



# The National Association of Vocation & Formation Directors

March 2020

## AN UNEXPECTED LENTEN MESSAGE!

When Sister Nancy, NAVFD Executive Director, first asked me to contribute a reflection during Lent this was not the reflection I had imagined. Such a short time ago most of us could not have envisioned a Lenten season such as this; a season now permeated by news and experience of the Coronavirus pandemic, a season marked by loss, suffering, devastation and fear for so many and by experiences of isolation and its accompanying grief for most of us, a loneliness especially impacting seniors and the most vulnerable in our world.

The traditional Lenten message includes mention of being called like Christ into the desert; it generally refers to Jesus' journey to the cross and ultimately to His resurrection. This Lent is no exception but as the old song reminds us, "what a difference a day makes"! Indeed, what a difference each day makes for all of us now as updated news of the pandemic reaches us and as governments across the world close down what we have come to know as "normalcy" in daily life. There is indeed a difference this year and yet our traditional Lenten meditations remain, and in many ways, are amplified by the struggle and tragedy of these times. This is a desert time such as most of us have never before known; our world and its peoples are carrying a heavy cross.

Closely aligned to the Scriptural meditations of Lent are the traditional practices Christians are called on to embrace during the season; prayer, fasting and almsgiving (or works of love). These traditions too, I believe, remain

valuable and yet in the context of an ever changing world, each year they take on new meaning. Without such refreshed meaning they become nothing more than rote actions lacking authenticity. True Lenten practices, rather, invite us to personal and communal transformation for a new day of Gospel living. This new day is a hard day! How are we called to live the Gospel now? To what do our traditional practices call us today in light of our sudden, almost unimaginable circumstances?

In Canada, our Prime Minister, in the interests of responsibility, prevention and safety and care for others, has starkly told us to "go home and stay home"! Large numbers in our society are quarantined. Our formerly busy lives have come to an abrupt stop. For many, such quietness and circumscribed living is no easy task. Already, and just a few days into the requirements, we read on social media of those who are truly disturbed by this mode of life. Indeed, our modern society is almost "allergic" to such quietness of being. The anxiety that many are experiencing is understandable but in light of the Lenten call to Christians might it also be a special invitation to that first Lenten practice of prayer?

The prophet Isaiah reminds us: "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30:15) While it is true that the necessary cessation of religious services is a hardship for people of all faiths and denominations, our capacity for prayer.

Contact Us  
[navfdco@gmail.com](mailto:navfdco@gmail.com)

Visit Us  
[www.vocations.ca](http://www.vocations.ca)

[www.navfd.info/](http://www.navfd.info/)

Like Us  
on Facebook...

[NAVFD](#)

Follow Us  
on Twitter...  
[@NAVFD2](#)

remains. Perhaps the unfamiliar quietness with which we are now afforded can help us deepen our life of prayer. The time we now have provides opportunities for various forms of prayer; time set aside for meditation, for reflection, scripture and some other spiritual reading (on-line booksellers are still open for business). For those of us able to get out and walk time allows us to listen to God in creation. If going out is not an option then perhaps we can listen to the hope conveyed in the song of birds so prevalent as Spring arrives in its inevitable way. Or perhaps it is in reflecting on a tree outside the window, or a plant in our home that we come to remember that after the cross comes resurrection. For those with young families there are many creative suggestions on line to be able to use this time to help our children in the practice of prayer. Masses, the rosary, scriptural reflections and other devotions are available on line also. Those of us living in religious communities, even in the context of social distancing, can perhaps gather more often as we deepen the life of prayer to which we are committed. Our new technological age also gifts us with the chance to pray with others from whom we are now physically separated. All of these opportunities bring us the possibility of deeper relationship with God and the practices of Lent are fundamentally intended to deepen that relationship even in times of hardship, doubt and sometimes, despair.

The deepening of our relationship with God must and does lead us to deeper relationship with one another and with all of creation. If this global crisis is teaching us anything it is teaching us that we are indeed one. Let us pray, pray hard, for one another and for our Earth at this critical time. While we pray especially for those who are directly affected by the virus, those who have lost loved ones, and those impacted by loss of work and financial support, let's also hold in our prayer those who mustn't be forgotten in the chaos of this time; those who were already hungry, sick, suffering, refugees whose long experience of suffering continues in a context within which they are even more vulnerable.

The second practice of Lent, fasting, also finds a special place in today's context. It may not entail the simple "giving up of chocolate" this year but rather lead us to a greater awareness of committing to a spirituality of "enoughness" for the sake of others. How many of us, I wonder, have been sickened by scenes of hoarding –

even violence in supermarkets? Perhaps this time, as no other, invites us all, whatever our calling in life, to greater balance, to a move from the commercialism and materialism that has marked our age. It may remind us also of restraint for the sake of God's Earth



as we become vividly aware of nature healing itself in our absence!

What a message from nature!

Both prayer and fasting also invite us to "almsgiving" or the acts of love that are the intent of Lent. Some indeed, health professionals and all front-line workers, and some others are being called to acts of risk, courage and heroic love, for

which we all give deepest thanks. We

have also witnessed incredible and small acts of kindness in ordinary life. Each of us can reach out to those who are isolated, especially the elderly, the anxious, those who are overwhelmed. It just takes a simple phone call, message, delivery of food to doors, a card or an "old-fashioned letter" even! Then we know we are not alone – indeed God is with us and so is the hope of resurrection.

Pope Francis urges us in light of the global crisis to consider ordinary actions. In an interview he gave to the Italian newspaper, "La Repubblica" he has said: "We need to rediscover the concreteness of small things, the small acts of kindness shown to those who are close to us, family, friends. We need to realize that our treasure lies in small things. There are tiny gestures that sometimes get lost in the routine of everyday life, gestures of tenderness, affection, compassion, that are nevertheless decisive, important." Some today will be called to heroic sacrifice but all of us whatever, our vocation can "give alms in this ordinary way".

Each of us is called today, through the commitments of baptism, whether single, married, priest or religious to acts of great love in a suffering world. It may be precisely through our promises, commitments, vows that we best offer hope of new life in the world. In her lovely print (pictured here), Sister Madeleva Williams, CSJ reminds us of the promise of our commitments made in the past precisely for our work today. This is our time of grace.

We wish all of you, members and friends, your family, communities and loved ones safety and health, accompaniment and blessing and God's peace in troubled times.



## CONFERENCE

Unfortunately we have had to postpone our conference planned for April 29 to May 2, 2020. The good news is that we will still be going to St John's, Newfoundland from April 25 to 28, 2021! If you registered for this year's conference, you may request a full refund or leave your registration with NAVFD for next year. Same great keynote speakers and an extra year to encourage even more people to attend. Thank you.

---

## 10 PRINCIPLES FOR ENCOURAGING JESUIT VOCATIONS

*Though this brochure was developed by the Jesuits, the 10 Principles for Encouraging Jesuit Vocations, can be applied to any community who is walking with discerners. Used with permission of John O'Brien, SJ.*



Contact by email: [CANvocations@jesuits.org](mailto:CANvocations@jesuits.org) or check out the website [JesuitVocations.org](http://JesuitVocations.org)

1. **Know that you are significant.** Because grace builds on nature, people look to see their faith incarnated in others and that their desires are possible. If a person confides in you his attraction to the Society of Jesus, you are obviously an important person to him. Somehow, he wants what you have, or at least wants your input.
2. **Ask the question.** It's as easy as "Have you ever considered being a Jesuit?" or commenting, "You have the qualities that would make a good Jesuit." Each person, of course, will have his own way of phrasing the question. How you ask is not important; what does matter is that you ask.
3. **Keep in contact.** Persons discerning a major life choice need lots of encouragement. Stay in regular touch through the ordinary means of chats, phone calls, letters, e-mails, birthday greetings, visits, etc.
4. **Openly share your ideals.** Speak of those things in or about the Society which excite you. Tell why your life is worth living and your ministry worth continuing.
5. **Introduce the Society.** Welcome him into your community or place of ministry. Introduce him to Jesuits near his age or with his interests. Give him a good book to read about the Society and its mission today. Invite him to a liturgy or prayer service. Bring him along to a vow ceremony, an ordination, a jubilee celebration or Ignatius Day.
6. **Support his spiritual development.** Encourage the Sacraments and regular prayer. Give him some help on how to pray. Introduce him to the Spiritual Exercises in some form, at some length. Offer spiritual direction yourself or suggest someone else skilled in direction.
7. **Introduce him to the Vocation Director.** At some point, when he seems open to it, introduce him to the Province Vocation Director. In addition to wanting to meet with the prospective candidate, the Vocation Director will also be very interested in any impressions and advice you can offer.
8. **Be patient.** With Ignatian indifference, give the Spirit space to work. We facilitate grace; we don't initiate it. Important life decisions deserve time.
9. **Pray.** Pray explicitly and frequently for this man. Pray that you may be an effective channel of God's grace. As Ignatius teaches in the preludes to prayer, ask for what it is you desire. Pray also to remain indifferent, that only God's will be done for that man.
10. **Do unto others as they did unto you.** How did you come to enter the Society or to align yourself closely with it? Surely someone was a great source of inspiration for you. Be willing to show forth and share your own lights in a similar way.

## THE SURPRISING JOURNEY OF PRAYER

*SAVE THE DATE for Religious 55ish and under*

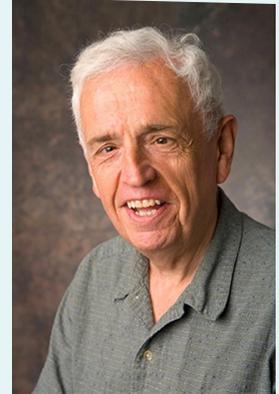


This retreat will be an opportunity to reflect in prayer on the blessings of both the hills and valleys of our religious vocations.

Sessions will include Scripture, time for silent prayer, community sharing and opportunities for personal conversations.

Guiding our retreat experience will be  
Sr. Bernadette O'Reilly, NDS and Fr. Larry Gillick SJ.

The retreat begins Sunday July 26th in the evening and concludes on Saturday August 1st, 2020 in the morning.



Queen's House Retreat & Renewal Centre  
601 Taylor Street West Saskatoon SK S7M 0C9 Canada

Telephone: (306) 242-1916  
Fax: (306) 653-5941  
Email: [receptionist@queenshouse.org](mailto:receptionist@queenshouse.org)  
Website: [www.queenshouse.org](http://www.queenshouse.org)

Registration is open! Visit [aroundthewell.ca](http://aroundthewell.ca) for more information and registration details.

