



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Practical Ideas & Suggestions
to Promote Religious Vocations

Putting Yourself Out Among the People

BY RHONDA GRUENEWALD

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.”—Mt 5:16

My life changed five years ago. When our new parochial vicar, Fr. Victor Perez, called my husband and me out of the blue one day to come to a meeting about “priests and such,” my life made a drastic and fantastic turn into the world of vocations.

You see I am a convert to the Faith and cannot remember the word “vocation” (in the Catholic context) mentioned in or outside of church since I was confirmed in the summer of 1999. I had much to learn. I did know that I was in love with my faith, so if Father Victor said we really need to promote the priesthood, religious life, and sacramental marriage at our parish, then I was in. All in! My husband says that I do nothing half-way.

Initially, I was just volunteering as director of what we called our Vocation Ministry at St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Houston, Texas. We prayed and encouraged our parishioners to pray for vocations, too. Our ministry worked hard, putting on activities each month after Mass, at youth events, at our parish school, anything really to bring awareness to vocations. We brought to our parish and school sisters, priests, and brothers of various religious communities, some driving five hours to visit!

I, and all those who encountered them, felt a palpable joy when conse-

crated men and women would visit. That was the main comment I would hear from young and old. “They are so joyful!” I quickly became a vocation junkie! I know now it is because these men and women were sharing their light with me and everyone around them, and the world is in desperate need of more light, Christ’s light that shows through each of you.

Fast forward five years, and I have written a book *Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry*, which is focused on how to create a culture of vocations at our parishes and local setting, created a website (VocationMinistry.com), and started a nonprofit to teach other dioceses about promoting vocations.

What I do know is that this was not *my* plan, which simply included volunteering and being a wife and stay-at-home mom of my two teenagers. God had other plans for my life, including my traveling around North America, so far to 17 different dioceses in little over a year, to spread the message that God’s people need to be actively involved in vocation awareness and prayer.

Through this work, I am seeing more and more signs of a resurgence of vocations to the religious life, especially for those communities and institutes who are willing to put their



lamp on the stand and not under a bushel basket. These expanding communities are *putting themselves out among the people*.

Do you remember when Pope Francis told priests to be “shepherds, living with the smell of the sheep”? I don’t think that is meant only for priests. Not taking anything away from our ordained’s special role in our lives, I just think that you—being consecrated men and women—also need to be smelly!

You, many of whom labor among the people in nursing homes and hospitals, educating our youth, and a million other ways that you encounter God’s people, are a pretty smelly lot. Now I want you to step out of your comfort zone to share

with people not in your normal circle to have a wider ripple effect!

Pope St. John Paul II, said in his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, “As they (God’s people) become better acquainted with the consecrated life, they will be able with greater awareness to thank Almighty God for this great gift (no. 13).”

And this is where it begins. *God’s people, wherever they need to become more acquainted with the consecrated life by meeting you.* Your light, Christ’s light in you, needs to shine so brightly that it becomes a magnet.

Unfortunately, if you are waiting for throngs of people to come to you and your community, you will

probably be sadly disappointed. You must go out and make yourselves known to the people where they are, especially our youth.

I believe that this should be incumbent upon the most vibrant and joyful members of your religious community not just on your vocation director. So over the course of this next year, I will propose some practical ideas about how to place yourself in front of God’s people so that you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can experience an increase in vocations to your specific institute. Let’s journey together so your light—*Christ’s light*—can expand and we can give glory to Our Heavenly Father! 🕯️

Self-Assessment Survey—Rate How “Out There” You Really Are

Our Lord commanded: “Let your light shine.” Unfortunately, religious women and men don’t always allow their good works and evangelical witness to radiate so that God may not get the glory and honor He so rightly deserves.

The following questions are meant to encourage consecrated religious to evaluate themselves, as well as their community, on whether or not they are as “out there” as they could be. And while most of the questions are geared toward active institutes, cloistered and monastic religious may be able to benefit too from taking this self-assessment survey. (*4 is highest rating; 1 is lowest*).

Are you and/or some of your community members:

PRAYER

1. Attending adoration or special Masses at parishes nearby? 4 3 2 1
2. Encouraging those you encounter to specifically pray for more vocations to the consecrated life (not just to your congregation)? 4 3 2 1
3. Joining parish groups in prayerfully witnessing to the Gospel of Life in front of a Planned Parenthood or an abortion clinic? 4 3 2 1
4. Leading a Bible study or prayer



group at a nearby parish? 4 3 2 1

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

1. Attending the annual March for Life in Washington D.C., or in your own diocese? 4 3 2 1
2. Sharing your vocation testimony with anyone who will listen? 4 3 2 1
3. Actively seeking opportunities to be with parishioners where they are, such as at a Bingo Night, Parish Picnic, or Lenten Fish Fry? 1 2 3 4
4. Teaching or speaking at religious education classes? 4 3 2 1
5. Offering “Come and See” discernment events at your convent, friary or monastery? 4 3 2 1
6. Offering to be a joyful witness, especially during WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE and NATIONAL VOCATION AWARENESS WEEK? 1 2 3 4
7. Checking to see if there is a Vocations Committee or Ministry at a nearby parish? If not, could you offer to help start one? 4 3 2 1

YOUTH

1. Attending dynamic youth events such as Steubenville Conferences (high school) during the summer? 4 3 2 1
2. Attending SEEK, Encounter IGNITE or some other young adult conference? 4 3 2 1
3. Sharing your testimony and educating young people at youth ministry or outreach events? 4 3 2 1
4. Helping your Diocesan Office of Vocations with their discernment events or activities? 4 3 2 1
5. Assisting local youth ministers with retreats, especially Confirmation retreats? 4 3 2 1

AFFIRMATION

1. Affirming each member of your institute on their anniversary of profession of vows? 4 3 2 1
2. Offering prayers in the form of a spiritual bouquet for those in leadership in your community? 4 3 2 1
3. Once you have a relationship with the nearby parish(es), allowing parishioners to affirm you on special days, like your anniversary of vows or birthday? 4 3 2 1

Scoring Totals: 76-65—EXCELLENT; 64-50—Very GOOD; 49-35—GOOD; Below 34—GET OUT THERE MORE! 🙏