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Horizons
Religious Life



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As someone who works in the world of vocations ministry and formation of newer religious, I am blessed to attend many conferences and workshops. It's professional development, if you will. Recently, I was in Louisville for the Religious Formation Conference Congress.

"Being Signs of Courageous Hope" was our theme and the speakers, small group discussions and prayer were grounded in the idea that religious women and men in our world are called to be signs of hope in our world — and many times being a sign of hope takes courage. It is easy to be cynical. It is easy to demonize those who think differently than we do. It is easy to fall into the traps of the society in which we live. It takes courage to go a different path. It takes courage to believe that things can be different.

One of our keynote speakers, Fr. Bryan Massingale, a diocesan priest and professor of theology at Fordham University, spoke eloquently of the signs of the times that call us to be courageous. He spoke of the fact that some religious congregations have difficulty living in hope because there is a lack of growth or a slowing of growth in their institutes. It's true that many religious congregations are facing the challenges of change and letting go.

Therefore, it can be daunting to also look with hope towards an unknown future. Then, Father Bryan reminded us of the story of Abraham and Sarah. When Sarah heard that she would bear a child in her circumstances, she laughed. The visitor responds, "Is anything too marvelous for the Lord to do?" (Genesis 18:14) Indeed! Is there anything that is too marvelous, too large, too unrealistic for God to do?

Fast forward a few weeks. Our community is traveling to a formation event. The Marianist formation weekend is an opportunity for our brothers and sisters who are in formation and their mentors to gather for learning, prayer and building community. We have these weekends twice a year and they are always moments of grace.



The photo Sister Nicole posted on Facebook after the Marianist formation weekend. From left to right, Sister Nicole, the congregation’s novice director, a novice, and a temporary professed sister on the way to the Marianist Formation Weekend. (Provided photo)

As always, I posted a picture of us on social media. A friend of one of our sisters responded with this text:

> "I just want you to know I have noticed how you have assured the future of the FMIs [Marianist brothers and sisters] by your apparent decision to invest in recruitment and training. What a legacy and verification of your life's work, and affirmation of Our Lady's approval. That picture ... caught my eye and brought home the blessing you have made in mentoring these three young FMIs. Well done good and faithful servant."

While some congregations have made the difficult decision to move in a different direction, we continue to invest in the future of our institute. Why?

In Father Bryan's keynote he used the analogy of a relay race. People who run the middle legs of a relay race are not the ones who break the tape. They are not the ones who see the outcome of their work, necessarily. But they run for the sake of those who are behind them. And they run for the sake of those who were before them.

Those of us who work in vocations and formation ministry are like those who run the middle leg of a relay race. We do what we do for the sake of those who were before us - our founders, those who trusted in God enough to take risks that seem crazy from the outside looking in. And for the sake of those who are behind us — those who are being called to this wonderful, challenging, beautiful way of life. And we do this with hope. For is anything too marvelous for God to do?

The Scripture in 1 Peter 3:15 tells us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." I have many reasons to hope. God is still calling. Religious are needed for our world and for our church. Maybe it will look different. But different is not bad. So, let us walk forward in courageous hope! For nothing is too marvelous for God.

[Nicole Trahan, FMI, professed first vows as a member of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Marianist Sisters) in June 2008 in San Antonio, Texas. Since then she has lived in Dayton, Ohio, where she professed perpetual vows in August 2013. She served as a campus minister at the University of Dayton for three years. Currently, she teaches sophomore religion at Chaminade Julienne Catholic High School, serves as the National Director of Vocations for the Marianist Sisters and is director of the pre-novitiate program for her province.]

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