

SR. CONSTANCE VEIT, LSP

A SCOOP OF VOCATIONS WITH YOUR PIE

GUEST COMMENTARY

Each November, we enjoy fresh-picked apples, cranberries, and pumpkin-spice everything as our excitement builds toward Thanksgiving. The church in the United States observes another celebration this month promoting vocation awareness.

The National Religious Vocation Conference encourages us to take advantage of this special vocations promotion each November to celebrate religious life and each Christian's foundational calling to discipleship. And they invite us to do so with PIE!

PIE is an acronym that stands for pray, invite, and encourage. It's a call to action for vocations in which we can all participate year-round for the good of the church.

P stands for pray.

God hears our prayers. So, let's pray for an increase of vocations for the holiness of the Church and the service of God's people.

And let's pray for the priests and consecrated persons we know and love, that they will be faithful to their special call and that God will grant them the gift of perseverance in his service. The future of the church depends on the generous response to God's call to priesthood and consecrated life in its diverse forms.

We might be tempted to think that young people are no longer entering religious life. This is not at all true!

Recent data shows there have been 3,500 new entrants to religious communities in the United States in the past 15 years, with an average of 200+ new professed members per year. Thirty-five percent of new members discerned for more than two years and about the same number discerned for about a year before entering a community.

Although 70 percent of entrants first considered religious life before the age of 21, the average age when one enters a religious community today is 28.

From these statistics we can see that new priests and women and men religious are not made overnight – there are no instant vocations!

Nevertheless, young people are still answering the call. These facts invite us to redouble our prayers for vocations.

If you know a young person considering a priestly or religious vocation, be patient. Pray for them each day as they clarify God's call for their lives!

I stands for invite.

Among new entrants to religious life, 66 percent report that someone invited them to consider a religious vocation and that this invitation impacted them.

Whatever our own path in life, we are all called to be inviters!

We can share our faith and invite young people to pray with us, to attend Mass and other liturgies, to join in faith formation opportunities, and to participate in service projects and works of charity. With us and through us, let them experience the joy of the Gospel!

For religious communities, nothing is more important in promoting vocations than welcoming young people into the heart of our communities.

Despite the abundant availability of social media and online content, recent surveys indicate that nothing can replace direct personal contact with consecrated persons and communities in supporting vocational discernment.

Meetings with a member(s) of a religious institute, opportunities to share in communal prayer and meals, invitations to special occasions like professions and jubilees and meeting individually with a vocation director are all considered more helpful by young adult discerners than websites and social media.

Finally, E stands for encouragement.

Although most religious communities in our country are becoming smaller and older, young members of these institutes report that smaller numbers and aging members did not deter them.

The majority of young religious report that the encouragement of others was an important factor in their vocation discernment. This encouragement comes from members of their institute, vocation ministers and spiritual directors.

But new members in religious institutes also report they received encouragement from those with whom and to whom they minister, diocesan priests, people in their parish, and friends. Unfortunately, many younger consecrated persons did not receive a great deal of encouragement from parents, siblings, or other family members early in their discernment, but this support seemed to grow after they entered religious life.

Whether you prefer pumpkin, apple, or mincemeat, I hope you have ample opportunities to enjoy homemade pie this holiday season.

And with each bite, I hope you will remember to pray, invite, and encourage vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life!

Sr. Constance Veit is the communications director for the Little Sisters of the Poor in the United States and an occupational therapist.