

In the Heartland with Bishop Pates The “Light” of Religious Life

There are ever so many of us who have benefited from the ministry of religious men and women in our personal histories. In my case, I was educated by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet from kindergarten through 8th grade. My fourth grade teacher, Sister Anslem, CSJ, currently resides at the retirement center for the Sisters in Saint Paul. Typically, when Auxiliary Bishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, I celebrated Mass there monthly. Sister Anslem, ever the instructor, would catch me after Mass. “Now, Richard” and then she would offer a critique of my homily.

I was fortunate to have Jesuit priests at the Gregorian University when I studied in Rome. As my parents aged, the Little Sisters of the Poor welcomed them into their home in Saint Paul. Nowhere could they have experienced the care and love they enjoyed with the Little Sisters. Finally, in my “administrative years” I have benefited from the collaboration of Sister Dominica Brennan, OP, in Saint Paul and Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, CHM, here in Des Moines.

During the celebration of the diocesan centennial, the influence and impact of the sisters’ ministries were deeply intertwined with our history. They founded and operated first class schools. From scratch they bravely inaugurated hospital systems which maintain to this day their loving spirit. Sisters were engaged as pastoral and religious education ministers in evangelization outreach as well as in caring for the poor in social work.

Religious men and women belong to communities that were founded by visionary leaders with a focus on a particular charism – whether education, serving the poor, health care work, missionary outreach, etc. Some are contemplative and devote themselves to a life of prayer in which they intend to support the Church by following the inspirational lifestyle undertaken by the earliest members of the Christian Church.

Many religious communities take on an identity by virtue of their being responsible to the Pope. These are regarded as “Pontifical Rite.” Others are selected to serve as a “Diocesan Rite” community concentrating their ministry nearly exclusively within a particular diocese.

Religious men and women take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They give their lives fully to the needs of the community in ways that reflect the most authentic and deepest religious commitment in discipleship of Jesus.

Church community at every level is immeasurably enriched by their presence and engagement. Regretfully, the numbers of religious men and women have declined significantly in the American Church. In the Diocese of Des Moines, there are fewer than twenty active religious women who belong to American religious communities. Nearly thirty retired Sisters also live in the Diocese. A number remain very involved on a volunteer basis. Others, because of health limitations, now devote their lives to prayer for the people of God.

There is hope, however. In the face of this decline, several international orders have come to the diocese and are helping to continue to provide the loving spirit of Jesus. There are four communities in number.

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary There are three Sisters who are from Nigeria and are engaged in the ministry of the Saint Gregory Retreat Center in Bayard, Iowa, addressing addictive behavior.

Little Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus There are three Sisters from India who serve in a nursing capacity at the Bishop Drumm Home. In the short time they have been assigned, they have come to be highly appreciated for their compassionate and tangible love.

Community of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hue Two Vietnamese Sisters provide a day care service.

Nazareth Sisters of the Annunciation These two Sisters are from Kenya and are associated with Saint Luke's Hospice where they provide spiritual guidance and nursing care.

There are five orders of religious men currently active in the Diocese of Des Moines.

- Four priests from the Holy Spirit Fathers (C.S.Sp.), province of Nigeria, serving the diocese in parish and hospital ministries.
- Three priests from the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) involved in parish, hospital, and developmental service.
- One priest from the Third Order Regular (TOR), a variation of the Franciscan Family, who serves as a pastor.
- One Jesuit Priest (SJ) who is a pastor and spiritual director for diocesan priests.
- Finally, our beloved Bishop Emeritus Joseph Charron, is a member of the Precious Blood Community (C.P.P.S.).

This year, on Sunday, February 2, a special service will be held at the 10:30 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Saint Ambrose to highlight the religious vocation. Pope John Paul II inaugurated this commemoration on the feast of the Presentation of Jesus to emphasize that religious become one with Jesus in the total dedication of themselves to the work of God the Father. A symbol which is utilized on this feast is that of a candle. The religious carry a candle in this particular vocation to demonstrate that, in dedicating themselves, the light of Christ is able to shine forth from them. "No longer is it I who live, but Christ who lives within me."

It is obvious that from the earliest days, religious men and women have enriched the Church immensely. While, of late, their numbers have dwindled, religious communities of men and women are welcoming newcomers. Newly arrived carry forward traditions and charisms that have carried the light of Christ in a manner from which all of us have benefited. Some of these communities are thriving.

The Diocese of Des Moines Vocation Office vigorously supports and encourages such vocations. Father Joe Pins, Vocations Director for the Diocese of Des Moines, is most willing to facilitate the exploration of such a vocation. In turn, all of us associated with the diocese guarantee our welcome, support and prayer as these vocations are pursued.

I invite you to join me regularly in the diocesan Prayer for Vocations that men and women will respond generously to the invitation being extended by God to share their lives in service.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God,
Give to the People of the Diocese hearts open
To the Call of Your Holy Spirit.

Help us Work Together with Richard, our Bishop
To Cultivate a Culture of Vocation.

Inspire our Young People to Give Generously
Of Themselves and the
Courage to Follow their Vocation in Life.

In the Spirit of Faith, Love, and Sacrifice,
Help our Parents Rejoice when their Children
Are Called in Service of Your Church.

May the Parishes of Southwest Iowa
Support those Called to Priesthood,
Diaconate, Lay Ministry, and Consecrated Life.

Sustain our Faith which Calls us
To Walk in the Footsteps of Christ.
Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth,

Patroness of our Des Moines Diocese, pray for us.
Amen.