

Vocation Vocabulary Guide

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Apostolic

Describes *active* religious communities - communities whose mission includes ministry in the world, such as social work, health care, or pastoral work.

Example: "We are an apostolic community devoted to meeting the needs of poor women and children."

Charism

The particular focus and spirit of a religious community. From the Greek word, *charismata* for gift.

Example: "Our charism is to be peacemakers, with Jesus as our model."

Chapter

A meeting for all members of a religious congregation to discuss and decide on policy, leadership, and direction of the congregation.

Example: "At our chapter, we decided to make direct work with the poor a high priority."

Contemplative

Describes religious communities that focus primarily on prayer, rather than on active ministry. Most contemplative communities follow the Rule of Saint Benedict, a set of rules providing structure for a communal life of prayer. These communities generally pray seven times a day, attend daily Mass, read Scripture and spiritual works, maintain periods of silence, and perform labor to sustain the community.

Example: "Prayer is the center of contemplative life."

Cloistered

Describes certain contemplative communities that have limited access to the outside world. Members of these religious communities have limited opportunity to leave the monastery and outsiders have little direct contact with members. Not all contemplative communities are cloistered.

Example: "Those who live in cloistered monasteries usually travel very little."

Discernment

The process of praying and reflecting on God's call.

Example: "After many months of discernment, I realized God was calling me to be a missionary."

Formation

The process of education and spiritual development that takes place during the early months or years of joining a religious community. Those entering the diocesan priesthood are involved in formation during their seminary years.

Example: "I read a number of books on theology during formation."

Novice

A man or woman taking part in the initial stage of entering a religious community. The novice is typically involved in discernment, preparation, and formation activities, including study of the order's charism, history, constitution, and way of living the vows. This period lasts from 12 to 24 months and is called the novitiate. At the end of the novitiate, a novice either leaves or takes temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Example: "I really got to know my community while I was a novice."

Postulant or Candidate

A man or woman requesting and still discerning membership into a religious community, before becoming a novice. The period of postulancy or candidacy usually lasts six months to two years.

Example: "I'm now a postulant/candidate with a religious community because I feel called to this way of life."

Profession

The religious rite in which a person formally enters a religious community. Profession follows a formation program (usually called novitiate) of discernment, education, and spiritual development.

Example: "All of my family and friends came to my profession of final vows."

Spiritual Director

One who meets periodically with another to counsel and encourage that person to deepen and strengthen his or her relationship with God. Spiritual directors take into account all aspects of life in the process of growing closer to God.

Example: My prayer life has taken on new dimensions since I began meeting with a spiritual director."