



The Vocation of the Religious Brother

[The following represent the reflections of four religious brothers, two from mixed priest-brother communities and two from all-brother communities, on the significance of the religious brother's vocation in the modern Church.]

A De La Salle Brother

Brother Larry Schatz, FSC, currently serves as Assistant Provincial of the Midwest Province of the De La Salle Christian Brothers. His ministry experience includes teaching and campus ministry at the high school and college level. He has authored *Brothers: An Inside Look* and *Walking With the Word* for Saint Mary's Press. He is a contributing writer to SMP's *The Catholic Youth Bible* and *BreakThrough! The Bible for Young Catholics*.

I recently returned from Nairobi, Kenya, where I had the privilege to spend a week with our scholastics or student brothers from the Lwanga District. This district includes Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, all English-speaking countries. This was an opportunity for me to share with those young Brothers a bit about what is going on in the rest of our global Institute known as The Brothers of the Christian Schools or the DeLaSalle Brothers, after our Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle.

My experience in Kenya reminded me once again what a blessing it is to be a Brother and at the same time a member of a worldwide congregation. Brothers are certainly a distinct minority in the Roman Catholic Church. Our particular community was founded to be educators, and we have remained true to that charism for more than 300 years. As a DeLaSalle Brother, I have taught on the high school, college, and middle school levels, have served in campus ministry, helped to found a tuition-free San Miguel school, and now serve in provincial administration for our Midwest District. Each of these varied experiences has called out the best of me and has reminded me over and over again what a blessing it is to be a Brother.

I love the title "Brother," because it so clearly spells out the nature of our relationship to the young people that we serve as well as to our Lasallian colleagues.

I often get asked the question, "So why did you become a Brother?" It is a vocation with which not a lot of people are familiar. The easiest starting point is to differentiate the Brothers' vocation from that of priesthood. The Brothers' life is centered upon community life and educational ministry. We take the traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, along with a special vow of association for the educational service of the

poor. This last vow is a constant challenge to us to keep focused on the underserved in our world. Because Brothers do not do sacramental ministry or serve as parish pastors, we are free to meet the varied educational needs of young people. And because we are part of a congregation present in over 80 countries, we are always reminded of the necessity to think bigger than our school or province or country. As I look back on my life as a Brother, I am amazed at all the places I have been and experiences I have had. I definitely took 'the road less travelled.' And it has opened to me so many blessings.

Brothers enrich the life of the church primarily through the quality of their presence. We see ourselves walking with our lay brothers and sisters as well as the young people entrusted to our care. We are available to them in a variety of ways, and we do that without the inevitable distractions that our married and ordained colleagues have. Our primary commitment is to the young people we serve and to our fellow Brothers. One of the Brothers once said, "Brotherhood is my pathway to God." That really sums it up for me as well: by being a Brother, I feel that I am responding in the best way I can to God's call deep within me. I am constantly challenged to keep my eyes wide open and to not get too settled. There are fewer Brothers than there used to be, but more Lasallian ministries than ever. Our lay partners share our mission and do so enthusiastically.

This is a great life, and one filled with opportunities to grow. I really can't imagine who I'd be had I not said a very tentative "yes" to checking out the Brothers so many years ago. Spending time with the young Brothers in Kenya, sharing in their joys and struggles, saying the same invocation used by Brothers and Lasallians all over the world, has enriched me beyond measure. It is so good to know that halfway around the world, I am linked in prayer and e-mail to Brothers who have touched my heart, a phrase often used by our Founder. Followers of DeLaSalle always begin prayer by remembering that we are in the holy presence of God, and in so many ways that sums up my spirituality. I am truly blessed to have found a life that is so rewarding and so challenging as well. I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to call other young men to this special life.

Live Jesus in our hearts---forever!

A Jesuit Brother in Formation

Brother Pat Douglas, SJ, entered the Society of Jesus after working as a social worker in St. Paul as a domestic abuse counselor with both victims and perpetrators. Br. Pat recently completed a master's degree at Loyola Chicago in Pastoral Counseling. Currently he is assigned to the St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, where he is working with at-risk youth.

When invited to write this article I was asked to write about what it was like to live as a Jesuit Brother in formation in a "mixed" community (one combined of those studying to be priests, called 'Scholastics', and those like myself who chose to be Brothers). My initial response was confusion. I asked, "What other type of community would a Brother live in?" In my five years of living within Jesuit communities, half of that time has been spent being the only Brother. I inquired more about this and found out that there were indeed communities comprised completely of Brothers. Wow, what a magnificent "Shangri-La" such a community must be! How wonderful not to have to explain to others what a Brother does, or not to have to fight for inclusive language and equal treatment between the grades.

If only I lived in an all-Brother community I would never have to hear, "Why would you want to be *just* a Brother?" I would not have to constantly defend my vocation and I could focus on being a Brother.

Once I finished daydreaming about the greener grass in the all-Brother community, however, I realized that the mixed communities I have lived in have helped to shape who I am as a Jesuit Brother. These communities have consisted of Brothers in formation, Scholastics, as well as "fully formed" Brothers and Priests (those who have completed all of their 'formal' training and have taken final vows). Even though this diversity can be frustrating at times, I think it also helps to bring about new perspectives and balance.

For instance, I have lived in two different models of formation houses. The first was in Novitiate, which was comprised of men mostly in their mid 20's, as well as three fully formed Priests who worked on the Novitiate staff. This type of community can be very vibrant, but it tends to offer a very limited perspective on Jesuit life. After vows I went on to studies and lived in a community of young men in formation as well as older Priests and Brothers who engaged in a variety of apostolic work outside of the formation house. We ranged in age from men in their early 20's to men in their mid 80's. The greatest benefit for me in this intergenerational community was the insight and balance the older Priests and Brothers gave me.

It seems the greatest temptation that Novices and men in formation face is being an "armchair quarterback." This is where men who have the luxury of being removed from decision-making have much to say on how things should be done. Often I have observed and participated in grand discussions about what the Provincial should be doing, how we should live poverty, and the role of the Brother in a Priestly Society. I have found that when these conversations only involve men in formation, little gets accomplished besides frustration and hurt feelings. When older priests and brothers are involved in this dialogue, however, they bring a balance to the discussion. They are able to offer calm insight that comes from experience. Their input is not based on "we need to" and "it should be," but on trying, failing, and trying again. They have taken the ideal theories and adapted them to a non-ideal world. This learning from others' experience has been key to my formation as a Brother. Through a Brother's talent and work he serves God. Hearing from older Priests and Brothers about what "works" in the world and what does not helps to better prepare me to serve God.

Another benefit of living in a mixed community is that it has helped me identify and define who I am as a Jesuit Brother. It can be very challenging being the only Brother in a community. I find that I become the default resource for all things Brother. As a result of this other Jesuits will ask me questions about the vocation, its joys, struggles, and limitations. These questions were first asked of me in my second week in the Novitiate, when I was a Novice Brother still learning about the vocation. It can be very challenging being a resource for others about something that you are still learning. I have found these questions to be beneficial, however, in helping me articulate what it means to be a Brother. This process not only challenges me to address questions I would not look at on my own, but it helps to educate other Jesuits about the joyous way to serve God as a Brother. I hope that with a better understanding of what it means to be a Brother, Priests and Scholastics will be better equipped to educate others who might be interested in religious life and possibly the Brothers' vocation.

Though it may be enjoyable to daydream about what an all-Brother community would be like, I realize it, too, would come with its own set of struggles. I feel blessed to be called to serve God as a Jesuit and to be mentored and inspired by Priests, Scholastics, and Brothers.

Reflections on the Vocation of a Teaching Brother

Brother John Klein, FMS, Provincial of the Marist Brothers of the United States, is past president of CMSM and has served as a member of CMSM/LCWR's Committee for the Study of Religious Life. In January 2005 he was appointed as a member of the National Advisory Council for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“God chooses individual men and women and calls each one personally into the desert where he speaks to their heart. He sets apart those who listen to him, and through his spirit, leads them into a continuous process of conversion and growth in his love, to send them forth on Mission.” (Constitutions of the Marist Brothers of the Schools) Religious brothers are clearly men personally chosen by God, set apart to listen to his word and then sent forth to serve his people as brother to each of them.

As religious men, Brothers live lives of stewardship and loving. We are prayerful guardians of God's gifts, and we have the responsibility to guarantee that they are utilized for the common good. As Brothers, we have no interest in amassing great wealth or power or influence or in achieving fame or status in the Church or society. Our genuine focus is in being one with the people who enter our lives. Our challenge is to accept them as they are and to let them know that is good enough for us.

The opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes* speak loudly to this reality: “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ, as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” Religious Brothers hear that echo in the lives of their students in their high school classrooms, in the pain and suffering of those afflicted with AIDS, in the families in the parishes in which they minister, in their retreat work and counseling programs. Nothing and no one is foreign to their care and concern.

Fundamentally, the mission of the Brother is rooted in his prayer and community life. This mission is by its very nature a communal one animated by living as part of explicitly *intentional communities*. These communities, similar to the one Jesus formed with His disciples, have mission at their center and heart. Mission, as a result, operates as their chief source of connectedness and energy. Members of an intentional community of Brothers realize that they cannot minister to others unless they live in a community founded on interdependence and mutuality, informed by faith. This faith life sensitively balances the needs of the individual and those of the community and finds sharing of faith to be indispensable to its life. This inevitably leads to a high level of trust that allows members to challenge one another's behavior in light of a commonly accepted vision and goal. While this approach to community life meets some of the emotional, social and intellectual needs of its members, communities are in no way therapeutic support centers.

On the contrary, an intentional community of Brothers is “...a group of religious men living together who feel the need to be supported in their work and willingly commit themselves

to develop a gospel-centered intimacy to be expressed in shared faith, ongoing conversion and shared action.” (Gerald Arbuckle, S.M., *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding Religious Life*, p. 11) In short, this type of community life is one that has a clear and visible and easily identifiable way of life. Such a group offers the world what it does not find elsewhere: a community of faith, friendships, and mutual support engaged in an adventure larger than itself. Perhaps, this is the unique contribution that Religious Brothers offer to the Church and society today.

Several years ago, former New York City Mayor Ed Koch bemoaned that “...there are so few people who are fierce about anything.” Today, Religious Brothers are challenged to be on fire, fierce, for the Mission of Christ, for that is our call as religious. No longer can we afford a choice between maintenance and mission. Mission, rooted in prayer and community life, is the only option, for in mission we discover the key to renewal and new life. It is the mission that must frame and inform all our decisions. Everything is really mission, for we are called not to maintain ourselves and guarantee our survival but rather, to serve the mission of Christ, a mission to proclaim the unconditional and compassionate love of God. This mission will direct our energy outward rather than inward and give us new life.

Religious Brothers possess the potential to demonstrate an approach to life that can offer others a compelling alternative to societal values that have proven empty and hollow and void of meaning. Brothers through their community life and commitment to mission can truly offer that passion, faith, friendship, and mutual support for which each of us longs.

The Brother's Vocation

Friar John-Joseph Dolan, OFM Conv., is currently in his ninth year in Rome and second term as the General Assistant for the Conventual Franciscan Friars, with responsibility for USA, Canada, Jamaica, Great Britain, and Ireland. In 2001 he became the first Religious Brother on the Conventual General Definitory since the time of Francis.

Frequently in literature the road beginning at our door and front steps and ending “God only knows where” is a metaphor for the adventures, dangers, discoveries and relationships in our journey through life. Be it a pilgrimage (sacred or secular), a coming-of-age story, a flight, or an epic quest of the ever-popular Tolkien or Merlin-Arthurian genre—all journeys take us away from the comfortable and ordinary of our every-day life, to places and horizons beyond our immediate vision, experience and control, and ultimately lead us to the goal of our search, the Grail – ourselves. All roads—in all directions—are ultimately “roads back” to where we began; all journeys are ultimately journeys of self-discovery—discovery of the person whom God has called us to be.

This year is my 40th in Religious life and fraternity. When I left home in 1969, I could not have imagined the “twists and turns” that led me from college to the inner city to rural farmland to a non-canonical community of Brothers to the Order of Friars Minor Conventual and eventually here to the banks of the Tiber—or Tevere as the locals would have it. I spent the first decades getting my hands dirty working with the poor and underprivileged, community organizing around housing issues, nursing the sick, teaching, and promoting social justice on a parish, diocesan, and Order-wide level. I have spent the last two in globetrotting and internal ministries: formation and administration/leadership (provincial,

national, and general level). On this road (which has brought me to every continent save Antarctica) in addition to the blessing of family and true friends, there has been one constant, the joy of my vocation—of serving God and the Church, living the Franciscan charism with my brothers and sisters, and doing this as a Religious Brother.

In the contemporary Church, there are many ways of expressing this vocation – monastic, apostolic, conventual, with a myriad of choices of apostolates, an almost endless array of charisms to direct it, and lifestyles to support it (hermit, communities of all Brothers, so-called mixed communities where the institute’s charism is lived out in either a lay or clerical manner, or as we Franciscans prefer, fraternal institutes of monks or friars in which one also happens to be a priest, a deacon, or a Brother). The common thread is a relationship—the vocation to be a Brother to all, to stand with all in the Church and Society as equals in ministry and the thirst for salvation, holiness, justice and dignity for all human beings “made in the image and likeness of God.” Each of the choices above brings its own set of rewards and challenges. The vocation of a Religious Brother today is often hidden from the public view (either confined to the proper schools, hospitals, charitable foundations of all-Brother institutes or internal services and ministries of the mixed institutes) and is almost universally misunderstood. If I had a penny for every time I was asked why I did not become a priest, I would be a very rich man. Often—unfortunately—it has been priests, deacons, Religious Sisters and even confreres who have posed the inquiry.

I did not choose **not to be** a priest in the same way that I did not choose not to be a medical doctor, a rocket scientist, or a married man with children. I **chose to be** a Religious, to be a Franciscan, to be a friar, to be a Conventual, to be a Religious Brother. I believe that I was called—to turn on its head a common phrase—to “go all the way” and embrace fully the consecrated life in the evangelical manner of the Franciscan Family without any other predetermined choices, conditions or ministries. I believe that Religious life—in and of itself—is a full vocation and needs nothing else joined to it to be lived fully as a prophetic sign in the world and a means of sanctification. In fact, I believe that both the very profession of vows (promises, oaths, etc) and the life in community (defined and lived in various ways) is ministry, is evangelization, is the preaching of the Gospel. The active apostolates are further expressions of this love of God and neighbor.

The vocation of the Religious Brother is the oldest form of consecrated life for men in the Church, and it was the predominant form of Religious life for the first millennium of Christianity. Unfortunately, it seems to be declining, and is often not appreciated or promoted sufficiently by the hierarchical Church—despite what her teachings and pronouncements say. Even today, the vocation and charism of the members of mixed and fraternal institutes is injured by the Church’s position on clerical jurisdiction and its subsequent legislation. In the third millennium, Anthony of Egypt, Francis of Assisi and Benedict of Nursia could not exercise formal authority in the movements they founded. Imagine that! This is highly unfortunate, especially today given the stratification of power, privilege and authority exercised both “in the world” and in the Church—and the widespread concomitant alienation. On the other hand, authority is not limited to institutional positions or mandates. One can exercise moral authority without the other and vice versa.

The Brother’s vocation is one of bonding and reconciliation—with laymen and women, his ministry is deemed lay and he frequently can enter arenas on behalf of the Church where clerics are not able to penetrate, with Religious Sisters and nuns, he is a fellow Religious

giving witness to the priority of God through the evangelical counsels lived simply and without the added benefit of Orders, with priests and deacons, he is a co-worker and can often more easily enter into an all male world. His is the only vocation that so clearly attests to the fullness of Religious life separate from ordained ministry and hierarchy and freely chosen —and in the mixed and fraternal institutes, he has the added privilege and duty of witnessing to the primacy and integrity of the institute's charism and vocation to his confreres.

The journey home should be a journey back to ourselves—changed and converted. I cannot say that I have enjoyed every passage of mine, but each moment was grace-filled and invigorating. Forty years later, I would without hesitation choose again to be a Religious Brother (I cannot envision being friar any other way) and would encourage others to do so. In fact, that's just what I did again the other day.