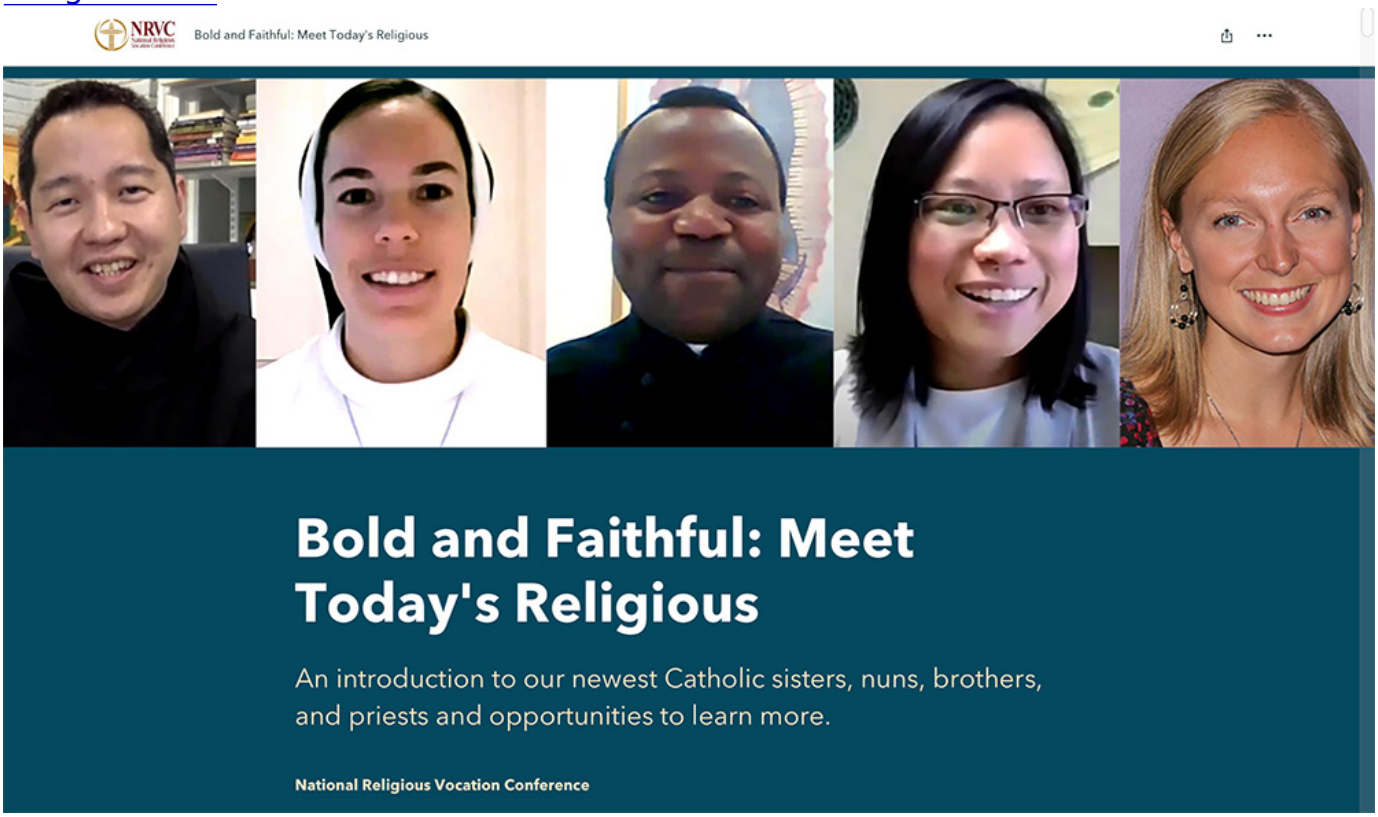
News
Religious Life



The homepage for the National Religious Vocation Conference's StoryMap website "Bold and Faithful: Meet Today's Religious" (GSR screenshot)



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The latest project launched by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) — in time for the Nov. 5-11 National Vocation Awareness Week — makes available a broad range of resources for those discerning their vocation, those in parish or campus ministry, educators, and catechists.

Titled "Bold and Faithful: Meet Today's Religious," the StoryMap website evolved as a way to make use of data compiled in the 2009 Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and its follow-up, the 2020 Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life.



Sts. Cyril and Methodius Sr. Deborah Marie Borneman (Courtesy of Deborah Marie Borneman)

"It's exciting because this project is moving the 2020 study forward in a collaborative way," said Sr. Deborah Marie Borneman, a member of the Sisters of

Sts. Cyril and Methodius of Danville, Pennsylvania. Borneman serves as director of mission integration for the National Religious Vocation Conference.

She started with the conference in 2011, shortly after the first CARA study was released. To gain an understanding of the trends, and how discerning vocations had changed — especially with the spread of internet access — the 2020 study provided additional, valuable information.

"The way discerners discern today is different [from] how I discerned in the 1990s, or even 10 years ago," Borneman noted. "A lot of people don't have experience with sisters, brothers or priests. We wanted to enlarge the digital footprint for those who are curious about what God is calling them to be."



Patrice Tuohy, publisher at TrueQuest Communications (Courtesy of Patrice Tuohy)

Accomplishing the creation of that digital footprint, of course, required funding. A grant submitted to the Catholic Sisters Initiative of the GHR Foundation was approved to get the ball rolling.

Development of the site also involved bringing some key collaborators on board. GSR in the Classroom, Called and Consecrated and A Nun's Life Ministry were the first three organizations approached to share curriculum, podcasts and videos that will be rotated off and on the website on a quarterly basis, according to Patrice Tuohy, publisher at TrueQuest Communications, which is contracted to publish the National Religious Vocation Conference's annual VISION Vocation Guide.

"We're showcasing young religious and the different types of background they have," Tuohy said of the Bold and Faithful project. "Our whole goal is to continue to build awareness of religious life today."

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Part of that goal was the creation of the "story map," an interactive section of the webpage that can be used to find religious communities around the United States. Clicking on the markers in a particular state, contact information and website links come up, allowing for access to even more information.

"What we want to expand this to in the coming year is pinpointing the ministry locations" of those vowed communities, Tuohy added. That would allow young people on vacation from school to find opportunities to volunteer their time, such as at local food pantries, tutoring, or caring for the elderly.



Charity Sr. Rejane Cytacki (Courtesy of Rejane Cytacki)

Along with the story map, a variety of podcasts from A Nun's Life Ministry will be shared. Executive director Sr. Rejane Cytacki, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and area coordinator for the National Religious Vocation Conference's Heartland Region, sees the collaboration as a "win-win," not only because it augments the audience for A Nun's Life, but "it has a really good look to it, the story map is very well-designed, and it's easy to navigate."

Cytacki has discovered some of the curriculum resources will also be useful in her part-time role as a second-grade catechist at Immaculate Conception-St. Joseph Parish in Leavenworth. She formerly ministered as a teacher and is now back in the classroom for an hour each week. "How cool is that," she said. "I'll be able to use these resources with my students."

Cytacki credits the conference for the "heavy lifting" on the Bold and Faithful project, which was brought to fruition in three phases, as Sr. Dina Bato, the conference's director of membership, explained.



Providence Sr. Dina Bato (Courtesy of Dina Bato)

Bato, a Sister of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Indiana, summarized Phase I as the production of the actual 2020 Study on New Vocations. Phase II featured the

creation of the "Religious Life Today" story map, special resource publications, and a six-part webinar series, "Religious Life Today: Learn It! Love It! Live It!", to highlight the results of the study, so the data wouldn't just be tucked away on a shelf after being hastily reviewed.

The Bold and Faithful website — Phase III — was in the planning stage from August 2022 to March 2023, Bato said.

"More than anything, we wanted to make the story map's flow easy to follow and lead users to the content that would serve them best," said Bato.

Whether those who use the website gravitate to the podcasts, the videos, the curriculum, the story map, event listings, or other resources, Borneman offers this reminder to keep an open mind about the many types of vocations: "While some see vocations like the sand in an hourglass, the Spirit beckons us to see vocations like the sand on a beach, timeless, and too numerous to count."