

**The Importance of FUNDED,
In-depth Community/Apostolate
Experiences
For Discerning Candidates
(2/2)**

Brother Robert Carnaghi

**HOW DID THIS EXPERIENCE HELP YOU IN THE
DISCERNMENT OF YOUR VOCATION?**

«The experience made me look further into a vocation possibility as a Brother or Priest. It also brought up the possibility of being a teacher.»

«The experience made me more open to God's call in my life, whether that be as Brother, Priest, or Layman.»

«It pushed me to look further into the Religious Life because it had a nice feel about it.»

«It helped me greatly to realize how much I admire the ministry of the Brothers, and to realize how comfortable and appropriate I feel being a part of it.»

**DO YOU THINK AN APOSTOLIC/COMMUNITY EX-
PERIENCE IS A GOOD IDEA OR NECESSARY?**

«Yes. It gave me a chance to try out a new experience to see how it fit...without any strings attached.»

«Yes. It was a concrete realization of the Brother's life. I did what they did and I liked it.»

«Yes, it was necessary for me because it showed me 'the core of Brotherhood'.»

«Yes, I strongly believe it is absolutely vital, essential in determining the answers to the questions that only the candidate can answer for himself, and only when he's inside the situation.»

For the pastoral ministry of vocations to be effective in discerning and identifying the Will of God and then willingly collaborating with God's plan, the process should include the four aspects of Christian initiation:

initiation in the knowledge of Christ and His message; initiation in Christian attitudes and values and into an evangelical lifestyle; initiation in prayer and sacramental celebration; and initiation in apostolic and missionary commitment. While developing these four aspects of Christian initiation, this process also familiarizes the candidates with the life of the Founder and his spirit as exemplified by the Brothers today. In discerning a vocation to the Religious Life, it is essential that a candidate experiences not only the rhetoric but also the reality of Religious Life. This knowledge is best gained by interaction. Since a religious vocation is lived out in a specific congregation or institute, discerning candidates are best informed of the religious family's founding charism by an «on-site experience.» It seems to me that no candidate can fully accept God's invitation to Religious Life without really experiencing and understanding the value of its constitutive elements. The value of such a program lies in its ability to «weed out the uncertainties» and helps the candidate to discover and interiorize factors which bring about a more consistent motivation. Throughout his «journey,» the candidate seeks and identifies signs of his vocation. These signs make it necessary for him to make specific choices which bring about some fundamental changes in his life. These changes stimulate him to pass through various stages which culminate in a definitive decision in the form of a «life plan,» thus identifying the vocational path he should follow.

Should a congregation wish to start a program of this type, attention should be given to establishing a clear understanding on the part of the congregation and the candidates as to the purpose and value of such a program. In addition to including the four aspects of Christian initiation, the vocation program should further show the value that consecrated life has in the ecclesial community. To achieve this, one needs to include reflection on the topic, some personal witness and a carefully chosen form of experience that will enable candidates to understand the specific values of the consecrated vocation in the context of the Christian plan. Another aim of the vocation program is for the candidate to recognize consecrated life as a positive personal and social achievement, capable of giving meaning to one's life.

Choosing the proper SITE and MINISTRY is crucial. Every religious family, inspired by its founding charism, expresses its own way of living the Gospel for a specific purpose. There are certain «constants» which the pastoral ministry of vocations takes into account: the call to live in community as an answer to individualism (following in the footsteps of Jesus in a fraternal and supportive community...one that reflects hospitality and welcome); and the preference and clear option for the marginalized (The Gospels are filled with Jesus' stance with the marginalized). It is extremely important that the community chosen to house the candidates be one that will nurture their vocations through the witness of its members who live authentically, passionately, and effectively all the dimensions of our call.

To cut back on expenses, explore the possibilities of programs within your present ministries that are FUNDED, but don't hesitate to invest finances into such an important ministry as vocation discernment. There is a line in HELLO DOLLY that best expresses

this concept. Both Dolly's deceased husband Ephraim and her new suitor Horace Vanderguilder utter these words, «Money is like manure. It's not worth a thing unless it's spread around encouraging young things (vocations) to grow.» It is a worthwhile investment when a discerning candidate comes to the realization of who God wants him/her to be, what He wants him/her to do, and why, for whom, and how He wants him/her to do it. For such persons will realize that Religious Life is their way to find meaning, happiness, and fulfillment. They will be «at home» in their vocations. •

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