

Guest Commentary – 650 words

How to give birth to new vocations

By Sister Constance Veit, I.S.P.

We Little Sisters spend our lives caring for the elderly, but I try to keep up with young people as much as I can. Last week I read a blog for young women about the impact of our throw-away culture on the quality of personal relationships. The more we move around, according to a recent study, the more likely we are to develop attitudes of disposability toward our material possessions – and we also come to perceive relationships in the same way.

An attitude of disposability promotes superficiality rather than deep personal relationships. Research suggests disposability is detrimental to our mental and physical health. It's no wonder that while they often seem absorbed in their mobile devices, young people crave real community and truly meaningful relationships.

Pope Francis understands the hearts of the young. His message for this year's World Day of Prayer for Vocations, to be celebrated April 17th, is based on the realization that vocations are born within the community that is the Church. "The call of God comes to us by means of a mediation which is communal," the pope wrote. "God calls us to become a part of the Church and, after we have reached a certain maturity within it, he bestows on us a specific vocation. The vocational journey is undertaken together with the brothers and sisters whom the Lord has given to us: it is a con-vocation."

Our Holy Father asserts that this "ecclesial dynamism" is a cure for the indifference and individualism too prevalent in our society. It establishes "the communion in which indifference is vanquished by love, because it demands that we go beyond ourselves and place our lives at the service of God's plan, embracing the historical circumstances of his holy people."

My conversations with women in discernment confirm that young people strongly desire life in community. At the same time, they want to give the best of themselves to the Church. How important it is for us as a community of faith to journey with young people in discernment, and to support their first steps into the priesthood and consecrated life!

It is no less important to offer our friendship to mature priests and consecrated women and men who give of themselves each day for the sake of God's people. I cannot begin to express how much the support of countless members of the Church meant to us Little Sisters of the Poor in the months leading up to our recent Supreme Court case. Many people commended us for our courage, telling us that we were standing up for religious believers of all faiths. But we could never have done it without the prayerful support of so many!

As we celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis is calling on all the faithful to appreciate the ecclesial dynamism of vocations, "so that communities of faith can become, after the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, like a mother's womb giving birth to new vocations. "The motherhood of the Church finds expression in constant prayer for vocations and

in the work of educating and accompanying all those who perceive God's call," the Pope wrote. "The Church is also the mother of vocations in her continual support of those who have dedicated their lives to the service of others."

When people asked our foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, to pray for them, or when she wished to thank someone, she often suggested, "Let us say a Hail Mary together." On April 17th let's be mothers and fathers of vocations by offering a Hail Mary – or a whole rosary – for the priests and religious who have influenced us, and for the young people in whom we perceive the potential to be holy priests and consecrated women and men!

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