

## VOCATION TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

**Apostolic** — A word to describe religious orders active in society and the world, perhaps performing services such as teaching, ministering to the sick, or going on mission to proclaim the Gospel.

**Apostolate** — The type of work or mission through which a religious order's particular charism is lived out.

**Brother** — Brothers live in religious communities. They make vows and promise to use their talents to serve God wherever the community decides they are needed. Brothers are not ordained.

**Charism** — Each religious community has a charism - a unique way of returning God's love to him and his people which manifests a particular attribute of God's being. This is also the distinctive spirituality of the founder or foundress of a religious institute. It is the "personality" of a religious community bequeathed by the one who founded it.

**Consecrated Life** — A life totally offered to God in response to His call of love, through the radical living of one's baptism by the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience through vows or sacred bonds in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. Forms of consecrated life include: religious priests, brothers, and sisters in religious institutes; consecrated men, women, and priests in secular institutes; women who are consecrated virgins; men and women who embrace the solitary call to the eremitic life; as well as consecrated men and women who live in societies of apostolic life.

**Consecrated Virginity** — "The order of virgins who, expressing the holy resolution of following Christ more closely, are consecrated to God by the diocesan Bishop according to the approved liturgical rite, are mystically betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, and are dedicated to the service of the Church."<sup>4</sup> Among other practices, the consecrated virgin faithfully prays the Liturgy of the Hours, re-

---

<sup>4</sup> Canon 604 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law

ceives the sacraments regularly, and practices private prayer. She keeps the intentions of her bishop and clergy and the needs of her diocese as a special focus of prayer. Consecrated virginity is a distinct form of consecrated life in the Church.

**Convent** — Residence or living area for a community of religious sisters.

**Cloister** — Residence or living area for secluded nuns who rarely leave their community.

**Contemplative** — A word used to describe a religious order that holds prayer as its principal activity.

**Deacon (Permanent)** — A third degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, after bishop and priest. The permanent deacon is ordained for ministry and service, but not to the priesthood. He assists and preaches at Mass, baptizes, and presides at weddings and funerals. Most deacons have jobs outside the Church to make a living; some deacons work for the parish. Men at least 35 years of age, married or single, may be ordained permanent deacons.

**Deacon (Transitional)** — Men who are called to the priesthood who are in the final stage of formation before being ordained as priests. The men receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders and usually serve as deacons for one year before ordination to the priesthood. During this time, they continue their studies and serve in parish assignments.

**Diocesan Priest** — A priest is ordained to preach the Gospel and celebrate the sacraments. When a man receives the sacrament of Holy Orders at ordination, he makes three promises: to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily, to obey his bishop, and to live a celibate life. Diocesan priests serve the people of a particular geographic region – the diocese.

**Discern/Discernment** — When talking about vocations, discernment refers to the process of discovering through prayer, reflection, and discussion how God calls each person to love him.

**Discernment Group** — An opportunity for men and women to gather separately and regularly to reflect on God's grace and action in their lives and their call to participate in God's work through the Church.

**Evangelical Counsels** — Christ proposes the evangelical counsels to every disciple. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church #915, "The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called,

entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience. It is the profession of these counsels, within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God.”

**Final Vows** — Formal commitments made by a religious man or woman to God to follow Jesus in his poverty, chastity, and obedience.

**Formation** — The process that a man or woman goes through to be ordained to the priesthood or profess vows as a religious. This formation will have multiple steps as the person matures in their vocation and can take 6-13 years, depending on the community.

**Hermit** — A hermit is a woman or man who lives alone expressly for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the salvation of souls. Some hermits are consecrated by the Church per Canon 603 “(Hermits) devote their life to the praise of God and the salvation of the world through a stricter withdrawal from the world, the silence of solitude, and assiduous prayer and penance.” They live their vocation in the name of the Church; some hermits live out their calling without publicly professing their commitment in the hands of the diocesan bishop.

**Holy Orders** — The Sacrament by which the mission entrusted by Christ to his Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church through the laying on of hands. By receiving Holy Orders men become members of the ordained clergy - deacons, priests, and bishops. By receiving holy orders men’s souls are marked with a permanent, sacramental character.

**Laity** — People within the Church, including religious brothers and sisters, as well as all other single and married persons not ordained as bishop, priests, or deacons. They are also known as the lay faithful.

**Monk** — A man who has made religious vows, living under specific spiritual regulations (a Rule) that structure his life and under the guidance of an abbot. Most monks live out the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in contemplative communities.

**Novice** — The second formal stage of becoming a consecrated religious man or woman. Novices continue to study and learn about the religious community, his or her relationship with God, and the

lifetime commitment to the religious life. This stage may take one to two years of prayer.

**Nun** — These women are brides of Christ who are called by him to pray and serve the needs of the Church in a more hidden way. They usually live in cloistered communities and do not leave their convents for outside apostolates. Though other sisters are often called "nuns", technically nuns live a specifically contemplative life, and are analogous to monks.

**Priest** — A man is ordained to the priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Together each man and the Church discern whether he is called to become a priest or not. Diocesan priests are called to serve the people of a particular diocese. Men called to be priests in religious orders belong to communities, and in addition to receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders, they also take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (the three Evangelical Counsels).

**Postulant** — The first formal stage of becoming a consecrated religious that normally takes 6-12 months to complete.

**Religious Community** — The founder of a religious community brings together a group of men or women who share the same charism and are dedicated to the same mission in the Church. These are religious communities of priests and brothers and communities of sisters. The apostolates of the communities vary according to their mission. Those dedicated primarily to prayer are contemplative communities; those who combine prayer with apostolic ministries are called *apostolic* communities, sometimes referred to as "active" communities.

**Religious Life** — Priests, brothers, monks, sisters, and nuns who separate themselves from the world to some degree according to their religious institute's mission and purpose to witness the coming of the Kingdom of God. This radical witness is made through the public profession of the evangelical counsels and is a permanent commitment made in a specific religious institute recognized by the Church.

**Sacramental Marriage** — A covenant between baptized man and a woman and establishes a partnership of the whole life, which is ordered toward the good of the spouses and procreation and education of offspring.

**Secular Institute** — Consecrated lay men and women, as well as some diocesan priests, who permanently profess the evangelical counsels in a secular institute recognized by the Church. They maintain their secular or lay state by living in the world, often engaging in secular jobs, and living alone or in small groups of fraternal life. They sanctify society from within.

**Seminary** — A place where men go to discern fully and prepare for the priesthood. Seminaries have four areas of formation: spiritual, intellectual, human, and pastoral. A man would typically attend seminary for eight years after high school. If he goes to seminary after college, the length of study is typically six years.

**Sister** — Sisters belong to religious communities. They are brides of Christ chosen by him to love him and serve his Church like his Mother Mary as virgins and spiritual mothers. They serve in whatever ways their superiors decide is best given their talents and inclinations.

**Society of Apostolic Life** — A group of people who have a particular purpose. According to Canon 731 members of Societies of Apostolic Life, “resemble institutes of consecrated life; their members, without religious vows, pursue the apostolic purpose proper to the society and, leading a life in common as brothers or sisters according to their proper manner of life, strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the constitutions.”

**Vocation** — A calling or summoning. A vocation is God’s invitation to love and serve him and his Church in a particular way of life. It is a call to live on earth in a way that will impact eternity. The word itself is derived from the Latin word *vocare*.

**Vows** — Formal commitments made to God to follow Jesus in his poverty, chastity, and obedience as members of religious communities. The vow of poverty means that members hold all things in common. The community takes care of each other’s needs through the providence of God and our charity. The vow of chastity means that the member gives up the goods of marriage and marital relations for the sake of God’s kingdom. The vow of obedience allows the member of the community to imitate and share in Jesus’ obedience to His Father to accomplish His will. (Diocesan priests promise to live in celibate chastity, obedience to their bishop, and a simple life.)