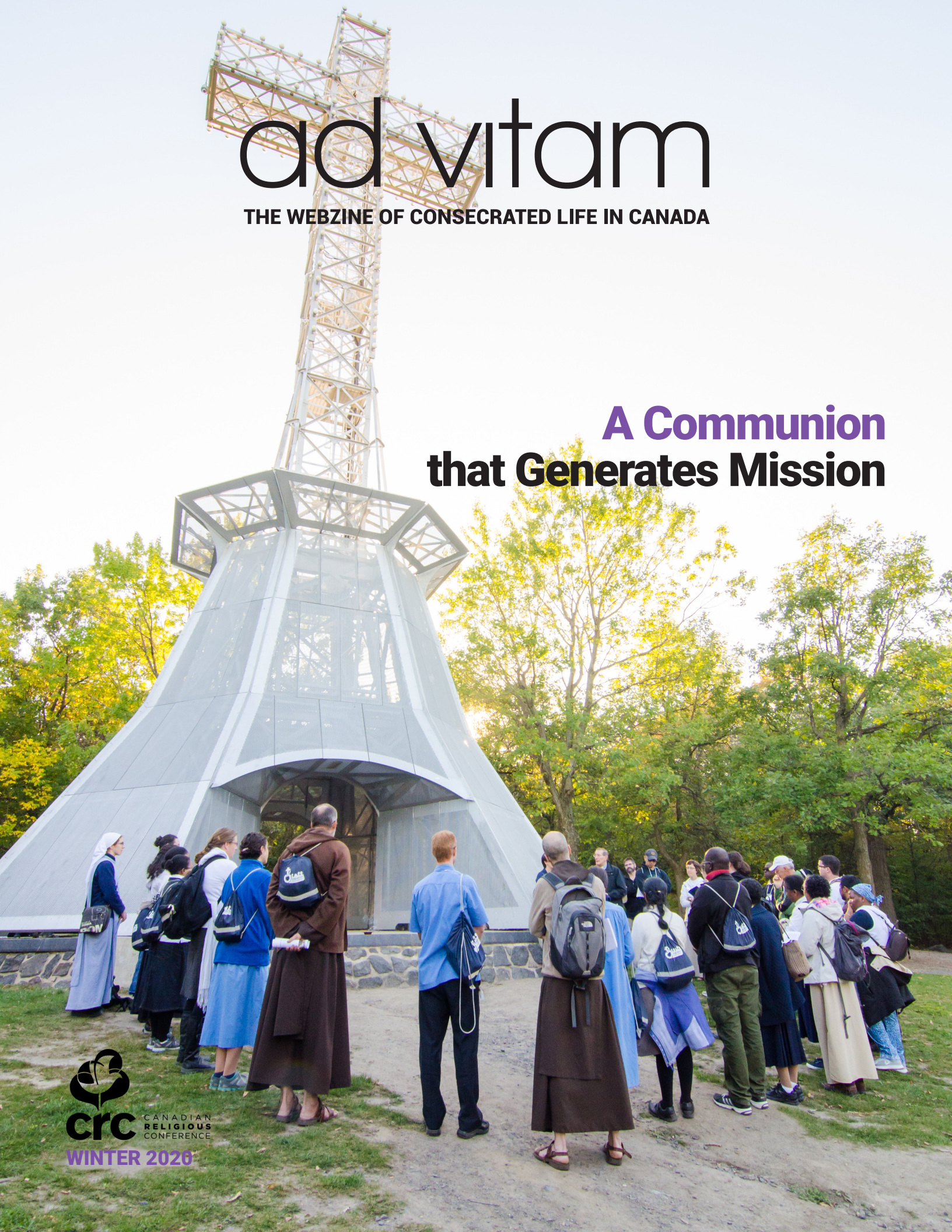
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THE WEBZINE OF CONSECRATED LIFE IN CANADA

A Communion that Generates Mission



CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE

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Where two or three **are gathered**

Sabrina Di Matteo, Assistant Director, Ongoing Formation, Canadian Religious Conference

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." This verse of Matthew 18:20 is often considered foundational of community gathering. It is the smallest *ekklesia*, the humblest convocation of an assembly in the same faith.

This recalls the adage "A Christian alone is a Christian in danger." Danger of what? It is generally understood as the risk of losing one's faith by not sustaining it within a community. However, given the systemic extent of sexual abuse, abuse of power and spiritual abuse, I would argue that there is another confirmed danger of isolation: that of perverting beliefs or constructing a self-serving spirituality, implemented by an isolated, often adulated leader who gradually introduces other vulnerable believers into his perversion, and even in an unhealthy fusional relationship.

The brokenness of communion is ultimately what harms the mission. In this sense, the Trinity can truly be a model of theology and ecclesiology capable of preventing the above-mentioned risks. A third party purifies the bonds, disrupts the fusion, invites to a wider communion. Therein is the reflection proposed in this issue thanks to the contributions of the Theological Commission of the CRC. What would seem self-evident in consecrated life – communion and mission – deserves to be re-examined in light of the Bible, of theology and of pastoral practice. These pages are interspersed with references to Christus vivit, an exhortation to synodality, the communion and mission with younger generations. There is in fact an issue of otherness in these reflections, insofar as it calls us to hospitality, mercy, and mutual elevation.

The call to communion in consecrated life and in the Church is the pledge of a just (and adjusted) vision that is enlightened – and corrected as necessary – by a community that discerns what the Gospel calls for and generates a mission of multiple ways and faces. Let us be that transfigured face!

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Trinity communion and otherness

Gill Goulding, CJ

The Trinity[1] is amongst the most mysterious of the articles of our faith to which we bear witness each Sunday in our recitation of the Creed. Indeed, for many of us, the Trinity is so much in the realm of mystery that we consider it to be beyond our understanding and thus we miss out on the gift of God that is revealed to us as we ponder something of the depths of our God. Each year that we celebrate the solemnity of the most holy Trinity it is an invitation for us all to commit ourselves to enriching our ordinary relationships of daily life by promoting communion, consolation and mercy. As Pope Francis stated early in his pontificate, in his Angelus Address: "Our being created in the image and likeness of God in communion calls us to understand ourselves as beings in relation and to live interpersonal relationships in solidarity and reciprocal love."[2] He continued stressing that the Trinity is not closed in on itself, but is open, communicates in creation and in history and has entered into the world of [human persons] to call everyone to take part."[3] Here we have a divine imperative of passionate love that calls human beings to share in this apostolate of love.

God within Godself

"With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful

When an encounter with God is called an "ecstasy", it is because it takes us out of ourselves, lifts us up and overwhelms us with God's love and beauty. Yet we can also experience ecstasy when we recognize in others their hidden beauty, their dignity and their grandeur as images of God and children of the Father. The Holy Spirit wants to make us come out of ourselves, to embrace others with love and to seek their good. That is why it is always better to live the faith together and to show our love by living in community and sharing with other young people our affection, our time, our faith and our troubles. The Church offers many different possibilities for living our faith in community, for everything is easier when we do it together.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, no. 164.

gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity."[4]

In and through an encounter with Jesus we are able to glimpse something of the merciful love of the Trinity. God is a dynamic reality of relations, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the work of divine freedom unfolds as the Father's personal freedom begets the eternal Son, the inseparable Other and together the Father and the Son breathe out the eternal Spirit. The Father `has' nothing apart from what he `is', so his gift to the Son is an act of total `self-expropriation'. The Son is the perfect image of the Father, who returns the Father's self-gift in an act of thanksgiving that likewise involves his whole self. And the Spirit is the fruitfulness of this mutual gift that always exceeds and overflows. The mystery of our Triune God involves one God in three persons, but the persons are only distinct in their relating. Accordingly, from eternity there is a relationship of communion (one God) and otherness (three persons) within the Trinity. God is not first one and then three but simultaneously both – otherness is inconceivable apart from relationship - and therefore it is revealed that communion does not threaten otherness rather it generates it.[5] This co-inherence of unity and otherness stands in sharp contradiction to our contemporary culture, where 'otherness' is often seen as at best suspicious and at worse a positive threat.

Fear of the Other

Within our world today there is an impetus to regard the other as our enemy until proven to be a friend. Christian tradition ascribes this attitude to the result of the 'Fall' and it does appear that there is – as it were – a form of pathology inherent in our genes that is the fear of the other. Clearly this is inculcated from an early age when we warn young children for their protection to be wary of strangers. Yet when the

fear of the other expands to become fear of otherness then, if we are not careful, we begin to identify difference with division. In such a situation communion ends up being nothing but arrangements for peaceful co-existence. But as Christians we are called to something more. Made in the image of God we are called to enter into communion with our Triune God and to relate to one another in love. It is Jesus who exemplifies for us how we are to relate both to God and to others without fear.

Christ: the love of the Triune God made manifest

It is Jesus who reveals to us something of the inner workings of the Trinitarian mystery and calls us to participate in it. "No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,"[6] we read in the gospel of Matthew. It is clear throughout the gospels that there is a constant relationship between the Father and the Son. It is the Son who speaks of the co-existence of the Holy Spirit with the Father, and who sends him to the Church to sanctify it by his loving mercy until the end of time. It is also Christ who reveals to us the perfect oneness of life of the three divine persons.[7] The Father eternally engenders the Son, and the Father and the Son together eternally breathe forth the Holy Spirit.[8]

As Christians we believe that there is no fullness of life without relationship with God and corresponding relationships with others. What we glimpse in the life of the Trinity is that otherness is not a threat to communion amongst ourselves but the very condition for it. In addition, an appreciation of otherness lies at the heart of good human relationships, which can lead to real communion. Such communion generates further openness to otherness. Still there is a price to be paid. As Jesus willingly embraced the cost of giving his life for our redemption so sacrifice at times of our own will and interests is the expression of our commitment to communion and our willingness to embrace otherness. Here we cannot discriminate between those who are and those who are not worthy of our acceptance. Ultimately, it is the Spirit who leads us to profound communion, and in our everyday living it is the Eucharist which affirms and sanctifies both communion and otherness.

Questions

1. Do I prayerfully ponder the mystery of the Trinity drawing from such prayer life-giving energy for mission? If not, how about trying it?
2. What 'others' do I fear both in my community and the wider world? Can I take these fears to prayer with an openness to having them transformed? Can I share my fears with my community? Am I open to being helped by others?

[1] For a book-length elaboration of this theme, to which I am indebted, it is worth reading John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, ed. by Paul McPartlan, (London: T&T Clark, 2006)
[2] Pope Francis, Angelus address, St. Peter's Square, May 22, 2014.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 11, 2015, 8.
[5] John Zizioulas gives an eloquent elaboration of this in the work already cited.
[6] Matthew 11: 27.
[7] John 16: 12-15.
[8] Clearly the focus here is on the Western tradition based on the understanding of the *filioque*, whereby the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Challenges calling us forth!

Louis Cinq-Mars, OFM Cap, Provincial Minister, Capuchin friars

Consecrated life is in transformation. Aging is an undeniable characteristic of its demographic. "Styles" of consecrated life that emerged in different times and from diverse spiritual impulses continue to evolve together, but emphasis is shifting. Apostolic congregations have been numerous and have championed missions abroad. Today, those mission destinations of the past are sending sisters and brothers to us in North America.

The challenges are great: inculturation, of course, but also the need to listen to the visions of the Church and of mission learned in other cultures; intercultural dialogue within religious communities hoping to build authentic relationships and mutual support; intergenerational dialogue to care for the faces of the Church in all its stages...

In the face of these challenges, it is necessary to return to the source of consecrated life: a desire for communion, a call to witness to an alternative way of life, a thirst for the humanization of the world. Louis Cinq-Mars, outgoing president of the CRC (2018-2020), was a social worker before joining the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. He worked with the L'Arche communities in Ottawa and Montreal as a Capuchin. His role as Minister Provincial took him to India, Brazil and Madagascar. Based on these experiences, he brings his perspective on the future of consecrated life to this interview.



Nicole O'Bomsawin, of the Abenaki First Nation, facilitates a Blanket Exercise.

When mission rhymes **with communion**

Nathalie Roberge, OP

In recent decades, ecclesial documents have given significant space to the reality of communion. They invite us not only to live in communion with God and our neighbour, but with all of creation as well. In the deployment of this ecclesiology of communion, particular mention is made of a "missionary communion" or even of an "evangelizing communion," thus highlighting the intimate bond that exists between communion and mission (*Evangelii Gaudium* 23, 31 and 130).

Without being a new reality, the amalgam of these terms is particularly revealing! While it spontaneously evokes the missionary impact of communion (Jn 13:35), it also challenges us to rediscover the mission from the angle of communion. In that perspective, it is interesting to hear again the words of the first letter of John: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship [communion]1 with us; and our fellowship [communion] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).

I would now like to speak of vocation in the strict sense, as a call to missionary service to others. The Lord calls us to share in his work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the gifts we have received. This missionary vocation thus has to do with service. For our life on earth reaches full stature when it becomes an offering. Here I would repeat that "the mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an 'extra' or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world". It follows that every form of pastoral activity, formation and spirituality should be seen in the light of our Christian vocation.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, nos. 253-254.

Through these lines, the author of John's first letter suggests that missionary activity is a process that seeks to bring about communion. To put it another way, the call of our baptism to be a disciple-missionary is basically an invitation to put our lives at the service of communion.

People who are "experts in communion"

A few years ago, Pope John Paul II proposed an expression about communion that was astonishing to say the least. In his apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* (VC), he wrote: "Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion …" (VC 46). The qualifier "experts" used by the pope has something to make the principal interested persons smile! Indeed, one does not need to have a long experience of consecrated life to know that communion requires constant updating! In this case, then, would this be a rhetorical exaggeration?

The gift of communion

Beyond the—evolving—quality of our individual persons and our congregations, it is useful to remember that communion is first and foremost a gift. It is, more precisely, a Trinitarian gift. Indeed, in addition to the grace of having "been created in the image of that divine communion" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 178), it was given us, by baptism, to be introduced into this life of communion which is that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what Saint Paul reminds us of, in the form of a wish, at the end of his second letter to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God

and the fellowship [communion] of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Co 13:13).

In this passage, Paul gives pride of place to the Holy Spirit with regard to communion [fellowship]. He presents it, so to speak, as the main artisan. Is this not an inquiry to address a renewed prayer to the Spirit, to welcome with ever-increasing awareness the heritage received at our baptism and to be living witnesses to it? Because what we have to offer is precisely what has been given to us. Moreover, the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty that we have pronounced are part of this logic of making fruitful the gift of communion, in its triple dimension: with God, our neighbour and all creation.

Communion as a lifestyle

To speak of "missionary communion" is not only to aspire to work in a team! It's essentially a lifestyle, a spirituality. As Pope Francis recalls, "the human person grows … matures … and is sanctified to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created" (*Laudato Si'* 240).

Making communion the paradigm of our daily lives therefore leads to the manifestation, in the present day of this world, of the beauty of the mystery of the Trinity. According to this perspective, the mission concerns all of life's realities. More than that, it lasts a lifetime! Because communion is not simply an end goal to be achieved. It is a road to be travelled, a process that puts us into action in our daily lives.

In short, would not living a "missionary communion" be an invitation to consider holiness less in a mode of perfection than in a mode of communion? Is it not particularly in this sense that the pope speaks of a "turning point" or a "missionary conversion" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 25, 30)? As Benedict XVI affirms, "This life of fellowship with God and with one another is the proper goal of Gospel proclamation, the goal of conversion to Christianity."

During the May 2019 meeting of the International Union of Superiors General, Sr. Teresa Maya stressed that "Hope is the gift of communion." It is this great hope that the Christ made known at the Last Supper and that he comes to renew in us at each Eucharist. Armed with the active presence of the Risen One, we dare to build bridges, according to our charisms and the inspirations of the Spirit. Let us ask for the grace not to shy away from the challenge of being missionaries of communion.

[1] In the original Greek text, the word koinonia is used. It is most often translated in English-language Bibles as "fellowship", however French translations use the term "communion" which is closer to the theological meaning of this passage from 1 John. The term used in this article pertains to the social and relational meaning of communion, not the rite at Mass. You will notice the same phenomenon below in the Vatican's record of the 2006 general audience of Pope Benedict XVI regarding the gift of "communion". Both terms are included in the text for clarity.
[2] Benedict XVI, "The gift of 'communion'", General Audience, March 29, 2006.

Questions to go from reading to life:

How do our community structures foster a spirituality of communion—with God, with neighbours and all of creation?

Personally and in community, what can we do to better embody "missionary communion"?



Eli, Samuel and **intergenerational communication**

Yvan Mathieu, SM

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis begins by collecting "some of the richness of the sacred scriptures, since they often speak of young people and of how the Lord draws near to encounter them (CV 5). After speaking about Joseph and Gideon, Francis writes: "Samuel was still a young boy, yet the Lord spoke to him. Thanks to the advice of an adult, he opened his heart to hear God's call... As a result, he became a great prophet who intervened at critical moments in the history of his country (CV 8). A re-reading of the story of Samuel's vocation might offer us some paths for dialogue between the generations.

The birth of Samuel

After introducing Samuel's future family, the first book of Samuel underlines the sterility of Hannah, who will become his mother. She prayed, met the priest Eli, and returned home where she conceived and gave birth to Samuel. After weaning him, she went up to Shiloh, where she left the child: "Now I make him over to Yahweh for the whole of his life. He is made

Christ's Church can always yield to the temptation to lose enthusiasm because she no longer hears the Lord calling her to take the risk of faith, to give her all without counting the dangers; she can be tempted to revert to seeking a false, worldly form of security. Young people can help keep her young. They can stop her from becoming corrupt; they can keep her moving forward, prevent her from being proud and sectarian, help her to be poorer and to bear better witness, to take the side of the poor and the outcast, to fight for justice and humbly to let herself be challenged. Young people can offer the Church the beauty of youth by renewing her ability to "rejoice with new beginnings, to give unreservedly of herself, to be renewed and to set out for ever greater accomplishments".

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, no. 37.

over to Yahweh" (1 Sam 1:28). Now these events take place in a very special context. "In those days it was rare for Yahweh to speak; visions were uncommon" (1 Sam 3:1). This reminds us of our own times. But God has not said his last word. "The lamp of God had not yet gone out" (1 Sam 3:3).

In the middle of the night, God calls

"Samuel was lying in Yahweh's sanctuary, where the ark of God was, when Yahweh called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' He answered, 'Here I am'" (1 Sam 3:3-4). From all eternity, God is present in our world and in his Church. His lamp has not been extinguished. It shines in our darkness. The Lord continues to dwell among us (see Ex 25:8). And as he did with the young Samuel, he continues to call the young people of today by their name. Even today, God has not said his last word.

A generous response in need of guidance

"As yet, Samuel had no knowledge of Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Sam 3:7). Yet he responded generously: "'Here I am!' and running to Eli, he said, 'here I am, as you called me.' Eli said 'I did not call. Go back and lie down'" (1 Sam 3:5). And the child went back to bed. This happened three times. It was only after Samuel's third visit that "Eli then understood that Yahweh was calling the child, and he said to Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if someone calls say 'Speak, Yahweh; for your servant is listening'" (1 Sam 3:8-9).

Our young people today: generous people in need of guidance

Even now, it is my profound conviction that God continues to call. To this day, those who are



Eli and Samuel child
painted by John Singleton Copley (1780)

is "the word of the Lord" to be recognized? Our young people, however, are answering: "Here I am!" Think about their commitment to ecology, to peace, to a more just world! This is a sign that God's call will find fertile ground in them. As long as an Eli can teach them to say "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Listening to God by listening to young people

In *Christus vivit*, Francis reminds us that the Church "is young when she shows herself capable of constantly returning to her source" (CV 35). Such being the case: "Young people can help keep her young" (CV 37). "Those of us who are no longer young need to find ways of keeping close to the voices and concerns of young people" and "[D]rawing together creates the conditions for the Church to become a place of dialogue and a witness to life-giving fraternity" (CV 38). "Once the Church … listens carefully to the young …. it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community" (CV 65). And if we were to take the risk of being close to young people once again to listen to them and to listen with them!

Learning from Eli and Samuel

The vocation of the young Samuel invites us to overcome our prejudices and to accompany young people so that they may hear the Lord who speaks to them. "Anyone called to be a parent, pastor or guide to young people must have the farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn" (CV 67). Journeying together with young people (CV 206), we will discover with them the light of God that is always burning. With them, with our communities and with the whole Church, we will journey in his light.

Questions:

- Are we open to God's action, even among those people we think seem distant from him?
- Are we convinced that at the heart of the Church of our time, God's lamp is not yet extinguished? What are the signs of this?
- Are we attentive to detecting the signs of what God is doing to the young people who are close to us?
- How can we listen with them?
- How can we help them to respond generously: "Here I am! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening"?
- How does my community journey with young people?



Climate March in Montreal, September 27, 2019.

Caring for young people: a reading from Acts 20:6-12

Michel Proulx, O PRAEM

In the wake of the recent Synod of Bishops on Young People, the short story of Acts 20:6-12 offers us a challenge. In it, Luke recounts that after a week-long visit of Saint Paul to Troas, the disciples gathered together on the day before his departure to hear him one last time and to celebrate the Eucharist with him.

Obviously, things were clicking between the Apostle to the Nations and the Christians of Troas and the atmosphere was electric. There are a lot of people in the upstairs room (v. 8) and they are radiating so much light from the Gospel that Luke does not hesitate to compare them to lamps. Everyone is hanging on Paul's every word and the people are ready to listen to him until the middle of the night (v. 7).

A boring liturgy for young people

Everyone is listening to Paul, with the exception of one young man (*neanias*, in Greek) named Eutychus. He is probably an older teenager whose parents forced him to participate in the community liturgy. Clearly, this young man is literally bored to death. This liturgy does not

Youth is more than simply a period of time; it is a state of mind. That is why an institution as ancient as the Church can experience renewal and a return to youth at different points in her age-old history. Indeed, at the most dramatic moments of her history, she feels called to return with all her heart to her first love.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, no. 34.

reach him at all. While this type of gathering suits his parents and the other adults, that isn't the case for him. So, he stays as far away as possible. Sitting on the window sill at the back of the room, he is symbolically on the border between the space lit by the Gospel and the darkness outside, that of a world without the light of Christ. Focused on their own experience, the community does not seem to care about him.

Luke reports that this young man ends up falling asleep. He falls backwards into the darkness, from the top of the third floor, and he kills himself. As is often the case, the author of Acts expresses himself here in colourful language with theological significance. We understand his point by comparing it to what Paul writes in I Thess 5:4-6: "But you, brothers, do not live in the dark… No, you are all children of light and children of the day: we do not belong to the night or to darkness, so we should not go on sleeping, as everyone else does, but stay wide awake and sober."

In fact, the falling asleep of Eutychus means that he is closed to the Word of God. He thus sinks into the darkness of spiritual death. At first glance, this youth has a first name which contradicts his experience. *Eutychus* actually means "the lucky one." But things will not stay that way.

Invigorating attitudes for young people

Witnessing this fall, Saint Paul hastens to descend from the upstairs room to be by the young man's side. The apostle exhibits pastoral attitudes that are absolutely remarkable. He does not hesitate a second to leave the room bathed in light to descend down into the darkness where the young man was in danger of death. He leaves behind the liturgical assembly to put himself at the level of the adolescent. He takes care of him personally. Paul gives him the entire quality of his presence: he takes him in his arms (v. 10)! We could even translate the Greek verb (*sumperilambanô*) by saying that he embraces him. It is a presence of tenderness, a loving presence. We see that Eutychus becomes his priority. He provides him with personalized pastoral care, adjusted to his reality. Paul resembles the shepherd of the parable who leaves the 99 sheep of the flock to go in search of the lost one (Lk 15:4).

As a result of his efforts, Paul is able to exclaim, "There is no need to worry, there is still life in him" (v. 10). As a result of an adapted intervention, the young man opened himself to the life of the Gospel, he went from death to Life. The name that Luke chose to give to his character takes on its full meaning. Eutychus is lucky to have encountered a missionary like Paul.

In addition to the ordinary, well-planned pastoral ministry that parishes and movements carry out, it is also important to allow room for a "popular" youth ministry, with a different style, schedule, pace and method. Broader and more flexible, it goes out to those places where real young people are active, and fosters the natural leadership qualities and the charisms sown by the Holy Spirit. (...) We need only to accompany and encourage them, trusting a little more in the genius of the Holy Spirit, who acts as he wills.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, no. 230.

Towards an intergenerational communion

The story ends by mentioning that community members "took the boy away alive" (v. 12). Encouraged by Paul's example, the community takes an interest in the boy and now takes charge of his progress in the faith. The community initiates him into the Gospel. Less focused on itself, the community opens up to this young person and opts for a catechetical approach adapted to his reality. Paul took the initiative to go to a young man in spiritual agony, but he was able to bring along the whole community in his wake. The communion of the Christians of Troas thus expands to become truly intergenerational.

Our communities face-to-face with youth

Where are we in our religious communities? Are we still concerned with awakening the younger generations to the faith? Do we tend to withdraw into ourselves, fulfilled by the liturgies that we celebrate among ourselves? Do we have our eyes open to discern the needs of the younger generations or do we just lock ourselves up in our homes? Would we have conversions to make, personally and in community, to be more like Paul? Would we have to review our priorities as he himself was able to do?

In Canada, a large proportion of young people attend neither our churches nor our pastoral activities. Like Eutychus, they seem indifferent to the Word of God and, like him, they risk falling into spiritual death. Wouldn't they need someone to go up to them and look carefully at what they're going through? Could it be that the risen Christ needs us to express to them a presence of tenderness? Could this be one possible way to arouse an awakening to life with Christ?

To continue the reflection

1. What personal and community conversions does the story of Acts 20:6-12 urge us to make?
2. Taking into account our reality (age, health, availability, etc.), what concrete actions could we take to get closer to what Paul and the Troas community experienced with regard to youth?



Lauds of the Resurrection.
Credit: Rougemont Abbey

Rougemont Abbey: **an experience with youth**

Fr. Jacques Van Vliet, OCSO



How does a community open up spaces for youth in search of spirituality? The Cistercians of Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth abbey (Rougemont, Québec) have a few years of experience in this matter. Founded in 1932, the community has made younger generations a focus of their mission. In this interview, Fr. Jacques Van Vliet, novice master, shares the lessons learnt and challenges discovered on the journey.

1. How has your community evolved in terms of members and ages, in the last 10-15 years?

2. In your pastoral mission, you have developed retreats and camps targeting young Catholics. What led you to offer this and what fruits have you seen?



3. How has this regular proximity with young adults, students and workers, had an impact on your community life? What has been positive about it? What has challenged you?



4. Did any vocations emerge from this mission to youth? How has vocational discernment and its direction changed in the last 15-20 years?



Theological reflection, dialogue and communion

Lorraine d'Entremont, SC

When we agreed on the theme of dialogue and communion for this issue, it occurred to me that the process of theological reflection and some of the models of theological reflection I have experienced provide a structure and a space for developing skills for dialogue and for engaging at a level that brings about communion. This article gives a brief description of theological reflection, and highlights its potential for growth in dialogue and communion, in religious congregations or the broader church community.

What is theological reflection?

You may have engaged in processes that were theological reflection, but were not called by that name. The term 'theological reflection' does not accurately describe the kind of theologizing that is meant when we use that phrase. Other names in use describe it somewhat better: contextual theology, experiential theology, or praxis theology. Over the past three or four decades, a variety of models of theological reflection have been developed (Kinast, p.1).

The conversation is our life together.
James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead

What all forms of pastoral theological reflection have in common is "a deceptively simple threefold movement. It begins with the lived experience of those doing the reflection; it correlates this experience with the sources of Christian tradition; and it draws out practical implications for Christian living" (Kinast, p.1). In theological reflection, the primary focus is the presence of God in people's experience (Kinast, p. 3). Based on this broad description of the threefold movement, theological reflection could include the 'see, judge, act' method of the YCS movement (JEC in Quebec) or the reflection processes of base communities. Some readers may recall that theological reflection was a component of the four part pastoral circle put forward by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S. J., in their work on social analysis in the early 1980s.

A model for dialogue and communion

The model and method of James and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, which Kinast calls a 'ministerial' style of theological reflection, is the most familiar to me. It is also the method I believe has the greatest potential for fostering dialogue and communion in diverse groups, and across generations. While its most common use is in pastoral decisions, it is easily adaptable to other settings.

What follows is a brief overview of the method, which the Whiteheads published in a book, Method in Ministry in 1980, with a revised edition following in 1995 (see references). They understand theological reflection to be bringing the resources of Christian faith to bear in the practical decisions of ministry. Ideally, these decisions would include members of the Christian community or parish, and generally those who will be affected by the decisions, not only ordained ministers or those with pastoral roles or authority positions.

The Whiteheads consider three sources of information to be important in decision making and practice in ministry: the faith tradition, personal and communal experience, and contemporary culture, which are brought in conversation with one another. The method describes how the conversation among these three sources proceeds. It moves from listening, or attending, to assertion to pastoral response (Whiteheads, p. 1-5). Listening consists of "seeking out the information on a particular pastoral concern that is available in personal experience, Christian tradition and cultural resources" and "listening critically while suspending judgement". Christian tradition includes Sacred Scripture, the history of the Church and interpretations of both over time. Assertion is described as "bringing the perspectives gathered from these three sources into a lively dialogue of mutual clarification to expand and enrich religious insight" and "having the courage to share our convictions and the willingness to be challenged". Pastoral response moves "from discussion and insight to decision and action" and includes "discerning how to respond; planning what to do; evaluating how we have done" (Whiteheads, p. 13).

This kind of theological reflection is envisioned, and is to be practised, as a communal exercise, an ongoing community dialogue, and

not just as a once-for-all event to deal with a particular issue. "The conversation is our life together" (Whiteheads, p.4).

This brief overview does not convey the colour or flavour of the process in action, nor does it give an outline for the process. These will be unique in each circumstance where theological reflection is done, but the basic threefold movement will be the same.

Some practicalities

The process requires a significant time commitment from participants. This can be a challenge in a group with diverse schedules. Engaging in group theological reflection requires a certain level of skills for dialogue. Depending upon the tension or conflict generated by the particular experience the group chooses for reflection, facilitation may be necessary for the process to unfold well.

Young adults and theological reflection

During my years in university campus ministry, I led student retreats and programs that included theological reflection. One such program was a day-long event, which consisted of a morning experience in a food bank, or a temporary shelter for women and children, or a soup kitchen for homeless men. In the afternoon, we reflected on the experience using the pastoral circle previously mentioned in this article. Each time, a student expressed to the group the awareness that as educated persons, they had a responsibility to challenge systems that are unjust for persons in poverty. I did not plant this thought. Much to my joy, they came to it from their own experience and engaging with it in theological reflection. I also saw these young people had good skills for dialogue, and could speak from a faith perspective when a safe space was provided.

Conclusion

Based on this experience, and some others, I have seen that dialogue and communion are facilitated by the theological reflection process. While there are practical challenges to engaging in it, the possibilities it offers for deeper dialogue and communion are well worth the effort.

References

Kinast, Robert L. *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000.

Whitehead, James D. & Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection in Christian Ministry*. Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1995.

For your reflection:

Identify an experience or situation in your congregation or ministry where theological reflection could foster dialogue and facilitate a decision.

How might the process unfold in this situation? Do you feel a Spirit nudge to move it forward?



Benjamins of the Consecrated Life in Canada Pilgrimage.
Montreal, September 30, 2017.

A community **open to renewal**

Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS

In his letter to young people, *Christus vivit* (CV), no.35, Pope Francis invites the Church to be open to renewal. And this ecclesial renovation is not without affecting the renewal of the institutes of consecrated life. Among the possible considerations on this subject, one question arises for many of us. In these times of transition through which our communities must live, what space do we give to the word and action of younger people in the challenges to be met to enter into a "new" youthfulness?

This question brings us first to a clarification regarding the term "youth." Youth is more than simply a period of time, says Pope Francis, it is a state of mind (CV 34). To speak of "young people" is to recognize those who have a vision, who are capable of challenging the community and embarking on a path whose route can only be traced out by walking it.

A community that questions itself

That having been said, do we believe that — in the process of transition that is currently ours — we can journey towards a renewal of the ins-

In some young people, we can see a desire for God, albeit still vague and far from knowledge of the God of revelation. In others, we can glimpse an ideal of human fraternity, which is no small thing. Many have a genuine desire to develop their talents in order to offer something to our world. In some, we see a special artistic sensitivity, or a yearning for harmony with nature. In others, perhaps, a great need to communicate. In many of them, we encounter a deep desire to live life differently. In all of this, we can find real starting points, inner resources open to a word of incentive, wisdom and encouragement.

Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, no. 84.

titute? Of course, several external and internal factors are contributing to the decline we are currently experiencing. In addition, answering this question requires us to take a position with respect to our management of the decline and the opening up or not towards a possible regeneration... In what spirit are we living this passage?

What about this passage to a still open future? How can it be envisaged? The passage is a transitional stage during which the community must accept to see its reality lucidly, without denying it, and must learn to read its behaviour in the face of this same reality, listen to the discordant voices opposing a culture of maintenance and act in the face of end-of-life stagnation. When there is no one left with the capacity to react, so be it! But so long as voices are still being heard to think and dare the mission and/or the community life differently, let us bless the Lord and welcome the Breath of his Spirit!

If there are such people in our institutes, is it not a first step to recognize them and listen to them? To bring them together rather than dispersing them? Can we go beyond what is "reasonable" to hear these voices crying out their hope in the desert, proposing more suitable ways of living the mission, who are asking that we welcome those wishing to journey with us?

A community that hears

Hearing therefore involves listening without shutting ourselves off, dropping defensive walls and converting ourselves. Hearing commits us to refusing to sink into structures of mental rigidity (CV 65) that prevent us from listening, that do not allow us to question and that ultimately lead the community to turn into a museum (CV 41).

Hearing is an act of faith. It is believing that nothing is impossible to God (Lk 1:37). The current state of our institutes can confuse our

listening, block our vision of a possible future, lead us to a form of resignation and settle us in a satisfying status quo. Faith disturbs and obliges to go out! It opens up to hope and sets out towards an elsewhere, a place other than the one we have known. It listens, it uses the eyes and the heart. No escape possible. Faith lets questions emerge in their newness.

Do we believe that the community can renew itself? Do we accept to recognize in our midst the "bearers of a promise" (CV 44) who do not want to be paralyzed by the fear of risk just because not everything is clear, nor assured in advance? Do we dare to trust them, believe in their capacities to be available to make changes, to pick themselves up, to let themselves be educated by life (CV 13) and not to be robbed of hope (CV 15)?

A Community That Dares

Hearing, believing and making room for the young and the not-so-young who have a calling to invest in the renewal of the institute, that is what drives us to walk together on the road to an uncertain future, full of pitfalls but bearing promises. That is our responsibility! Whatever the outcome of our journey, we have to let ourselves be destabilized and enlightened by the words of one another and by the Word of God. We have to listen and make ourselves available to the unexpected of the Spirit who blows where he wants.

"I have appointed you as watchman for the House of Israel" (Ezek 33:7) challenges the Spirit! With regard to our response, it is up to us to be farsighted to find the little flame that continues to burn and gives the ability to discern pathways where others only see walls. It is up to us to develop the ability to recognize potential where others see only peril (CV 67).

To trust in the Spirit is to recognize that we are still "in labour pains" (Rom 8:22). Even in deprivation and at an advanced age, the wisdom of the elders must summon the youth of those who have the courage to express themselves to open up new horizons by returning to the sources of the institute. The institute's authorities have a duty to facilitate the word and encourage creativity in order to proclaim the Gospel in new spaces, in the welcoming and respecting of cultures. Together, we must create new proximities in dialogue and witness of renewed fraternity. Finally, let us remember, formation is essential for training missionary disciples, on their way out, capable of rethinking the community in a logic of intergenerational and intercultural communion, at the heart of the charism of the institute.

Conclusion

Confidence in the voice of younger people is essential. They are the "now" of God (CV 63). They are "mission" at the heart of the community, just as we ourselves are "mission" until our last day. Thus, may we be, for our world, watchmen and watchwomen of the dawn, prophets of the future, sowers of hope.

To complete your reflection.

Reread together: Diamuid O'Murchu, *La vie religieuse revue et corrigée*, Novalis, 2008, pages 24–28 : "Le temps de lâcher prise et embrasser un avenir différent".
Consecrated Religious Life: The changing Paradigms, Orbis books, 2005, p. 24-28.

#WeHearYou
Letter to Canadian Youth

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation network (JPIC) Atlantic, CRC

We thank and congratulate you for your courageous leadership. Locally and globally, you inspire us and many others to recognize the current climate emergency and respond to it.

We hear you. We stand with you. We are religious, sisters long committed to social justice, climate justice and peace. Representing many communities of Catholic sisters, associates and staff, we embrace the sacredness of Earth and all creatures. With you, we uphold their right to flourish, with not one being left behind.

We appreciate how your vital advocacy highlights the need for Canada and the international community to strengthen their efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and to work towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Thank you for awakening us with your peaceful persistence and creative collective action. Our own actions for reducing carbon, protecting and honouring water and safeguarding ecological diversity convey our desire to commit with you to a right relationship with people everywhere and with all of nature.

#WeHearYou, and we thank you! We boldly invite you to contact religious communities in your regions to initiate common intergenerational actions.

In solidarity and with gratitude.

"Water seen from the heart", a clip produced during the regional meeting of the CRC JPIC Atlantic network on environmental and political issues concerning water (Fall 2019).



Dialogue in a time of global crisis

Margaret Patricia Brady, OSB

Human and Divine Conversation

Human beings are innately dialogical, they instinctively wait to be addressed by the other. Herein lies their freedom to question and respond. Ultimately their questioning and searching leads them to find God, source of their freedom, who has first chosen to enter into dialogue with them. Their act of faith is their response to the revelatory word of God addressed to them through sacred history and then in its ultimate fullness in the incarnation of the Word made flesh. Through the incarnate Word's birth, life, death and resurrection God has entered into intimate dialogue with humankind. Enticing them to obey His word, to listen and surrender to it completely; He enters into a covenantal communion of oneness with them and all created realities through this dialogue.

Vatican II and Pope Francis

Since Vatican II the Church has become

increasingly more aware of the importance of dialogue and it has been declared the distinctive mission of the Church "to converse with the human society in which she lives" (Vat. II, *Christus Dominus*, #13). One of its chief advocates was the Canadian theologian Gregory Baum.[1] Presently, one sees its prominent place in the writings of Pope Francis. In *Laudato Si'* he devotes the whole of chapter five to dialogue. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus vivit* addressed to the "Young People and the Entire People of God", the pope enters into intimate dialogue with young people urging them to do this with one another and to remember:

"You are the ones who hold the future!...Above all, in one way or another, fight for the common good, serve the poor, be protagonists of the revolution of charity and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial individualism. (*Christus vivit*, no. 174)."

Imperative of Intergenerational Dialogue

While challenging the youth to dialogue with their peers, Pope Francis also speaks of intergenerational relationships and the rootedness collective memory provides by stabilizing society. To the elders he says:

"Those of us who are no longer young need to find ways of keeping close to the voices and concerns of young people…We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard… (*Christus vivit*, no. 38)."

In 2019 the voice of a sixteen-year-old from Sweden, Greta Thunberg, was heard at the United Nations on climate change. Her voice echoed around the world. Subsequently, other young people have challenged local and national governments to act decisively on climate change. Attentive to the signs of the time youth often see things in uniquely different ways especially in the digital and technological spheres. In the *Decree on The Apostolate Of Lay People* of Vatican II young people are recognized as exerting "a very important influence in modern society" (Vatican II, A.A. no. 12). Now it is imperative that all of us, young, old and in-between heed the cry of scientists and take seriously the global crisis of climate change. This situation requires the wisdom and action of humanity as a whole, communication in word and deed, if we are to survive as a habitable planet tending the earth as co-creators with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[1] Baum Gregory, "Vatican II…The Church in Dialogue", in *Scarboro Missions*, Vol. 93, No. 1, Jan. – Feb. 2012, pp. 6 – 7.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you read the statement by "Canada's Catholic Sisters Regarding the Climate Emergency" particularly the actions to be taken and how they must be concrete, justice-based and non-partisan?

2. How have you personally involved young people in these discussions? What new insights did you gain from their response?

WWW.CRC-CANADA.ORG

About

The CRC

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

"The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe."

Mission statement adopted in 2010

ad vitam

Launched in 2019 by the Canadian Religious Conference, ad vitam is a webzine and a window into consecrated life in Canada. Featuring articles and audio-visual media, ad vitam proposes theological and pastoral reflections on the Catholic Church and consecrated life. This resource aims to serve religious communities and their leadership, as well as readers interested in consecrated life and Church issues.

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Sabrina Di Matteo

PRODUCTION
Dinh Khoi Vu
Jean-Michel Bigou

COLLABORATORS
Theological Commision
of the CRC
Louis Cinq-Mars, OFM Cap
Fr. Jacques Van Vliet, OCSC

CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE
2715, chemin de
la Côte-Sainte-Catherine,
Montreal, Quebec H3T 1B6

Tel. : 514 259-0856
info@crc-canada.org
www.crc-canada.org

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