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Discernment through consecration

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Abstract

The Catholic Church faces a critical shortage of vocations, whereby it lacks available resources to evangelise and welcome others into a vibrant, resource-abundant ecclesial community. Meanwhile, young adults today tend to commit to vocations later, leaving a gap during which they remain uncommitted to a particular vocation, yet skilled, capable, and energetic. The current emphasis on increasing vocations seems to be through social media and advertisements, while Church teachings offer valuable insight into the process by which reflects on their inner life to make decisions. Yet, vocations remain scarce. Here, we propose a path towards authentic discernment based on John Paul II's 1996 Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*. We suggest that young adults engage in a daily offering of both interior and exterior acts of love, strengthening their relationship with the Lord, fulfilling the universal vocation to love, and preparing them to hear the Lord's call.

Keywords

Catholic Church, Vocation, Consecration, Discernment, John Paul II

1. A path towards authentic discernment

The Catholic Church is experiencing a critical shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In the United States and Europe, there has been a particularly troubling decline.¹ To promote vocations, religious communities and dioceses post promotional materials in parishes and Catholic schools as well as on websites and social media. Yet despite these efforts, the vocational crisis in the West persists and has even accelerated over the last decade. This situation is unsurprising as the amount of practising Catholics decreases, the pews remain empty, and countless youth have turned from the faith.² A calling to a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience as a consecrated person or celibacy, prayer, and obedience as a diocesan priest seems unrealistic and perhaps absurd.

At the same time, in today's world, young adults tend to marry later in life.³ The same situation is seen with those who do take religious vows.⁴ This leaves several years of discernment between the onset of adulthood and making a vocation commitment for life. As such, it is especially important for there to be a purpose to the period of discernment, which is in itself a call to holiness.

Indeed, with a dramatic decline in vocations to the priesthood and religious life and increasing time spent in “young adulthood,” it is essential that the period of “discernment” be examined. What will truly lead one to discern an authentic call to a particular vocation—whether the priesthood, religious life, or married life? Or rather, what should one be doing, interiorly and exteriorly, *during* and *as* discernment? What is the true purpose of discernment?

As such, to foster vocations in the Church, we propose a path to predispose a young adult to authentic discernment. Rather than inviting young adults directly to an unforeseen vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life, we suggest

¹ B. Hodge, “Is There a Global Vocations Crisis? A Look at the Numbers,” *The Pillar*, March 22, 2022, <https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/is-there-a-global-vocations-crisis>.

² M. Lipka, “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of ‘Nones,’” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>; Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

³ A. J. Cherlin, “Demographic Trends in the United States: A Review of Research in the 2000s,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (2010), p. 406.

⁴ R. Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 121.

first inviting people of all ages, especially young adults, to participate in a daily consecration. This proposed daily consecration is a pathway through which one might learn to live in communion with the Lord while participating in the missionary life of the Church.

2. Discernment

What does it mean to discern? We learn about the process of discernment from the writings of various spiritual writers, especially the saints, like St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.⁵ This topic is of particular interest to Pope Francis, who offered a catechesis on the topic in 2022.⁶ St. Ignatius of Loyola suggests that we should pray, observe concrete situations that would confirm or negate a choice, and pay attention to our inner responses.⁷ While this is highly valuable, we suggest that, given the critical shortage of vocations, there is a need for additional characterisation of the path leading to the point of decision making. This surely includes prayer, as Ignatius suggests, but may also involve acts of love. As such, what characterises the prior path that prepares one to hear a call from the Lord?

While much of Pope Francis' 2022 catechesis on discernment involves a discussion of how to make decisions that agree with God's will, he begins by emphasising relationship. He explains that discernment involves first and foremost, an "affective relationship with the Lord Jesus"⁸ and he encourages his listeners to consider their relationship with the Lord as a "relationship with a friend that grows day by day."⁹ He emphasises that friendship with the Lord generates love, which "nothing can hinder."¹⁰ As such, we take from this that

⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Elder Mullan (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1914; orig. 1548), p. 8.

⁶ Francis, "Catechesis on Discernment: 2. An Example: Ignatius of Loyola," September 7, 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220907-udienza-generale.html>.

⁷ J. C. Futrell, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970).

⁸ Francis, "General Audience of 21 December 2022," accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20221221-udienza-generale.html>.

⁹ Francis, "General Audience of 21 December 2022."

¹⁰ Francis, "General Audience of 21 December 2022."

discernment begins with a relationship with the Lord—and that this therefore might be emphasised prior to, for example, an invitation to join a particular religious community.

Furthermore, in Pope St. John Paul II's book-length collection of personal writings, *Go in Peace*, he reminds us that it was “when the young man indicated that he was already following that path, [that] Jesus invited him to an even greater love: Leave all and come, follow Me; leave everything that concerns only yourself and join Me in the immense task of saving the world.”¹¹ Here we see that it is first this love of God and love of neighbour that we must practice, and *then*, we may be called to “an even greater love” in a specific vocation of consecrated life, for example.

In his conversation with the Rich Young Man, Jesus gave the commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 19:19). In Greek, the word used here for love is ἀγαπήσεις. *Agápē* is the highest form of love, i.e., charity. It is a love that wills the good of the other, not one's pleasure, self-interest, or benefit. There is an implication here for the Church's missionary spirit. We are called not only to love, as in, be kind to; but to seek out others, with an active love, as Christ the Good Shepherd seeks each one of his sheep (Luke 15:4–7).

Therefore, we conclude that the initial steps of discernment involve primarily a call to love—to be in relationship with the Lord. In line with Matthew 19:21, we propose that the discernor can do so by living a daily consecration—an offering (giving, praising, crying out) of one's inner desires, needs, gifts, and sufferings—interiorly and in communion with a local Church. Concordantly and in line with Matthew 19:19–20, we suggest that those who are discerning can, in a particular way, participate in the “apostolic activity and missionary zeal”¹²—both interiorly and exteriorly.

3. Consecration: to be with the sacred

Our English word “consecration” comes from the Latin *consecratio* meaning associated with or dedicated to the sacred. We typically think of consecration as a temporally following discernment: One discerns a call to a consecrated life,

¹¹ John Paul II, *Go in Peace: A Gift of Enduring Love* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), p. 27.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), para. 828.

and then proceeds to take vows, possibly with an existing religious community. Here, however, as described above, we propose that a daily consecration—being *with* the sacred—be fostered prior to, or rather as a *path* to, discernment. When one participates in a daily consecration, he gives himself fully to the Lord, each day and in every moment. Through this union with Christ—by being *with* Him—he prepares himself to hear from the Lord: “Come, follow me” (Mark 10:21).

4. Challenges of our times

In *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II invites us to be open to the creative ways of the Holy Spirit, recognising that “the Spirit...gives new charisms...[which respond] to the challenges of our times...[T]hey are all characterized by an intense aspiration to community life, poverty, and prayer...and the apostolate focuses on the demands of the new evangelization,”¹³ He adds that “the originality of the new communities often consists in the fact that they are composed of mixed groups of men and women, of clerics and lay persons, of married couples and celibates, all of whom pursue a particular style of life.”¹⁴ He asks us to perceive “the needs of the times”¹⁵ and allow the Spirit to invite us to participate in an “innovative cultural proposal;”¹⁶ and, that “what is needed above all is a consecrated life which is continually open to the challenge by the revealed word and the signs of the times.”¹⁷ He states, “In this way the consecrated life will not be limited to reading the signs of the times but will also contribute to elaborating and putting into effect new initiatives of evangelisation for present-day situations.”¹⁸ John Paul continues to write that “it is necessary, therefore, to be open to the interior promptings of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹ We are asked to perceive the current situation in our world and in the Church. What is the current situation? As mentioned previously, there is a critical shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, leaving convents empty and Church doors closed.

¹³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 12.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 62.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 37.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 80.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 81.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 73.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 73.

With regard to the shortage of vocations, John Paul II explained that religious organisations may ask themselves whether they have “perhaps lost the capacity to attract new vocations.”²⁰ Yet he encourages them to “have confidence in the Lord Jesus, who continues to call men and women to follow him.”²¹ He says that “they must entrust themselves to the Holy Spirit, who inspires and bestows the charisms of the consecrated life.”²²

John Paul II recognised the need for new forms of consecrated life that, as described above, extend beyond the call to celibacy.²³ He did not necessarily or directly encourage more emails, websites, or posters encouraging young adults to become priests or religious. Rather, he encouraged an openness to new forms of consecrated life. He seemed to know that something new and different was needed—something that involved people of all states in life; something that would not replace traditional communities, but rather, would lead to them.

5. Living the daily consecration

Here we propose a practice of daily consecration, as a response to John Paul II’s call in *Vita Consecrata*, which does not replace traditional forms of consecrated life, but rather provides a pathway that leads to holiness, to union with Christ, and thus to ecclesial vocations.²⁴ Young adults in today’s world are constantly “on the go.” Most have smartphones and jobs that require substantial time and energy. Others wake up early to get the children dressed and ready for a day at school or are up late, working, while the children sleep quietly. Life is busy, and it has become more difficult to hear the voice of the Lord amid it all.

Yet with all the “to do’s,” today’s young adults have even more to offer the Lord. In each moment, each dish a mother washes, each email a professional writes, and each Facebook post a young adult shares, can be offered to the Lord. Each financial need, fear of war, desire for social connection, joy with family, and moment of pain can be offered to the Lord. All of this can be offered in daily consecration. We propose this daily consecration as a path to discernment.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 64.

²¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 64.

²² John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 64.

²³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 62.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 62.

We explain the components of the daily consecration below, which include momentary offerings, participation in the call to mission, acts of love, and union with the Church and broader community.

6. Defining the daily consecration

6.1. Momentary offerings

Consecration as a path to discernment might involve an offering of daily moments of waiting, walking, driving, talking, and watching. It might also involve offering small sacrifices throughout the day, such as choosing to pray instead of listening to music for 10 minutes. Young adults who are participating in a daily consecration as discernment might be encouraged to strive towards unceasing prayer: while walking to the subway, waiting for the bus, driving in city traffic, enduring struggles in the workplace, working through relationship challenges, and patiently bearing with suffering or persecution from the world because of one's faith (1 Peter 2:19). In bearing with these struggles, one learns obedience and becomes perfected (Hebrews 5:8–9), and with this, one grows in holiness and thus in authentic discernment.

John Paul II encouraged asceticism in consecrated communities. He writes that “asceticism, by helping to master and correct the inclinations of human nature wounded by sin, is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross.”²⁵ He also writes about the importance of “adapting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community.”²⁶ As such, young adults might recognise ways to live simply, such as cooking a communal dinner rather than eating out one night; and offer this, too, in a daily consecration.

In line with ascetism, young adults are called to practice the virtue of chastity, crucifying the flesh (Galatians 5:24). This, too, can be offered (Romans 12:1) on the path to discernment. In addition, chastity enables one to remain in a state of purity in which the Holy Spirit can descend upon us (Galatians 5:5), calling us to bring Jesus to others.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 38.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 82.

By living a daily consecration, one participates in the “fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10), and therefore allows one’s “lowly body to conform with his glorified body” (Philippians 3:21). In doing so, young people strive towards holiness—towards union with God—and thus, towards discernment (“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19).

6.2. With the Church

The daily consecration is lived, importantly, with and through the Church. With priests acting in the person of Christ²⁷ as they offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the daily consecration is offered with the sacrifice of the priests and thus, through the Eucharistic offering. Through this priestly offering, young adults unite themselves with Jesus “by offering their own lives to the Father through the Holy Spirit.”²⁸ Other Church practices to be encouraged include the Liturgy of the Hours, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual direction, and the Rosary—thus renewing one’s “spiritual union with the Blessed Virgin Mary.”²⁹

Moreover, we are invited to be “imitators of the churches of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:14), and the Church is called to have a visible presence: “the Church must always seek to make her presence visible in everyday life, especially in contemporary culture.”³⁰ Young adults can, on their path to discernment, be intentionally present to particular neighbourhoods, fostering the presence of Christ, the proof of our love (2 Corinthians 8:24). John Paul II further justified the necessity of such communities when he wrote that “the whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled ‘with joy and with the Holy Spirit.’” She wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person’s commitment to communion is strengthened.”³¹

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), para.1548.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 95.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 120.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 25.

³¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 45.

Interestingly, in *Go in Peace*, John Paul II reminds us that the “fundamental vocation and mission” of the parish is to “be a place in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a sign and instrument of the vocation of all to communion...to be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all...”³² Young adults can, in a particular way, choose to live at or near local parishes on their path to discernment, with the goal of bringing Christ to neighbours; thereby seeking first the Kingdom of God and letting all else be given (Matthew 6:33). This intentional life near and with a local Church is wrapped into a daily consecration of one’s interior and exterior self. Such consecration is a lifestyle that will lead to union with Christ such that one is able to hear a subsequent call to come, follow me (Matthew 4:19).

With young adults living a daily consecration near and with local churches, they bear witness, in line with John Paul II’s assertion that, “on the whole, under the ever creative guidance of the Spirit, the consecrated life is destined to remain a shining witness to the inseparable unity of love of God and love of neighbour”³³. This is a witness that is desperately needed in the world today.

6.3. Embracing the universal mission

A daily consecration involves not only an interior offering but also a daily and continuous embrace of the universal mission. Catholics embrace the call to seek, above all things, the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33), to give oneself first to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), and to lay down one’s life for their friends (John 15:13). These actions stand in contrast to the common ways of the world, whereby one is instructed to seek their future; and even to some vocation campaigns, which seemingly emphasise the decision before emphasising the path to holiness—communion with the Lord—with discernment as a product of that authentic relationship.

Then even in and as a path to discernment, the call is to seek first the building up of His kingdom (Matthew 6:33); and all else will be given to us (Matthew 6:33). This does not mean that one should not explore potential religious communities, meet with vocational directors, and date potential future spouses; rather,

³² John Paul II, *Go in Peace: A Gift of Enduring Love*, ed. Joseph Durepos (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), 115.

³³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 63.

alongside these intentional actions, one also strives to love the poor, share their gifts, and build up His kingdom, as is instructed in the Catechism:

Jesus asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father

who takes care of his children's smallest needs: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?'... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."³⁴

These words point to a childlike abandonment in which one trusts that the discernment of a future vocation will be granted unto us (Matthew 6:33). Likewise, Jesus explains, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). It seems here that Jesus invites us to follow Him and thereby receive much.

If one truly desires to experience God's love, then without doubt, they desire the same for others. Thus, as it is written: "If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?" (1 John 3:17). Likewise, John Paul II writes that "there is no authentic Christianity if there is no mission activity: Jesus is a gift from God that must be brought to everyone."³⁵ Such words highlight the call to love, bring Christ to all, and invite others into communion with Christ.

In following the Gospel in this radical way, one directly puts their trust completely in the Lord, trusting that He will provide. One embodies Philippians 4:6 where St. Paul writes, "Have no anxiety at all." This is true even in the absence of a clear call to the consecrated life, Holy Orders, or Holy Matrimony, even in the absence of a future spouse, religious community, or diocese to which one is drawn. In seeking first His kingdom and participating in the universal mission of the Church during and as discernment, one fulfils the call to holiness: "Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. The vocation to love, understood as true openness to our fellow human beings and solidarity with them, is the most basic of all vocations. It is the origin of all

³⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, para. 305.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Go in Peace: A Gift of Enduring Love*, ed. Joseph Durepos (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), p. 116.

vocations in life.”³⁶ This directs “discerners,” to love first and foremost, as love is “the origin of all vocations.”³⁷ It characterises the path towards discernment as emphasising love of God and neighbour, with trust that through this, one will hear, if Christ calls, as He manifests Himself along this path (John 14:21).

6.4. Acts of love

As discussed previously, in Matthew 19:20, the Lord invites His followers not only to be kind to others but also to seek them out. Similarly, John Paul II reminds us that “‘faith is strengthened when it is given to others,’ so the mission strengthens the consecrated life, gives it new enthusiasm and new motivation, and elicits faithfulness. For its part, missionary activity offers ample room for the different forms of the consecrated life.”³⁸ With a daily offering, one engages in deeper prayer, which inherently leads to action. As John Paul II wrote, “that prayer is the soul of the apostolate but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer.”³⁹ Prayer and acts of love strengthen one another. Both are essential to the consecrated life—even the form of daily consecration proposed here.

Many young adults hold jobs and have busy personal and professional lives. Therefore, they may not be able to commit to additional ministries or activities; but still can assume “a sense of mission,” which is “more than external works.”⁴⁰ It “consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness.”⁴¹ As a path to discernment, young adults can participate in the “genuine inculturation” of divinity, in which we imitate the Lord, who “became man and walked among us in love and meekness.”⁴²

In other cases, the action may be more explicit. With engagement in prayer, unity in mission (Acts 2:4), consecrated daily offerings, love of neighbour, and

³⁶ John Paul II, *Go in Peace: A Gift of Enduring Love*, ed. Joseph Durepos (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), p. 211.

³⁷ John Paul II, “Apostolic Journey to the Philippines: Prayer Vigil on the Occasion of the 10th World Youth Day in Manila,” Speech, Rizal Park, Manila, January 14, 1995. Accessed August 8, 2024. At https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19950114_vigilia-manila-gmg.html.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 78.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 67.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 72.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 72.

⁴² John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 79.

dialogue; the Holy Spirit descends, often calling one to action (John 16:13–15). With this “close union between contemplation and action,”⁴³ this action will be fruitful and young adults will surely be strengthened to act beyond their ability (2 Corinthians 8:3); and only with this union can the challenge of evangelisation in the modern world be undertaken.⁴⁴

Thus, young adults—in the world but not of the world (John 17:11–14)—in preparation to receive a call from the Lord, may seek to “discover the methods most suited to the needs of the different social groups and various professional categories so that the light of Christ will penetrate all sectors of society and the leaven of salvation will transform society from within, fostering the growth of a culture imbued with Gospel values.”⁴⁵ Importantly, during and as discernment, one is watchful and open to the promptings of the Spirit (Habakkuk 2:1). Our world can be truly transformed by Christ’s light as He dwells among us (Amos 3:17). Furthermore, through these works, faith is made perfect (James 2:22), which again advances discernment while simultaneously participating in the universal mission of the Church.

7. Community

7.1. Sharing

Young adults may choose to live in community and share material goods as the Apostles did in the time preceding the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:44). Such sharing could involve “material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable service.”⁴⁶ During the period after university and before making a formal vocational commitment, one may decide to live in the community, sharing goods, gifts, and service.

⁴³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 74.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 74.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 98.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 42.

7.2. Dialogue

As recommended by John Paul II, in consecrated communities, “inspired by the Holy Spirit, each individual engages in a fruitful dialogue with the others in order to discover the Father’s will.”⁴⁷ There must be a prayerful dialogue among young adults, as well as among priests and bishops. In this way, the community can “cooperate generously with the particular Churches as much as they can and with respect for their own charism, working in full communion with the bishop in areas of evangelisation, catechesis and parish life,”⁴⁸ bearing fruit for the building up of the kingdom of God at the local parish level. Further, John Paul II writes that “challenges of evangelisation are such that they cannot be effectively faced without the cooperation, both in discernment and action, of all the Church’s members. It is difficult for individuals to provide a definite answer; however, such an answer can arise from encounter and dialogue. In particular, effective communion among those graced with different charisms will ensure both mutual enrichment and more fruitful results in the mission in hand.”⁴⁹ This cannot be argued against, since the Holy Spirit works through many, each who has unique gifts (Romans 12:6–8). Overall, we echo John Paul II’s encouragement that “everything...be done in communion and dialogue with all sectors of the Church.”⁵⁰ In this way and with this “privileged experience of dialogue” and “ecclesial communion,” we are “ready to undertake the great universal mission”⁵¹.

Dialogue that will be truly fruitful will come from prayerful conversations that allow for meditation of the Sacred Scriptures and the study of Sacred Doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13–15), as well as reflection upon the writings of the saints. In this way, we respond to “the need for a renewed and loving commitment to the intellectual life,”⁵² “an incentive to dialogue and cooperation...a stimulus to contemplation and prayer in the constant quest for the presence and activity of God in the complex reality of today’s world.”⁵³ John Paul II reinforces that “meditation of the Bible in common is of great value.” When practised according to the possibilities and circumstances of life in community, this meditation leads to a joyful sharing of the riches drawn from the word of God, thanks to which brothers

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 92.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 49.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 74.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 74.

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 74.

⁵² John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 98.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 98.

or sisters grow together and help one another to make progress in the spiritual life.”⁵⁴ Through prayerful meditation and dialogue, the Holy Spirit guides and calls to action (2 Peter 1:21), which builds up the Kingdom of God (Acts 2:47).

7.3. Unity

John Paul II describes the “nature of the charism in communities of this kind” as one which “directs their energies...and the apostolic work of all towards the one mission”⁵⁵ Young adults, on a path to discernment, might aim to be “knit together in love” (Colossians 2:2); “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2); “perfectly joined together in the same mind” (1 Corinthians 1:10); as the Apostles were prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit. John Paul II writes of the importance of such communities: “If the Church is to reveal her true face to today’s world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelisation, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the new commandment.”⁵⁶

John Paul II calls us to be “united by a common commitment to the following of Christ...inspired by the same Spirit”⁵⁷. In this, he writes that we “cannot fail to manifest visibly, as branches of the one Vine, the fullness of the Gospel of love”⁵⁸. We cannot disagree that this visibility of the Gospel of love is extremely and urgently needed in today’s society; and, that young adults who have yet to take formal vows might contribute to this in a particular way—as a path to discernment.

7.4. United prayer

In 1 Peter, we read that we are called to love God through our united and fervent prayer (1 Peter 5:16). Along these lines, John Paul II recommends adoration: “The call to holiness is accepted and can be cultivated only in the silence of adoration.”⁵⁹ Moreover, we are called to pray fervently and ceaselessly

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 94.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 45.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 45.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 52.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 77.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), p. 38.

(1 Thessalonians 5:16), seeking first His kingdom (Matthew 6:33). Thus, young adults who are discerning would, in addition to offering themselves to God, also come together in adoration, to pray the Holy Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and to reflect on Scripture and other Church writings. Those who are on this path to discernment might pray in unity, for example, for the “light of God to enter into the world,”⁶⁰ for the Church to be a “dwelling place” (Psalm 84:1) of love, and for beauty and love to radiate from the Church. As such, while one is discerning, he or she is completely oriented towards the Lord, with the heart completely open, longing and desiring the building up of the Kingdom, just like Jesus’ instruction to the young man (Matthew 19:21–24).

8. Conclusion

Young adults often spend several years before making a commitment to the priesthood, consecrated life, or marriage. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life are on a dramatic decline. There have been major shifts in parish life and shortages of parochial resources. Facing these modern-day challenges, we propose that young adults participate in a daily consecration and thus in the missionary call of the Church. We suggest that they do so by abiding in Him (John 15:4) through prayer, with a ceaseless offering of daily moments, and through the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Young adults can be intentionally available, uniquely, to evangelise and reach out to local neighbourhoods, bearing fruit in Him (John 15:5). Finally, in communities, young adults might live and share in community life with the extent possible. They might come together for prayer, adoration, celebration of the Eucharist, meditation on the Bible, and dialogue. All of this, again, is done under the guidance of the clergy and in unity with the local and universal Church. John Paul II explains,

Those who love God, the Father of all, cannot fail to love their fellow human beings, whom they recognize as brothers and sisters. Precisely for this reason, they cannot remain indifferent to the fact that many men and women do not know the full manifestation of God’s love in Christ. The result, in obedience to Christ’s commandment, is the missionary drive *ad gentes*, which every committed Christian shares with the Church, which is missionary by nature.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), sec. 39.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), sec. 77.

In the proposed form of daily consecration—a response to John Paul II’s call—young adults have an opportunity to fulfil their vocation to love—the vocation for “life in the Holy Spirit.”⁶² They participate in “divine charity and human solidarity”⁶³ and walk along a path in which they are prepared and available to receive a call to an even greater love (John 15:13), to come follow me (Matthew 4:19). Moreover, with young adults walking this path towards discernment and contributing to the universal mission of the Church, “spices... flow out,” (Song of Solomon 4:16), “the wilderness becomes a fruitful field” (Isaiah 32:15), and the light of God’s love brilliantly and radiantly enters the world through the Church.

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⁶² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), para. 1699.

⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), para. 1699.

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