’s society. And the pope said that “respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition, by a wide and generous application “of Vatican directives for use of the Tridentine Mass.*

*“Apostolic Letter on Archbishop Lefebvre and His Followers” appeared in Origins, Vol. 18, No. 10, the edition dated Aug. 4, 1988.*

*Pope Benedict XVI in 2009 lifted the excommunications of the four Society of St. Pius X bishops ordained by Archbishop Lefebvre, who died in 1991. The decree said that Pope Benedict, “in his paternal compassion for the spiritual discomfort expressed by the parties concerned,” hopes that this action will “consolidate reciprocal relations of trust” and “intensify and stabilize” relations between the Vatican and the society.*

*It also said the hope is that the move would lead to the “prompt attainment of full*

jobs and five had internships — the best success rate in the country for such an effort. We are committed to expanding that program to address the high unemployment rate among young men of color.

And we will expand the anti-gang Peacemakers on the Street initiative at St. Sabina where former gang members do direct intervention by reaching out to current gang members and community members on the South and West sides. They have already brought six gangs together to begin to talk with each other and with 6th District police officers.

In just a moment Father Scott Donahue will talk about a mentorship program he employs at Mercy Home. We are committed to working with Youth Guidance to adapt this school-based program for use in parishes afflicted with violence.

Broad gestures and sweeping rhetoric will not solve this problem, but person-to-person contact holds promise.

That is why we are participating in an expanded round of On the Table talks within our parishes this May. We will explore topics including the impact of racism on our communities. Solving the problem of violence requires that we break the bonds of racism, person by person, heart by heart. We will encourage other faith leaders to do the same or, if they like, to join in our parish gatherings.

We will also begin the process of holding the first U.S. meeting of the Scholas Occurrentes in Chicago next year. The Scholas program, now active in more than 100 countries, brings young people together for a week of encounter, discussion and problem solving. The participants will be chosen from schools throughout the two-county archdiocese area. Young people have the greatest stake in building a nonviolent culture, and they should have a voice in forming solutions. Pope Francis is personally supportive of this effort and has given it the status of a papal foundation.

This kind of bridge building across our neighborhoods is so important to break down the barriers of segregation that leave so many isolated and hopeless. As the recent Metropolitan Planning Council report showed, reducing the level of segregation in Chicago — which is the direct result of racism — to the national average level would reduce the Chicago region’s homicide rate by 30 percent.

In addition, we understand that the many worthy programs, many of them neighborhood-based, which are already deployed against violence often lack resources. I will

use \$250,000 of my discretionary funds, which people donate to support my charitable works, to start the Instruments of Peace Venture Philanthropy Fund.

We will seek other donors who want to join us in supporting and expanding existing programs and new approaches, but who also want to partner with us in the administration and oversight of this fund. This is just the start of a long and hopeful journey; we invite you to watch it grow and prosper.

In all of this we have not forgotten the power and peace born of praying together and the public witness of working together. On Good Friday, I will lead a walk for peace in Englewood, praying the Stations of the Cross and pausing to remember those who have lost their lives to violence this year. We will recognize the people who are working hard each day to bring security to our city, promote peace and address the causes of violence.

By highlighting their efforts, we hope to put the spotlight on the many good things happening here in Chicago and build greater support and a sense of solidarity in the broader community. We want to inspire people to work together, giving them hope that we can do something even if we cannot do everything. That is why we will walk the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, and I hope you will join us.

I intentionally chose this day, April 4, to provide this update on our efforts and announce our goals as it is the 49th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. My hope is that throughout this year, leading up to the 50th anniversary of that dreadful day when his life was cut short by an assassin at age 39, we will come together as a city inspired by his legacy to likewise dedicate our lives to nonviolence and peacebuilding, to make a commitment starting today to do everything we can to end the scourge of violence in our neighborhoods before more lives are cut short, more promise and potential lost, more tears shed.

I am also inspired by the challenge Pope Francis issued in his New Year’s message for the World Day of Peace to make peacebuilding and combating violence a priority in each one of our lives. He believes that young people especially have an important role to play in this regard, and he also appreciates that we have a legacy in the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to inspire us as we take up this work of peacebuilding and creating a greater solidarity.

While I was in Rome this past week, Pope Francis asked to see me. I updated him on our initiatives, and he is aware we are announc-

ing this effort on the anniversary of Dr. King's death. The Holy Father told me that he wants to be supportive of what we are doing and offer a word of encouragement as we move forward in building a framework for peace. And so he has written a letter signed in both English and Spanish.

Let me read the English version now. ■

## Letter to Cardinal Cupich on Archdiocesan Anti- Violence Efforts

Pope Francis

*Pope Francis sent a letter to Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago April 4 telling him that the people of Chicago "have been on my mind and in my prayers" as violence rates surge in the city, with more than 4,000 people shot in 2016 and more than 700 killed, which is more than New York City and Los Angeles combined. The cardinal read the letter at an April 4 news conference in Chicago announcing an expansion of the archdiocese's anti-violence programs. The pope gave his "support for the commitment you and many other local leaders are making to promote nonviolence as a way of life and a path to peace in Chicago." Pope Francis said, "People of different ethnic, economic and social backgrounds suffer discrimination, indifference, injustice and violence today. We must reject this exclusion and isolation, and not think of any group as 'others' but rather as our own brothers and sisters." The pope quoted the Rev. Martin Luther King, and urged people "to respond to Dr. King's prophetic words — and know that a culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results." The pope's letter follows.*

Please convey to the people of Chicago that they have been on my mind and in my prayers. I know that many families have lost loved ones to violence. I am close to them, I share in their grief and pray that they may experience healing and reconciliation through God's grace.

I assure you of my support for the commitment you and many other local leaders are making to promote nonviolence as a way of life and a path to peace in Chicago. You are

marking that effort by inviting people of good will to walk for peace on Good Friday in areas afflicted by violence. As I make my own Way of the Cross in Rome that day, I will accompany you in prayer as well as all those who walk with you and who have suffered violence in the city.

Sadly, as you have told me, people of different ethnic, economic and social backgrounds suffer discrimination, indifference, injustice and violence today. We must reject this exclusion and isolation, and not think of any group as "others" but rather as our own brothers and sisters. This openness of heart and mind must be taught and nurtured in the homes and in schools.

Walking the path of peace is not always easy, but it is the only authentic response to violence. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, humanity "must evolve for all human conflict a method that rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."

I urge all people, especially young men and women, to respond to Dr. King's prophetic words — and know that a culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results. The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations — and it can heal Chicago.

I pray that the people of your beautiful city never lose hope, that they work together to become builders of peace, showing future generations the true power of love. I ask you to pray for me too.

From the Vatican, April 4, 2017 ■

## Religious Response to Refugee Displacement: Meaning in the Face of Suffering

Father Hollenbach, SJ

*The 67 million refugees and internally displaced people driven from their homes by war or other disasters today have not only physical and emotional needs but also deeply spiritual needs to which appropriately trained faith-based aid agency workers can make a distinctive contribution, said Jesuit Father David*

*communion with the church by the entire Fraternity of St. Pius X." The move caused some controversy both for the society's views on Vatican II and because one of the four bishops, British-born Bishop Richard Williamson, asserted that reports about the Holocaust were exaggerated and that no Jews died in Nazi gas chambers. Bishop Williamson has since been kicked out of the society.*

*"Vatican Lifts Excommunications of Lefebvrite Bishops," appeared in Origins, Vol. 38, No. 34, the edition dated Feb. 5, 2009.*

*Later that year Pope Benedict placed responsibility for the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei" under the authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.*

*"Ecclesiae Unitatem" appeared in Origins, Vol. 39, No. 10, the edition dated July 30, 2009.*

*"Comments that cause pain to our Jewish partners are painful to us as well," the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs said in a 2013 letter in response to a speech by Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X, who listed Jews as "enemies of the church."*

*Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Dennis J. Madden sent the letter to Jewish groups and individuals who engage in interreligious dialogue with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He said both the USCCB and the Vatican "find the statements of Bishop Fellay both false and deeply regrettable. His remarks are not only prejudiced but also hurtful."*

*Bishop Madden noted that Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, also critiqued Bishop Fellay's comments.*

*"Comments on Jews by Head of Society of St. Pius X Are False and Hurtful" appeared in Origins, Vol. 42, No. 33, the edition dated Jan. 24, 2013.*

Hollenbach. *Humanitarian crises can “cause a kind of seismic upheaval on the spiritual level, a sort of spiritual earthquake that fragments the patterns of daily secular existence. Both the victims ... and those trying to help them stand before a rift in the structure of meaning that sustains ordinary life,”* observed Father Hollenbach, research professor at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service and senior fellow at its Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. He spoke March 24 at a Georgetown conference: *“Theology Without Borders: Celebrating the Legacy of Peter C. Phan.”* A clear commitment by faith-based agencies to both religious nondiscrimination and to interreligious understanding and collaboration is required, he said. *“Accompaniment of those from another tradition who are facing crisis means fully respecting their religious freedom and their religious convictions. It also calls for listening to their deeper questions about meaning and hope, and for respectfully sharing one’s own best insights on how to deal with these questions,”* he said. This is not formal interreligious dialogue but is a form of communication that can lead to interreligious understanding, he said. Citing the work of theologian Catherine Cornille, Father Hollenbach said this kind of accompaniment requires humility, commitment, mutual interconnection and empathy by aid workers. *“If these requirements ... are present, we can avoid the false choice between an abusive proselytism and a secularism that sets aside deep issues of meaning as if they were unimportant,”* he said. His text follows.

In recent decades the forced movement of refugees and internally displaced persons has been rising markedly, reaching 67 million displaced people today. This is higher than at any time since World War II.

Many agencies responding to these crises are secular, working on the basis of a vision of universally shared human dignity supported by secular values. Faith-based agencies also play an important role in assisting refugees.

The contributions of religious communities in response to the current crisis are both distinctive and substantial. The import of the faith-based contribution is evident from the scope of their

work. For example, the largest religiously inspired humanitarian organization in the United States, the evangelical agency World Vision US, has a budget of approximately \$1 billion annually, approximately the same as major secular organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam, while Catholic Relief Services’ budget of more than \$600 million is similar to that of the secular International Rescue Committee.

Thus faith-based agencies provide a significant share of the assistance for people driven from their homes by war or other disasters. There is little doubt, of course, that religious communities are sometimes among the causes of forced migration when they regrettably generate interreligious conflict. Nevertheless, most religious traditions possess deeply held normative convictions that support action for peace and on behalf of displaced people.

The beliefs of Jews and Christians lead them to see all persons as brothers and sisters in a single human family no matter what their religion, nationality or ethnicity. Every person has been created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27) and thus deserves reverence and respect. Pope Francis drew on this biblical vision during his recent visit to the Greek island of Lesbos, where he assured Syrian refugees seeking entrance into Europe that “God created mankind to be one family” and called Europe “to build bridges” rather than “putting up walls.”<sup>1</sup>

The three great monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all trace their origins to the patriarch Abraham, who was a migrant to the land of Canaan. Jewish identity is shaped by the story of the Exodus — a migration from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land of God’s promise. The New Testament portrays the newborn Jesus as fleeing persecution as a refugee to Egypt along with Mary and Joseph. Muslims measure time from Muhammad’s *hijra* from Mecca to Medina, a kind of forced migration. Thus each of these major faiths has a forced migration across borders as one of its founding elements.

Asian religions also insist that ethical duties such as dharma in Hinduism and compassion in Buddhism do not stop at national or religious boundaries. A similar sense of universal responsibility can be found in African traditional religion, where Bantu concepts such as

*bumuntu* (humanness), *umoja* (unity) and *ujamaa* (solidarity) point to the interconnectedness of all persons.<sup>2</sup>

Religious belief also plays an important role in sustaining those afflicted by crisis and supporting the engagement of those seeking to help them. Wars and other disasters not only kill many people; they also fracture the framework of meaning provided by secular explanations of life’s purpose. Humanitarian crises can cause a kind of seismic upheaval on the spiritual level, a sort of spiritual earthquake that fragments the patterns of daily secular existence.

Both the victims of humanitarian crisis and those trying to help them stand before a rift in the structure of meaning that sustains ordinary life. These emergencies destroy expectations about how life will normally be lived. They raise the question of whether evil and destruction have gained the upper hand in human existence.

Humanitarian crises, therefore, point to two possibilities. Those forced from their homes by crisis can conclude that the rift in this-worldly meaning they face descends into an abyss where efforts to respond are pointless. This can result in despair. Alternatively, they may come to perceive, however dimly, a source of hope that goes deeper than the world that has been fractured by crisis.

Jon Sobrino pointed to this possibility when he described how some of the people whose lives were turned upside down by a devastating earthquake in El Salvador saw the death of Jesus on the cross as a sign of God’s presence in the midst of their suffering. The cross pointed to God’s presence with them in their suffering, sustaining them and bringing them hope. Faith also invited other believers to work to alleviate the suffering.<sup>3</sup> Faith can thus sustain both those whose lives have been shattered by crisis and also support the action of those who have come to their aid, even when the struggle is long and hard.

This shattering of meaning by the crises that drive people from home means that displaced people have spiritual as well as physical needs. Jesuit Refugee Service tries to respond to these spiritual needs through a kind of response it calls *accompaniment* — a willingness to listen to refugees tell their stories and to assure them that they are not alone in their struggles. This is a form of assis-

tance that is often called psycho-social support. But it can also go to a deeper, even spiritual level. It can even take the form of pastoral care when those providing it have been appropriately trained to provide such assistance.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, JRS, like nearly all faith-based humanitarian agencies, insists that its accompaniment and service are offered to all in need “regardless of their race, ethnic origin or religious beliefs.”<sup>5</sup> In an analogous way, Islamic Relief states that while its mission is “inspired by our Islamic faith and guided by our values,” it also believes that “those in need have rights over people with wealth and power — regardless of race, political affiliation, gender or belief,”<sup>6</sup> especially those facing the crisis of displacement.

This points to a possible tension between the positive role of faith in responding to refugees and the need for religious nondiscrimination by faith-based agencies. This tension calls for a clear commitment to both religious nondiscrimination and to interreligious understanding and collaboration.

Accompaniment of those from another tradition who are facing crisis means fully respecting their religious freedom and their religious convictions. It also calls for listening to their deeper questions about meaning and hope, and for respectfully sharing one’s own best insights on how to deal with these questions. This is not formal interreligious dialogue, but it is a concrete form of communication that can lead to a lively and practical interreligious understanding. This kind of interreligious accompaniment is a form of what Pope Francis has called “spiritual encounter.”<sup>7</sup> It can be one of the important kinds of assistance faith-based organizations bring to refugees.

Several marks of genuine interreligious exchange noted by theologian Catherine Cornille help clarify what is needed for this kind of accompaniment to happen.<sup>8</sup>

First, it requires *humility*. If one accompanies some of the Muslims driven from their homes by war today, one should expect to learn something — very likely something important about the meaning of life.

Second, this accompaniment requires a certain level of *commitment*. One should be willing to speak about

what sustains one in the face of the struggles and losses that arise in the crisis one is facing. Expressing convictions and doubts humbly and honestly can create genuine bonds between agency staff and those they aid, bonds that can help sustain both groups.

Third, it calls for recognition of the *mutual interconnection* among those suffering from displacement and those seeking to aid them. Both the displaced and those assisting them equally share a common humanity that links them together. This means standing guard against any hint of condescension.

Finally, the needed exchange will require a concrete, experiential *empathy* for the role of beliefs in the life of a person who is a member of another faith community.

If these requirements for genuine accompaniment are present, we can avoid the false choice between an abusive proselytism and a secularism that sets aside deep issues of meaning as if they were unimportant. When at least some of those aiding refugees are able to accompany the refugees with a faithful spirit that is both humble and committed, it will make a real difference for them as they seek to keep their hope alive under conditions that can threaten them with despair.

My hope is that these brief remarks point to a few ways that religiously inspired agencies can make needed and distinctive contributions in the effort to respond to the refugee crisis we face today.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Visit to refugees, Mòria refugee camp and meeting with the people of Lesbos and with the Catholic community, A Remembering of the Victims of Migration, Lesbos, Greece, April 16, 2016. These statements are on the Holy See’s website at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2016/outside/documents/papa-francesco-lesvos-2016.html>.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the approaches of Christianity, Judaism and Islam to forced migration, see my “Religion and Forced Migration,” in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 447-459. On African traditions, see Mutombo Nkulu-N’Sengha, “Religion, Spirituality, and R2P in a Global Village,” in *Responsibility to Protect: Cultural Perspectives in the Global South*, ed. Rama Mani and Thomas G. Weiss (New York: Routledge, 2011), 25-63.

<sup>3</sup> See Jon Sobrino, *Where Is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 144-146.

<sup>4</sup> See the JRS website at: <http://en.jrs.net/serve>, under the link for “Pastoral care/social services.”

<sup>5</sup> See the JRS website at: <http://en.jrs.net/serve>, under “Persons served.”

<sup>6</sup> Islamic Relief, “Global Strategy 2017-2021, How We See the World.” [www.islamic-relief.org/publications](http://www.islamic-relief.org/publications).

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, “The Joy of the Gospel” (2015), Nos. 169 and 171.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 4-5, and *passim*. ■

## The Mission and Charism of the Religious Brother: An Uncomplicated Witness

Brother Falkenhain, OSB

*At the first National Symposium on the Life of the Religious Brother, Benedictine Brother John Mark Falkenhain delivered the keynote address on the witness of the religious brother. Held March 25 at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, the symposium was sponsored by the Brothers Think Tank, along with the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the National Religious Vocation Conference, the Religious Brothers Conference, the Religious Formation Conference and the University of Notre Dame. Brother John Mark, a professor of psychology at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Indiana, spoke about the tension that can often accompany the dual identity of the religious order priest, with the priestly identity at times leading to a diminishment of his religious order identity, which at times can affect the charism of the order itself. Brother John Mark noted that the religious brother offers a counterbalancing “uncomplicated witness” to the order’s charism. He said, “A brother’s witness first reminds the church at large of the presence and importance of consecrated religious life and just as important reminds all the members of his religious congregation, both ordained and non-ordained members, that before and aside from ordination, their charism and witness are already complete.” Brother John Mark noted new research that “identifies clarity of charism as the first criteria for determining whether the culture within a congregation or institute facilitates the attraction and retention of new members.” He said that while brothers are*

*not able to hold the highest leadership positions in many orders, "communities wishing to be creative may even consider promoting brothers as special conductors of the institute's charism." Brother John Mark's keynote follows.*

I am honored by the invitation to prepare and deliver this address. My hope today will be to highlight — or perhaps clarify or maybe even advance a little — our understanding and appreciation of the charism of the religious brother, or said another way, the nonordained male religious.

From the outset, I recognize that this task is accompanied by a couple of dangers, one of which I have just stepped into. We brothers are oftentimes sensitive to being defined by what we are not — that is, nonordained male religious. While I completely understand the concern and would not want to suggest that we are only defined by what we are not, there is no escaping that we are always, at least in part, defined in relationship to those around us, especially those who are like us in some respects but not like us in others.

In the discipline of the visual arts, if you want a figure, a shape or a color to stand out, you place next to it a contrasting or complimentary line, color or shade. Suddenly the figure is clearer. It stands out and has more definition. I similarly tell vocation visitors looking at our way of life that they should visit other communities and investigate other orders — not because I don't want them to join our monastery, but by referencing something similar, they will come to better understand our way of life.

So it is with intention that I will spend some time this morning trying to highlight and add further definition to the charism of the religious brother by speaking of him as a religious whose charism is defined in part by the choice or the invitation not to pursue ordination — not also to be a priest in addition to being a religious brother in the church.

When we begin to define people and roles relative to one another, another trap arises: comparisons. In truth, comparisons are inevitable even if they are not always helpful: But which is the better witness? Which is more important to the church? Which is truer to the

charism of the order or the vision of the founder? Now, because we are all mature, we laugh at the possibility that we would ever wander into such adolescent territory. And yet we do all the time.

Comparisons such as these probably grow out of our insecurities — perhaps from having felt unappreciated or overlooked at times, maybe even poorly treated in previous eras. Brothers have been heard to complain, "The brothers never get the opportunities the priests do." "This place would fold without the brothers!"

But of course, the right to complain goes both ways, and we find ourselves once again arguing over whose grass is greener: "The brothers have no idea what extra work comes with being ordained. I would love to be able to take Sunday off every once in a while or have a job where I don't have constantly to be in my head, dealing with people or worrying about administrative concerns."

Regardless of our personal perspective, it is probably best to simply acknowledge that we have felt bruised at times and proceed with an articulation and renewed vision of our life that stands in loving relationship and creative interdependence with our ordained or nonordained confreres.

I'd like to begin by telling you about Brother Lawrence Schidler, a late confrere of mine. For over 60 years Brother Lawrence was a monk of St. Meinrad Archabbey.

To better appreciate Brother Lawrence, it would be helpful to know that St. Meinrad is a monastery with a long intellectual tradition, a long tradition in education and a strong identification with priesthood. This latter association is understandable: Priesthood is inextricably tied to our founding mission in the United States.

In the mid-1800s with the great influx of German immigrants arriving in central and southern Indiana, a priest from the Diocese of Vincennes was appealing to German-speaking religious communities in Europe asking if they could send men and women to help minister to the growing German population.

The abbey of Einsiedeln in Switzerland responded favorably to the priest's request and established a foundation which came to be known as St. Meinrad Archabbey in the hills of southern Indiana. These Swiss monks

came to the U.S. with the mission of not only establishing the monastic life but also providing pastoral assistance to the German-speaking immigrants and opening a seminary to help form local men for the priesthood.

Priesthood has always been an important dimension of our Benedictine identity at St. Meinrad, so much so, that in 2004, the year Brother Lawrence died, the ratio of ordained to nonordained solemnly professed monks was 80 percent ordained to 20 percent nonordained. Two years later when I made solemn vows as a brother, the nearest nonordained monk in seniority to me had already been professed 28 years.

Like priesthood, intellectual interests and academic achievement have also become important to our community's identity. Since our primary apostolate has been education, including collegiate and graduate education, it has been important for St. Meinrad to have monks with advanced degrees: doctorates and terminal masters' degrees. The sought-after jobs in our community have tended to be in the school, and positions of leadership have almost always been held by ordained members of the community. There has never been a nonordained rector or vice rector of the school. A brother has never served as the abbot or prior or even novice-junior master in the monastery.

It was in this context — this academically gifted and pretty clerically focused community — in which Brother Lawrence lived his monastic life. Brother Lawrence never went to college (not even our own). He never held a teaching position. He never gave the community an Advent conference. He certainly never taught in our seminary or even offered a retreat in our guest house. He never held a leadership position in the monastery, and to my knowledge, he was never on the abbot's council. He worked quietly in the carpenter shop building coffins, bookshelves, tables, and altars, and turning chalices on the lathe. For recreation, he played handball in his younger days and kings in the corner at the card table in the last years before his death. But when Brother Lawrence died, his confreres — priests and brothers alike — said of him: "Now, there was a monk's monk! A real monk!"

I've had to ask myself: Why Brother Lawrence? Why was he the model St.



Meinrad monk? He was not abbot. He was never the formation director. He held no place of importance in either the monastery or in any of our apostolates. He was “just a brother!”

If you are a nonordained male religious, you are well acquainted with the phrase “just a brother.” It is usually encountered in the context of a question: “Are you a priest or just a brother?” As soon as the question escapes the mouth of the inquirer, an apology is typically issued: “That’s not what I mean — just a brother. I mean ...”

We tend to rescue the unmeaning offender from his or her embarrassment but not before giving ourselves a moment or two to feel a little put down or irked. Lately, though, I’ve reconsidered the phrase and have come to the conclusion that we have been wrong to be offended. I think we are being too sensitive, and I suspect that our propensity for getting our feelings hurt has been getting in the way of hearing what I suspect most people are actually trying to say when they ask, “Or are you just a brother?”

Stay with me.

Crofter’s is a brand of jelly. Organic jelly — so it must be good! The Crofter’s label points out that it is “just fruit spread.”

This is not a paid advertisement for Crofter’s — I’ve never tried it, to be honest — but their label opens our eyes to different meanings of the word *just*. In this usage, *just* communicates a sense of singleness, of being uncomplicated by other things. Crofter’s is “just fruit” — not fruit and sugar and gelatin and preservatives. The use of the word *just* here is not meant to diminish the identity of this product but to clarify. Crofter’s is just fruit. Only fruit. Nothing but fruit. Solely and singularly fruit.

Now let’s revisit the question: Are you a priest or are you solely a brother? Singularly a brother? A brother with no additional witness or charisma added? Just a brother.

When I was asked to submit a title for the symposium brochure, I wanted to suggest, “Just a brother”; however, I didn’t think the conference organizers would go along. So instead I proposed, “The mission and charisma of the religious brother: an uncomplicated witness.” But from this point on, let’s call it, “Just a brother: an uncomplicated

witness.”

In the remarks that follow, I would like to spend some time exploring what it means for brothers to offer an uncomplicated witness to the charisma of religious life. My primary point is that there is great value for the church and for our own individual communities to have men who provide an uncomplicated — and we might even say, unchallenged — witness to the special charisms of our religious congregations. A central thesis I will work from is that religious brothers play an essential role (and therefore carry a significant responsibility) by representing the charisma of religious life and the charisma of their order without the additional and sometimes competing identity and demands of priesthood.

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A brother’s witness first reminds the church at large of the presence and importance of consecrated religious life and just as important reminds all the members of his religious congregation, both ordained and nonordained members, that before and aside from ordination, their charisma and witness are already complete.

In the spring 2008 issue of *Horizon*, the journal for the National Religious Vocation Conference, Father Ted Keating wrote an insightful article on some of the challenges associated with our evolving understanding of religious priesthood in the United States. One of Father Keating’s central points is that among clerical and mixed orders, i.e., religious institutes which include both priests and brothers, there has been a tendency for the identity and demands of priesthood to “overdefine the group’s sense of mission” (p. 17) and create or

contribute to a sense of ambiguity relative to the congregation’s founding mission and identity.

Father Keating goes on to point out that in recent decades, many religions have become “diocesanized,” drawing a greater sense of identity and purpose from their priestly ministry (often parish ministry) than from the founding mission, identity or charisma of their religious order. Keating cites as contributing factors: the growing number of religious priests serving in parishes secondary to the priest shortage as well as the diffused sense of identity resulting from the changing theology of the laity and the increasing contributions of the laity to the work of the church since the council, ministries previously carried out by priests and religious.

We could add to Keating’s list of factors contributing to the diffusion of many religious orders’ mission and identity the historical takeover of many works and founding missions by public agencies as a result of our growing governmental structures. For example, many religious communities, both men’s and women’s, were founded either in the U.S. or in other parts of the world to provide education or health care to the underserved poor. While advancements in public education and health care initiatives such as Medicare and Medicaid have greatly served society by extending these vital services to the disadvantaged, the result is that they have in many cases left religious communities without a common apostolate and devoid of their founding mission in the church.

Many communities once founded to provide education to the poor now, in the face of public education, continue their tradition of excellence in education in the service of wealthier clientele who can afford the tuition of private schools. While there is obvious merit in such work, it is far afield from the original intention of bringing Christ to the poor and marginalized, and is often less compelling to young potential vocations who are looking to spend their lives doing something more radical.

Other congregations who were founded to provide health care to the disadvantaged have adapted to advancements in public health by diversifying their ministries, sometimes to the extent of having few if any “com-

mon works” that help to publicly identify or reinforce the internal identity of the religious community. This gradual diffusion, if not perceived obsolescence, of many communities’ founding missions and charisms over the past several decades seems to have occurred despite Vatican II’s call for a “rapprochement” or re-engagement with each institute’s founding charism.

Keating’s argument is that where a community’s founding charism and mission have grown more diffuse or seemingly unnecessary or obsolete, the pressing needs and oftentimes clearer charism of priesthood have come increasingly to dominate the identity of many religious priests and, by extension, the identity of many men’s orders in the United States.

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***“A central thesis I will work from is that religious brothers play an essential role (and therefore carry a significant responsibility) by representing the charism of religious life and the charism of their order without the additional and sometimes competing identity and demands of priesthood.”***

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In support of his argument, Keating points to the findings of Nygren and Ukeritis’ (1993) comprehensive study of religious communities in the U.S., which found that religious priests had the highest levels of role clarity compared to brothers and sisters; however their clarity and satisfaction appeared to be derived from their priestly identity rather than their identity as consecrated religious. A brief example from my own community might help to illustrate this point.

Less than 10 years ago, my community used our annual study days to look at issues related to our work and apostolates. At that time, we had approximately 16 monks serving out in parishes. Seated at tables of six to eight for ease of discussion, the entire com-

munity was asked, “What is appropriate work for a monk of St. Meinrad?” The response that came back from almost every table was, “Anything that serves the church.”

While service to the church is certainly an important criteria in determining the appropriateness of work for any monk, entirely overlooked seemed to be the demands or limits that our monastic charism places on the ways in which we serve the needs of the church.

The next question asked of our small groups was, “For our men serving in parishes: should there be term limits to their parish assignments, and if so, what should the term limit be?” With similar negligence to the primacy of our specific monastic charism, the response from each table was, “Whatever the diocese’s policy sets as customary term limits.”

Keating’s assertion that priesthood has come gradually to dominate the identity of male religious life, particularly in congregations which include both ordained and nonordained members, finds some support in the statistical research as well. Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) point out that in the 30 years between 1962 and 1992, the number of religious brothers decreased by 43 percent while the number of religious priests had declined by only 18 percent. The recent Vatican document on the identity and mission of the religious brother in the church (2015) points out that at present, religious brothers make up only 20 percent of the total of male religious in the world. Eighty percent are priests.

One fears that brothers are disappearing, and we are left to wonder if brothers are becoming obsolete. Have we “gone out of vogue”? Are we no longer relevant or necessary to the church’s mission in the world? In an interview early in his papacy Pope Francis spoke about the vocation of the brother, stating, “I do not actually believe that the vocational crisis among religious who are not priests is a sign of the times telling us that this vocation has ended. We should rather understand what God is asking us” (Spadaro, 2014).

What is God asking us?

Nygren and Ukeritis (1993) seem to get it wrong when they suggest that “the vocation of the religious brother awaits a supporting theology that contrasts his vocation with the spirituality of the laity”

(p. 8). It well may be that religious men (and women) await new apostolates or even reimagined missions that distinguish them from the laity; but a theology of vocation is certainly not wanting. It is very well established and has been for centuries, and Nygren and Ukeritis’ suggestion that religious brothers lack a “supporting theology” only seems to prove Keating’s point that the identity and charism of consecrated life among men has come to be dominated by the charism of priesthood, leaving brothers to be regarded as members who “didn’t go all the way” or who failed to “live their vocation to the fullest.”

Perhaps Nygren and Ukeritis’ uncertainty regarding the theology of the brother vocation is representative of the larger church’s uncertainty. Perhaps the entire church has forgotten or failed to recognize the relevance of the evangelical counsels and the eschatological witness that consecrated religious are uniquely called to provide. If this is the case, one has to wonder if we ourselves have failed to communicate the charism of consecrated life — the beauty, the heroism, the charismatic nature of it — to the church and the world. Perhaps it is not so much that the vocation of the religious brother awaits a theology but rather a proper zeal and observance of its charism to distinguish his life from that of the laity.

But theology is there, and I would like to spend a little time this morning trying to whip up some zeal for our distinctive and compelling charism which defines and distinguishes our life as brothers.

### **Celibacy**

We’ll start with celibacy because it’s probably the least understood and most often misinterpreted of the counsels which define our life as consecrated religious. I’ve spoken to many religious men and women about celibacy formation, and when I ask them why they chose to be celibate, the overwhelmingly most common answer is “because it came along with the territory of religious life.” (Definitely not inspiring!)

When asked for their theology of celibacy, if they have one it is usually tied to the notion that by not marrying and bearing children, they will have more time, energy available to serve and therefore love more broadly. This is a good start, but the beauty and true

value of celibacy extend far beyond a simple economy of time and energy.

A more ancient and I think more compelling theology of celibacy if we can get past our initial stereotypes and overly pietistic associations is spousal. The entire church is the bride or spouse of Christ, and as consecrated men (and women) we occupy this particular facet of the church's identity and relationship with God in a special way and with expanded intentionality.

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***“In recent decades, many religious have become ‘diocesanized,’ drawing a greater sense of identity and purpose from their priestly ministry (often parish ministry) than from the founding mission, identity or charism of their religious order.”***

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It means for us the pursuit of a relationship with God that is deeply personal and intimate, one that is not mediated through husband or wife and children. Rather, the religious brother's relationship is an unmediated intimacy with God, and in order to pursue it, he is afforded the time and space and expectation to pray, meditate, adore and develop a relationship with the word of God in our *lectio divina* and our praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, time and activities that our married, parenting and oftentimes diocesan counterparts wouldn't find possible with all of their holy obligations.

In turn, the entirety of the church relies on our having this special relationship with God. Proof is on the bulletin boards found in every religious community in the world. They are universally littered with small scraps of paper with prayer requests printed on them: “Please pray for my husband who has just been diagnosed with cancer.” “Please pray for my daughter who is suffering from depression.” “Please pray for me because I have lost my job and I have three small children.”

It may embarrass us that people ask for our prayers because we have “a spe-

cial relationship with God,” but we do and the structures of our life allow it. It is a gift we receive from the church, and one we give back to the church. It is our charism, our responsibility. The rest of the church knows and expects that if we have been living the charism of consecrated celibacy zealously and as intended, then — on behalf of the entire church — we have been afforded the privilege of pursuing the kind of relationship with God in which petitions become personal favors asked by one who endears himself in a particular way to the heart of God.

And this is not dependent on ordination.

Of course, this life of the celibate can be lonely, but even this is by design. By agreeing not to marry and not pursue romantic and physical intimacy, the brother invites a greater share of loneliness upon himself — first to drive him toward a relationship with God, the only one who could know any of us as deeply and completely as we desire, but then — and especially — to remind those who are lonely but not by choice — i.e., the widow, the sexually marginalized, the unhappily married, those who so desperately wish to be in love but have never found anyone — that there is the possibility of happiness, meaning and joy in life even without sex and without belonging to one other person, despite what the rest of the world seems to say.

#### **Poverty**

As with celibacy, the point of poverty is not mere asceticism. Nor is it a means of shaming the rich and the wealthy into giving more of what they have to the poor. Poverty, voluntary poverty as adopted by the consecrated religious, is meant to give hope to those who are involuntarily poor. A brother who agrees to live poor reminds everyone, but especially the poor, that contrary to what most people in our pretty materialistic world think, it is possible to be happy, joyful and even fulfilled if you don't have a lot of money.

The consecrated man's witness of poverty says to one who struggles financially, “I find joy and fulfillment in life without having a lot, and I find it in Christ!” (Of course, this means that the brother really does have to live poor and joyfully!)

Imagine the potential impact that a

young, caring, cool religious brother in a pair of Walmart sneakers could have on the poor kid who has the Walmart sneakers but who, until meeting you, has felt he had to have the same expensive shoes as his more advantaged peers in order to fit in and feel good about himself. Then imagine the relief that child's mother might feel because until now she has worried that her son won't be happy unless she can give him “the best.” Imagine the bit of hope restored to the man about to suffer a pay cut or who is worried about his job upon hanging out with a brother who has even less than he has but is still full of life and satisfaction.

I had a colleague recently apologize to me for the junkiness of his car. He seemed embarrassed. I looked at him and said: “I'm a monk! You think I care? This is great.” He smiled, and maybe he was a little more grateful and unashamed for what he had.

We have some wonderful models in our church of consecrated men and women who have voluntarily taken on poverty in order to ease the burden of the poor: St. Francis, St. Vincent de Paul, Mother Teresa, Brother Andre Bessette, St. Jean Baptiste de la Salle. Their great gift to the poor was not to give the poor all the money and possessions they had, but rather to live happily, contentedly, gratefully and faithfully with little or no more than what their comrades in poverty had. And when someone wondered or asked what accounts for their joy, their answer could only be Christ: Christ in our hearts and Christ in one another.

Charismatic isn't it? This is the theology of our life. And it is not dependent on ordination.

#### **Obedience**

Obedience is about power and self-determination, and the consecrated religious, by vowing obedience, surrenders these goods. He does so partially because he knows that accountability to another (or to a community of others) places him on the path to conversion; but he also does so, once again, to align himself with those whose power has been taken away or limited by life's circumstances: the oppressed, the imprisoned and alienated.

I am waiting for a monastery to spring up just outside the walls of a prison. Think of the questions and then the

hope that might arise among and within the inmates confined there. So many parallels after all: cells, uniforms, lots of rules, a single-sex community, limited freedoms, limited possessions. The difference of course is that one group renounces their self-determination and freedoms, their money and their access to human and romantic intimacies voluntarily.

And the result, if done freely, zealously and joyfully by the consecrated volunteers, is that their incarcerated counterparts might be reminded or taught for the first time that their life still has value even in prison and that happiness and meaning do not depend on having the freedoms, money and relationships that others have. The witness of the brothers should proclaim that there is a joy, a life, a meaning that comes from a relationship within — within the walls of an enclosure and within the cloister of the human heart.

Recently, a young Dominican brother ministering in a prison asked me what he was supposed to say to an inmate who wondered why, as good looking as he was, he would ever choose to give up sex and not marry. After some theological reflection, we agreed the best answer he could give would be to express a hope that by his celibacy and his presence, he might prove to the incarcerated gentleman that life and joy are possible without sex and without having another single person who belongs to us and to whom we belong. In so doing, he might offer that gentleman in prison some hope, especially during his time of confinement, while he is separated from those he loves or hopes to love once he gets out.

These evangelical counsels of celibacy, poverty and obedience are the theological centerpiece of our life as consecrated religious. They are charismatic not only in the sense that they define and distinguish our life from that of the laity and the diocesan priest, but charismatic also in the sense that they are compelling: that when lived with proper zeal and conviction they have the capacity to attract others to us and to make us irresistible to God. This is a complete charisma which has stand-alone value for the church, one which does not await ordination to complete it.

Pope Francis has reminded us over

and over what the Catholic Church has been telling us for centuries: that there is a prophetic dimension to the lives of consecrated religious. This means that by the evangelical counsels, by the charisma and theological meaning in our state of life, consecrated religious men, regardless of whether or not they are ordained, point to what much of the rest of the world is not accustomed to seeing. We are called in the words of Pope Francis to “wake up the world” to a reality — a joyful reality — which requires no money, sex or power to participate in. That reality is the kingdom of God, and while we will be totally decked out in it in the life to come, we can begin making it real and tapping into its great promise amid the struggles and challenges of this current world. It’s the eschatological witness.

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Finally, brothers: fraternity.

Both *Vita Consecrata* and the recent Vatican document “On the Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church” are careful to emphasize the communal nature of consecrated life and the brother vocation. By coming together to live in community in a way that is distinct from family and diocesan life, consecrated men not only pattern themselves after the communities formed by the Twelve Apostles and the disciples of the early church as described in the Acts of the Apostles, but also strive to stand as a sign of the kingdom to come, when we in all of our differences will be gathered together as one in God.

We give testament to this reality with greater success some days better than others, but our goal as brothers should

always be to live closely and carefully with one another in such a way that people are reminded of something otherworldly — as if a little peninsula of the kingdom of God had actually reached down and planted itself in our midst. Visitors to our communities and those who become acquainted with our way of living should walk away scratching their heads a little, wondering: “So many characters! Such a variety of personalities! How does it possibly work?” Of course, it shouldn’t work, except for charity and by the grace of God.

The fact is that people do come to our communities searching for something, for some kind of witness, and when we get it right, they say: “It’s heavenly. There’s something special there. I sense the real presence of God in that place.” And what greater gift can we give the world than by striving to live with one another as equals in perfect charity — not dominating one another, not punishing each other for one another’s weaknesses, not competing with one another except (as St. Benedict admonishes us) to be first to show respect to the other, we provide a glimpse of the kingdom and renew the world’s hope that the new Jerusalem is not only possible but already on the horizon, coming together in our midst.

Some like to think of our mission as consecrated religious as being counter-cultural; I prefer placing the focus on love and its ability transform and call forth the very best from our culture. I am reminded of the words of a celebrated dancer, Pina Bausch, who is reported to have said: “For a long time I thought the artist’s role was to shock audiences. Now on stage I want to give people what the world, which has become too hard, no longer gives them: moments of pure love.”

Let us return now to the central thesis introduced at the beginning of this talk: that there is not only a great value, but indeed a great need to have men in our church and in our communities who are “just brothers,” whose singular vocation it is to provide the uncomplicated witness to the charisma of the consecrated life and to the more specific charisms of our religious congregations.

In making this argument, I am not suggesting that we should not have priests among us if our specific charisms allow. Nor do I want to sug-

gest that religious priests cannot live the witness of the evangelical counsels and community in just as effective a way as nonordained religious. Still, we must acknowledge that the addition or superimposition of priesthood to the consecrated life adds a specific charism and demands that sometimes compete with the identity, charism and mission of consecrated life.

Nygren and Ukeritis have reminded us that when individuals assume multiple roles, one role tends to assert dominance over the other; and our recent Vatican (2015) document acknowledges that “over the centuries, this goal [of living the evangelical counsels in imitation of Christ] has run the risk of taking second place in male religious life in favor of priestly functions” (Section 9). This dominance of one charism or mission over another, of priestly functions over the charism of consecrated life — what Keating has labelled the “diocesanization” of male religious — is evident in the presently lopsided ratio of ordained to nonordained religious among men. And at what cost?

### Specific Charisms

The church’s documents pertinent to consecrated life are shot through with references to the importance of respecting the specific charism of each religious institute. The church does so out of recognition that each charism, inspired by the Holy Spirit, plays an essential role in the larger mission and building up of the church. In the opening paragraphs of *Vita Consecrata*, for example, we hear:

“Whereas the Second Vatican Council emphasized the profound reality of ecclesiastical communion, in which all gifts converge for the building up of the body of Christ and for the church’s mission in the world, in recent years there has been felt the need to clarify the specific identity of the various states of life, their vocation and their particular mission in the church. Communion in the church is not uniformity but a gift of the Spirit, who is present in the variety of chrisms and states of life. These will be all the more helpful to the church and her mission the more their specific identity is respected” (No. 4).

In words a little more poetic, the point is made again:

“In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays

of the one light of Christ, whose radiance ‘brightens the countenance of the church’” (No. 16).

Later references in *Vita Consecrata* to the mystical body make clear that the church is less herself and her progress more impeded when the rich charisms and proper contributions of the many institutes are diminished or are absent altogether. Where founding charism takes “second place” to priestly functions, there is greater risk that the church at large, and even we ourselves, misunderstand or fail to perceive the true nature of our calling and what it is that we are called to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ in the world.

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***“Religious institutes may wish to strongly consider delaying seminary formation until after the profession of final or solemn vows. Where formation for priesthood competes with, substitutes for or even replaces initial formation for the consecrated life, there is a greater likelihood that the charism of priesthood will dominate the religious charism.”***

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In a recent conversation with a number of Marianist friends, one of the ordained members made what I considered an insightful, if not prophetic statement in relation to his own community’s identity, “If our number of priests grows larger than the number of brothers, then we have lost our charism.”

### Vocations

Of related concern are the implications that unclear or “second-seat” charisms have for the attraction and retention of new vocations to our religious institutes. If indeed the evangelical counsels of poverty, celibacy and obedience and the fraternal witness of living in community are the defining, theological centerpiece of our charisms, then any additional

obligations that weaken or make these less apparent to others (as honorable as they might be), may ultimately diminish our “charisma” or our ability to draw others to join and persevere in our way of life.

This goes for each of our institute’s more specific charisms as well. A young man, for example, who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to pursue a more contemplative life of work and prayer is less likely to join or persevere in a monastic community whose manner of living more closely resembles that of diocesan priests or missionaries than men living together as brothers, sharing meals, prayer and work, and competing with one another in charity and mutual obedience. Similarly, a man looking to join the Franciscans, attracted by its mission of poverty may become discouraged if he finds the majority of friars engaged in parish work, pursuing a standard and style of life that is more consistent with upper-middle class Americans than the poor and marginalized that Francis so deeply identified with.

The findings of the National Religious Vocation Conference/Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate study looking at recent religious vocations (Brendyna & Gautier, 2009) have made it abundantly clear. Young men and women who have joined or are looking to join a religious community are motivated first by the desire to live in community: to live, work, eat and pray together with others, and preferably in larger groups of eight or more. A particularly striking result was the inverse, direct correlation found between the number of the institute’s members living out on one’s own and the likelihood of that community’s ability to attract new members.

A tool recently published by NRVC (Falkenhain, 2014) designed to assess the “internal culture of vocation” within religious communities, identifies clarity of charism as the first criteria for determining whether the culture within a congregation or institute facilitates the attraction and retention of new members.

### Challenges

I would like to conclude my remarks today by offering some challenges or recommendations we might consider in moving forward. I will try to address them to the various groups present with

us today.

Religious institutes and leaders: Religious institutes and their leaders are encouraged to promote and facilitate the presence of brothers or nonordained members within their communities as a partial means of preserving a primary focus on the charism of consecrated life and of their own proper charism. The larger church benefits by having “uncomplicated witnesses” to the charism of consecrated life, and our own communities are in great need of those who remind us of the completeness of our institutional charism prior to or aside from the charism of priesthood.

In some cases institutes and communities may need to revisit their apostolates and the structures of their life in order to provide meaningful and attractive roles for young men not pursuing ordination. Limiting roles for brothers within our apostolates and works to support staff and tradesmen may significantly limit the appeal for new members to pursue the consecrated life as a nonordained member.

While these are noble and meaningful labors, many young men are approaching religious life without these particular skill sets and interests, and arrive instead with considerable education and professional experience in other arenas. If we have not prepared roles for intellectually, academically and professionally gifted individuals which do not require ordination, then these men may find it difficult to imagine a place for themselves among us and either leave our communities or pursue ordination simply in order to find work and ways of contributing that make good use of their talents and gifts.

The recent Vatican (2015) document strongly encourages institutes of brothers only to “develop new structures and initial and continuing formation programs which can help new candidates and current members to rediscover and value their identity in the new ecclesial and social context” (Section 39). While I would agree that increased levels of structured formation for nonordained religious is a great need, I would argue that the need is probably greater in our clerical or mixed communities than in institutes of brothers only.

In communities and congregations in which seminary has become the norm for the temporary professed once

they have completed novitiate, newly professed members not pursuing ordination are at risk of finding the rest of their initial formation abruptly cut short or comparatively poorly thought out. Problems likewise arise when communities leave important dimensions of initial formation (e.g., celibacy formation) to the seminary. When this is the case, the formation of brother candidates suffer neglect and even those in seminary may find the distinct meaning and theology of consecrated celibacy underrepresented if not left entirely unaddressed.

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***“Delaying priesthood formation until after final profession guarantees the same religious formation for all new members and communicates to the entire community that a complete and intentional formation in our particular way of life is the foundation upon which a secondary charism of priesthood is overlaid.”***

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Religious institutes may wish to strongly consider delaying seminary formation until after the profession of final or solemn vows. Where formation for priesthood competes with, substitutes for or even replaces initial formation for the consecrated life, there is a greater likelihood that the charism of priesthood will dominate the religious charism.

To gain some perspective, leaders may wish simply to compare the amount of time, energy and resources their community devotes to initial formation for the consecrated life with that allotted for priesthood formation. A community whose initial formation program includes only one or two years of religious formation (novitiate) followed by four or five years of highly organized and rigorous priestly formation should not be surprised if that they discover that the role and charism of priesthood has come increasingly to dominate the

community’s identity.

Delaying priesthood formation until after final profession guarantees the same religious formation for all new members and communicates to the entire community that a complete and intentional formation in our particular way of life is the foundation upon which a secondary charism of priesthood is overlaid.

Men who are not pursuing ordination for priesthood should be encouraged and provided the resources to continue their theological education and training by means appropriate to the individual and the community’s resources. A growing understanding of ecclesiology, Christology, Scripture, religious canon law and the theology of the consecrated life equips brothers with the theological knowledge necessary not only to grow in holiness and derive greater meaning from their life as consecrated religious but also prepares them to be credible leaders within the institute.

Along these lines, current leaders of institutes are encouraged to cultivate leadership among nonordained members. If not allowed by canon law to serve as provincials or abbots, brothers may be able to serve as priors, assistant provincials, members of leadership councils and perhaps more important, formation personnel and directors of our apostolates. Community governance that overlooks or minimizes the voice of nonordained members robs itself of a perspective that reminds us in a particular way of the demands of the community’s charism and tradition.

Communities wishing to be creative may even consider promoting brothers as special conductors of the institute’s charism and find formal ways for nonordained members to study and explore the history, tradition and charism of the institute. This type of intellectual and spiritual engagement with the charism may come to be recognized as part of the responsibility of the brother’s vocation and help sharpen the intentionality with which they provide the “uncomplicated witness” of brotherhood. To take this one step further, brothers would then be well positioned for greater inclusion in the ongoing articulation of the charism and mission of the community over time.

Most of the challenges articulated so far are probably more pertinent to

mixed communities, and communities of brothers and priests probably have much to learn from institutes of brothers only, especially with respect to models of initial formation and ways of articulating and expressing religious charisms that depend less on priestly identity and ministry. Institutes of brothers only also play a special role in reminding the larger church that the charism of consecrated life is already complete without the presence of priesthood.

Again, this is not to say that priesthood is not a valuable dimension to many religious communities; however, the presence of communities like the Christian Brothers, the Alexian Brothers, the Franciscan Brothers of the Poor and many others stand as a witness to the completeness of the charism of consecrated life. To do this most effectively, members must be visible, identifiable and compelling in their fidelity to their vocation and its demands.

To all my fellow brothers, regardless of type of institute, I challenge you not only to be aware of the dignity of your call as consecrated religious in the church but to strive each day to live it with the greatest zeal. As I have tried to communicate above, your gifts of voluntary celibacy, poverty and obedience (made perhaps a little more striking by the absence of the status of priesthood) are a great gift to the church and a sign of true hope to those who are lonely, marginalized, poor, oppressed and without social status themselves.

To be a generator of hope, of course, you must live your vows — these evangelical counsels — with great seriousness and conviction, and then you must commit yourself to a deeply intimate relationship with God, who will bring the joy, meaning and fulfillment that others need to see in your lives and which they desire so very much for themselves. If you can do this, then your life is truly charismatic, and you will be, as the recent document from the Vatican has pointed out, the memory of Jesus in the world. Jesus is the prototype, the one who lived to ease the burden of and give hope to the lonely, the poor and the oppressed through his own sacrifices.

Brothers, do not assume that just because we do not have the competing demands of priesthood that we are automatically more available to give an “uncomplicated witness” to the

charisms of the consecrated life and our specific institutions. Our own identities as brothers are just as vulnerable to being dominated by overidentification with our work and professional life, by the myriad opportunities that can draw us away from the center of community life and even by our occasional desire to hold on to the idea of ourselves as victims in a hierarchical church.

If the true fruits of our vocation and sign of hope for others are our joy and our capacity to love, then nothing is more inconsistent with these than unbridled ambition, selfishness and bitterness.

I urge you, brothers, take every opportunity to advance your spiritual and theological education. While your mission as nonordained religious is more likely to be played out in the temporal realities of life, this does not mean that you are any less responsible for cultivating a deep and rich theological and spiritual life.

Be sure to practice and master the art of theological reflection, the setting aside of time to allow your specific experiences of ministry, celibacy, poverty, obedience and community to come into conversation with your theological knowledge and your knowledge of the charism of religious life. It is only when we take the time to apply what we know to what we are living that the meaning of our lives becomes apparent and we are sustained by that meaning. This mining of our consecrated lives for its meaning leads to greater knowledge of God and ultimately to gratitude for our vocation.

Finally, brothers, don't forget to express gratitude for your ordained brothers, who often find the strain of priestly ministry a burden and an added challenge in their attempts to live out the demands of religious life. Not only do they need our witness to what is foundational, but they also need our support, encouragement and prayers as we strive together to add our particular ray to the one light of Christ.

To the laity present, please allow me to express, on behalf of all of us who strive to offer the witness of the consecrated life, our deep, deep gratitude for the many ways you support us. We are grateful for the trust and hope you place in us and never forget the power of your witness.

Just as we hope that you will contin-

ue to look to us to be shining witnesses to the kingdom to come, know that we draw great inspiration from your ability to keep Christ at the center of your lives amid the oftentimes overwhelming demands of family life, care for elderly parents, economic challenges, social obligations and social consciousness.

Equally as critical are the encouragement and positive models of commitment you provide us by your marriages and your dedicated obedience to your children and family members. I am discovering in my own life that I have learned most about perseverance in the monastic way of life from the example that my parents have given in their 55 years of marriage.

Finally, to any young people considering a religious vocation in the church, allow me only to say that the consecrated life is rich, challenging, beautiful, difficult and, above all, a great privilege. This is true of all vocations in the church if they are lived with zeal. I do not hesitate to tell you that life as a brother can be challenging, gritty and tough as well as rewarding and sweet, because I know you are looking to do something extraordinary and heroic with your lives. Know that you are invited to point to the kingdom with us, and in Pope Francis' words, to “wake up the world” to realities that we are not yet accustomed to seeing but are too magnificent to be missed.

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**\*April 28-29**

Pope Francis visits Egypt.

**April 28-May 1**

National Conference of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. Theme: "Hearts on Fire: Our Own Emmaus Journey." Hyatt Regency Tamaya. Santa Ana Pueblo, N.M. [www.nacc.org](http://www.nacc.org)

**April 30-May 2**

National Association of Church Personnel Administrators Annual Convocation. Theme: "Human Resources and the Church: Advancing in Harmony." The Inn at Opryland, A Gaylord Hotel. Nashville, Tenn. [www.nacpa.org](http://www.nacpa.org)

**April 30-May 3**

Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development Annual Conference. Theme: "Into the Fields: Pastoral Planning for Our Lived Realities." Savior Pastoral Center. Kansas City, Kan. [www.cppcd.org](http://www.cppcd.org)

**May 1-4**

National Workshop on Christian Unity. Theme: "Reform, Repent, Reconcile." Hilton Minneapolis Downtown. Minneapolis, Minn. <http://nwcu.org>

**May 12-13**

Pope Francis visits the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima in Portugal for the 100th anniversary of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

**May 16-18**

Yale Institute of Sacred Music Poetry Conference: "Any-angled Light: Poetry and the Mission of Your Church." Yale University. New Haven, Conn. <http://ism.yale.edu/calendar>

\*signifies new listing

## On File

Pope Francis strongly condemned an apparent chemical attack in Syria that left some 70 people, including at least 10 children, dead. "We are horrified by the latest events in Syria. I strongly deplore the unacceptable massacre that took place yesterday in the Idlib province, where dozens of civilians, including many children, were killed," the pope said April 5 before concluding his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square. Images of dead men, women and children lying on the streets provoked international outrage following the attack April 4 in a rebel-held area. Western leaders have accused Syrian President Bashar Assad and the country's military of perpetrating the attack, based on reports that warplanes dropped chemical bombs in the early morning. Pope Francis appealed "to the conscience of those who have political responsibility at the local and international level, so that this tragedy may come to an end and relief may come to that beloved population who for too long have been devastated by war."

The Senate voted late March 30 to override a rule change made in the last days of the Obama administration that prevented states from redirecting Title X family planning funding away from clinics that performed abortions and to community clinics that provide comprehensive health care. "The clear purpose of this Title X rule change was to benefit abortion providers like Planned Parenthood," said Cardinal Timothy M.

Dolan of New York, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities. "Congress has done well to reverse this very bad public policy, and to restore the ability of states to stop one stream of our tax dollars going to Planned Parenthood," he said in a March 31 statement. Midday March 30 Vice President Mike Pence, as president of the Senate, cast a tiebreaking vote that allowed Senate action to proceed on a joint resolution to block the Obama-era regulation that went into effect Jan. 18, two days before President Barack Obama left office.

At the urging of Catholic leaders, El Salvador has passed a law banning metal mining nationwide, making the small Central American country the first in the world to outlaw the industry. The new law, approved overwhelmingly by El Salvador's congress March 29, orders the Economy Ministry to close existing mines while prohibiting the government from issuing new mining licenses. Mining had become highly contentious in the country of 6.3 million, as environmental groups protested the effects on water sources and soil contamination. "Mission accomplished," said Congressman Guillermo Mata of the ruling party, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, on his Twitter account. "As a political party, we were the drivers, but the hard work was done by the social movements, the NGOs and the church."