

## Mission and Ministry of Religious Life

*(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)*

### Opening Prayer

Loving Father, we pray for those men and women who seek to serve you as brothers and sisters in religious communities. May the Holy Spirit and the unique charism of their founder inspire them to live the gospel to its fullest. We pray particularly for those you have called through history, those you are calling now, and those you will be calling in the future. May we as Serrans always be open and responsive to those who receive such a vocation from you. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

### Scripture

“His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, He has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world.” *(1 Peter 1: 34)*

*(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)*

### Introduction

Men and women who join religious communities choose the vowed life as a way of expressing their dedication to God, with the individual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience being concrete expressions of that dedication. The purpose of this program is to appreciate the life of service these men and women live, as they become symbols of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel.

*(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)*

### Documentary Tradition

Through our baptism, we are all called to be people of service. The religious responds freely and totally by serving within a community that is consistently being formed by the gospel in order to bring Christ to the world.

While such a choice is viewed as being difficult and limiting by today's standards of self determination and individualism, the religious finds his or her joy in living a life of prayer, obedience, and celibacy within a gospel-centered community where members experience the mystery of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church captures the richness and beauty of the religious life in the following two statements:

“The religious state is the one way of experiencing a ‘more intimate’ consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ's faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all and, pursuing the perfection of charity in the service of the Kingdom, to signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come.” *(Catechism of the Catholic Church, #916)*

“By a life perfectly and entirely consecrated to [such] sanctification, the members of these institutes share in the Church's task of evangelization, in the world and from within the world, where their presence acts as a leaven in the world. Their witness of a Christian life aims to order temporal things according to God and inform the world with the power of the Gospel. They commit themselves to the

evangelical counsels by sacred bonds and observe among themselves the communion and fellowship appropriate to their particular secular way of life.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #229)

Finally, the value in religious life is based on the journey to conform to Christ, but is only effective to the degree that a particular community is able to renew itself in light of the needs of the church and the world. Thus, “The appropriate renewal of religious life involves two simultaneous processes: (1) a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community and (2) an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times. It is according to the following principles that such renewal should go forward under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church.” (*Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*, #2)

*(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)*

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How have the changes in the church in the last 25 years affected apostolic religious life?
2. What are the many different services that religious have been involved in because of the changes in the church?
3. What can parishes, local Serra clubs or Serra International do to respond more effectively to the needs of those in religious life?

*(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)*

### **Closing Reflection**

The vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience lead people to charity by connecting them to the Church and its mystery in a special way. Consequently, the spiritual life of these people is devoted to the welfare of the whole Church through special ministries. Also by the profession of these vows religious communities appear as a sign which attracts all the members of the Church to fulfill the duties of their Christian vocation. The challenge before the Church is to ask itself the questions about how to invite ever increasing numbers of faithful Christians to share more deeply in a spiritual life in a global culture that can appear superficial. At the same time, contemporary media presents us constantly with large realms of human need.

### **Bibliography**

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