



Religious Law and Consultation Newsletter

Screening Candidates for Religious Life

Vocation and formation ministry are always at the fore-front of religious life as it moves into each successive generation with confidence. The ministry has many aspects: prayer, announcement and invitation, mentoring and accompaniment of discerners and of those joining our communities, animating our communities to live their highest calling so that they may be places that nurture new sisters and brothers.

Discernment, both initial and ongoing, is among the more serious obligations of vocation and formation ministers and of leadership in religious life. In bygone days, our brothers and sisters knew those who came to join us; often they knew their families, taught them in school, had regular contact with them through the parish or ministry. All this provided a fairly good picture of those seeking entrance. Today, society is more mobile, we have fewer brothers and sisters who have long-standing relationships with inquirers and many of today's young people face a much broader range of challenges than did their peers just a generation or two ago. Yes, times have changed, yet the need for discernment



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Upcoming Webcasts

Screening Candidates for Religious Life

February 2018

Canon Law 101 (series)

February 2018

Councils, Chapters and Virtual Participation

May 2018

Mission and Catholic Identity

August 2018

Time:

Tuesdays, 2:00 pm ET, 11:00 am PT

[For more Information and to Register](#)

Format: Live, On-Demand or CD-ROM

Cost: \$65 for Live or On-Demand;
\$75 for CD-ROM

Past programs are available [here](#).

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remains constant. Today's discernment must include the development of an in-depth profile of a discerner, aimed at identifying those areas of a candidate's background that will need more attention and discussion.

Our screening should examine various areas of the applicant's life with a view to identifying issues that require planning or accommodation, or even those that disqualify a candidate. Working through the applicant's profile will also prompt important conversations that can help the applicant's discernment as well as that of the community. It will also be an opportunity to identify issues that may arise as the applicant proceeds through the formation program. It is generally better to discuss and resolve these issues before entrance, so that they do not become obstacles later on.

In a society with heightened awareness of sexual abuse of minors and of unethical behavior by church leaders, it is imperative to ensure that our vocation and formation programs maintain the highest standards regarding communication, relationships and records.

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Changes in vocation and formation ministry are raising new questions, particularly collaborative formation programs on the national or international scale. These programs may gather women or men from various parts of the country or the world. Candidates may be engaging in the formation program in a language and culture that are not their

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own. It is important to ask how this new reality may impact those we invite, and those who will be successful in our formation programs. Someone who struggles with language or culture may be unwilling or unable to enter or complete our formation programs. Are these men and women called to religious life? Are there communities where they can live and grow? Are we impoverished if we cannot accept them with the gifts they bring?

The same changes raise questions of cost and carbon-footprint. A few generations ago, candidates came by bus, and stayed in the formation community until they were ready to go out on mission. Now home visits are much more common and often involve air-travel. In a national or international formation program, our newer sisters and brothers become frequent fliers before final vows. The saying goes: “join the convent and see the world!” While travel and collaboration may be unprecedented gifts, can we also ask about the life-style we are modeling and about its impact on the environment?

Finally, this level of collaboration in formation has begun to raise questions about the ongoing accompaniment of candidates through the formation process. A new brother or sister who raises concerns at various points in the formation program may be given the benefit of the doubt. If these programs are in different places and even different countries, it is more difficult to get a clear picture of the candidate’s deepening sense of vocation and

commitment, and to connect the dots regarding troublesome behaviors. In some recent cases, when a brother or sister settled down after final vows, the community got a first clear and consistent picture of them, only to realize that they should never have made vows and perhaps should be dismissed.

All this is not to say we should immediately pull back from collaborative programs, but simply to invite us to continued discernment as to the best ways to continue inviting women and men into religious life and the best ways of accompanying them in inquiry, discernment and formation.

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Screening and accompanying candidates for Religious Life is a privilege and responsibility. As with so many aspects of religious life it requires thoughtfulness, preparation and ongoing care. February's webcast will explore these issues in further detail. [Register here.](#)

Also in February, we are again offering Canon 101, a 4-part series of webcasts that introduces participants to Canon Law, the rules that govern good order in the Roman Catholic Church. It is intended to be a broad-based introduction to Canon Law for those who work for Church ministries and for those who would like to deepen their understanding of Church Law. It is offered on-demand and on USB. [Register here.](#)

Please let me know if I can be of assistance to your community.

Sincerely,
Amy Hereford

[Printable Newsletter](#)



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