



# Curriculum for Vocation Ministers

## Introduction

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National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) is committed to providing its members with educational opportunities, resources, and supportive services that strengthen and enhance the professional ministerial skills of those serving in vocation ministry. It is essential for vocation ministers to keep up to date on trends, issues, skills, and best practices in the field of vocation ministry.

This document outlines a curriculum for vocation ministers who wish to deepen their understanding of the complex theological, spiritual, psycho-sexual, ethical, and intercultural elements in contemporary vocation ministry.

Each year, NRVC provides national events and local Member Area gatherings for professional growth through its networking with peers, comprehensive workshops, publications, and other resources. NRVC strongly suggests that vocation ministers participate in ongoing educational development to enliven their own vocation and to further develop their professional competencies. To assist vocation ministers in this, NRVC suggests the following curriculum, which provides three components: foundational core, continuing education, and ongoing enrichment.

## 1. Foundational Core Component

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It is recommended that vocation ministers attend all foundational core component workshops prior to or early in their ministry. These workshops are offered at Summer and Fall Institute on a regular basis.

### **Orientation Program for New Vocation Ministers**

This component provides new vocation ministers the foundational skills for contemporary vocation ministry. Important topics include accompaniment with inquirers, assessment of discerners, application and admissions process, vocation promotion, animating vowed membership with resources, and the theology of vocation. This foundational workshop is essential for all new vocation ministers and elevates the skills necessary for vocation ministry.

### **Ethics in Vocation Ministry**

This component is designed to assist vocation ministers, congregational leaders, and professed members in understanding and articulating the basic ethical values, principles, and standards of vocation ministry. Topics include: the ethical principles governing agency, confidentiality, and obligations related to positions of trust; dissemination of information; the timeliness of admissions or dismissal decisions; dual relationships; document disposition; the respect for human dignity, interculturality, and other issues related to ethical rights of candidates as well as ethical rights of those in positions of authority.

### **Behavioral Assessment I and II**

These two components teach practical interviewing techniques in a theoretical framework of behavioral assessment. While the focus is on initial assessment of candidates, the methodology is readily adapted to assessing candidates in other stages of formation. Interview topics include family background, educational and occupational histories, psychosexual histories and intimacy skills, faith history, Catholic practices, and other pertinent issues related to comprehensive vocational assessment. Behavioral Assessment II builds upon these skills acquired in Behavioral Assessment I.



### **The Role of the Family in Nurturing Vocations**

This component centers on assessing the candidate's relations within the family of origin in terms of its role in the discernment and formation process. This includes learning how to assess family-of-origin issues to formulate specific questions for discerners that may inhibit or deny admission. Topics include: the use of a genogram, childhood memories, identity of caregivers, family roles, sibling birth order, adoption and foster-care experiences, family relationships, conflicts, impact of generations, effects of divorce and re-marriage, and adverse childhood experiences.

### **Understanding, Assessing, and Fostering Psycho-Sexual Integration**

This component provides vocation ministers with a solid understanding of psychological well-being and psycho-sexual development to assist them in their efforts to adequately assess a candidate's aptitude for leading a healthy and integrated celibate life. It includes the basic elements of human sexuality: the fundamental aspect of being human, the centrality of relationships and healthy intimacy, gender identity, sexual orientation, age-related developmental tasks, and the necessity of boundaries. Potentially negative impacts are also considered, e.g., technology and social media, addictive behaviors, and unhealthy sexual expression. Helping vocation ministers determine if candidates may be at high risk of potential sexual abuse of minors is also an important element.

### **Ecclesial Competency**

This self-directed component includes a current understanding of the Church documents written on religious life and vocations. Quick links are found at NRVC.net. Such examples include: *Christus Vivit*, *Code of Canon Law*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, *Laudato Si'*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Perfectae Caritas*, *Program of Priestly Formation*, *Ratio Fundamental*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Starting Afresh in Christ*, and *Vita Consecrata*.

### **Requirements of Civil and Canon Law in the Assessment Process**

This component points to the critical nature of knowing and adhering to civil and canon law as it pertains to potential candidates to religious life. Religious institutes and societies of apostolic life are nonprofit voluntary religious associations. Topics include the confidential nature of the information received, assessment policies and document disposition, internal and external forum in candidate assessment, policies and practices in financial assets, salary, property, and tax issues along with debts, liabilities, and lawsuits (including traffic violations) during the application and initial formation period, re-admission and community transfers, and special issues regarding older, widowed, and divorced Catholics.

### **Requirements of Immigration Law in the Discernment Process**

This component addresses immigration law and policies for religious institutes who have international candidates in the discernment process to enter formation in U.S. religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Topics include clarification of key immigration terms, the R-1 Religious Worker Visa process, documentation and tracking immigration status, permanent residence process, long-term immigration planning, and legal responsibilities of the religious institute and the candidate.

### **Safe Environment Protocols**

To ensure the protection of minors, anyone who is promoting vocations by ministering to minors must have current Safe Environment training and follow all its prescribed practices and policies for discernment and promotion programs/visits where youth are present in parish and school visitations, fairs, retreats, conferences, and on social media. All require adherence to ethical ministry guidelines for such issues as boundary setting and ensuring the requirements regarding the ratio of adults to minors in ministry settings. This training is available through diocesan offices, Praesidium workshops, and various national programs such as VIRTUS.



## 2. Continuing Education Component

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It is recommended that vocation ministers continue learning while serving in vocation ministry by participating in Convocation, NRVC workshops, and Member Area Gatherings. These topics are also included in HORIZON Journal, the NRVC/CARA Studies, and through other professional workshops.

### **Incorporating Cultural Diversity in Religious Life**

This component enhances the cultural sensitivity, mindset, and skills of vocation ministers by embracing intercultural humility as a lifelong pursuit. Learning to be culturally mindful when accompanying inquirers and discerners, especially when they are from an underrepresented culture in the religious institute, requires a willingness for ongoing education. Consideration is given to intercultural diversity in terms of values, attitudes, perceptions of power, language fluency, generational theory, cultural wealth, and communication dynamics. The effective promotion of vocations calls for wisdom and honesty about the capacity to assess the religious institute in its ability to provide adequate resources to welcome and incorporate historically underrepresented candidates and members.

### **Ongoing Issues in Candidate Assessment**

This component responds to the ongoing learning that is necessary in vocation ministry in candidate assessment. Focus areas include issues of candidates and impact regarding education, spirituality, age, screen usage, addictions, food allergies, neurodivergence, emotional intelligence, eating disorders, adverse childhood experiences, and diverse physical and psychological health concerns.

### **Spiritual Accompaniment and Discernment**

This component focuses on the skills necessary for vocation ministers to accompany potential candidates in the discernment process and their spiritual journey. While the NRVC strongly recommends the vocation director does not serve in a dual role as spiritual director and/or confessor, skills are needed for vocation discernment and spiritual accompaniment. Topics include the theology of discernment, discernment as a faith journey, intercultural images of God, story of call, spiritual growth, boundaries of spiritual guidance and vocation ministry, and the interplay of the spiritual and psychological in the Catholic faith journey. Additionally, this addresses the skills in assessing the readiness of candidates for retreats, communal prayer, and integrating the cultural prayer customs, devotions, and traditions of spirituality in the religious institute.

### **Technology, Communications, and Marketing**

In an ever-expanding world of new technology, communications, and marketing, this component addresses the need for vocation ministers to exercise their ministry in a digital era. If religious institutes are to be effective in vocation ministry, it is imperative that their vocation personnel use the communication tools and technology available for effective vocation promotion and marketing. This involves the need for training in messaging strategy, social media platforms, communication, content development, analytics, marketing skills, and online presence.

### **Young Catholics**

This component fosters the learning and experience of the values, practices, and beliefs of today's younger generations, especially in light of the challenges faced by some religious institutes, where there is a widening generation gap between the present membership and those discerning a vocation. It is recommended that all those interested in promoting vocations continue to learn about intergenerational and intercultural living, relating to young Catholics, the Church, contemporary young adult research, and social networks.



### 3. Ongoing Enrichment Component

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New and seasoned vocation ministers are strongly encouraged to tend to their own vocation and to animate the membership of their religious institute. There are many opportunities for ongoing formation and networking through the Member Area gatherings. HORIZON, the quarterly journal of NRVC, provides numerous articles to assist in this enrichment component.

#### **Ongoing Formation of Vocation Ministers**

This component supports the ongoing attentiveness of a vocation minister to his or her own spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional growth—thus promoting a healthy integration of his or her own sexuality as a celibate religious. Practices which foster wholistic health include spiritual direction, retreats, reading, pilgrimages, days of renewal and reflection, as well as a plan for physical health that includes exercise, healthy eating, time in creation, and balanced resting.

#### **Animating Membership to Embrace Vocation Ministry**

This component recognizes the responsibility of the entire religious institute for vocation ministry along with strengthening the relationship between vocation ministers and leadership. This renewal includes learning the criteria for admission, understanding the candidate's right to minimal intrusion, recommending names of potential candidates, respecting the vocation discernment and assessment process of the religious institute, and on-going education about newer generations.

### NRVC Vision and Mission

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**VISION STATEMENT:** The National Religious Vocation Conference has a mission to set the world ablaze with the fire of God's love through the prophetic, joyful witness of religious sisters, brothers, and priests as radical disciples of Jesus.

**MISSION STATEMENT:** The National Religious Vocation Conference is a catalyst for vocation discernment and the full flourishing of religious life as sisters, brothers, and priests for the ongoing transformation of the world.

*Ratified by the National Board, February 2009  
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