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RESPONSES TO THE VATICAN DOCUMENT: CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THEIR MISSION IN SCHOOLS

To advance the discussion and study of this most recent document, the editors invited select Catholic educators to offer reflections, observations, and critiques of Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools. While each contributor responds from an individual background and a unique set of experiences, the following essays help us to appreciate how the document is being received and interpreted in different educational settings.

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It was a fortuitous coincidence that I was already in a serious study of Margaret Wheatley's book, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversation to Restore Hope in the Future* (2002) in preparation for a conference for Catholic school personnel, when a friend gave me a copy of *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*. While the two manuscripts are different from one another in significant ways, at the same time they enlighten and help to further define each other. The influence of one on the other greatly affected my understanding, and deepened my appreciation of the Congregation's newest document, a companion piece to *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982).

Consecrated Persons is a difficult read, and that may be due to the Vatican translation and the assumption that the reader is familiar with such constructs as "spirituality of communion," "evangelical completeness," "plenary humanism," "culture of vocations," "internal liberalism," "vertical relationalism," and "horizontal relationalism." Working through the awkward constructions and unpacking the tightly worded expressions, however, was well worth the effort. I found meditating on this document a prayerfully rich and inspirational experience as well as a needed affirmation. Listening to the carefully constructed message of the document was, in some sense, a vindication of my life's work, almost an apologia, in face of the mass exodus from the classrooms, for a variety of reasons, by my fellow vowed religious.

I did, however, wince when encountering the word “abandon” in describing the religious communities and the school ministry, and I objected to the phrase “estrangement from the teaching apostolate” (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 2002, art. 6). I thought those words somewhat harsh, and not entirely accurate. If, however, the absence of vowed religious in the schools invites a fresh rediscovery “[of] the charism, the roots and the modalities for our presence in schools” (CCE, 2002, art. 6), the casting of a new vision of the place of the religious in the school ministry, then, we might be able to see the good and the constructive emerge from a collapse of what worked in the past, but no longer is.

As a Dominican, the document renewed God’s call to me to minister to the people of God through the Church’s schools. It convinced me anew that because I witness to the evangelical councils, I have something special to give to the apostolate of education. The document named three unique gifts that I, as a vowed religious, can give the school community. Because of these gifts, I have the potential of being a leaven in the community.

First, because of my lifestyle I quite naturally link education with evangelization, a concept that has progressively taken on meaning in the educational documents written since *Gravissimum educationis* (Second Vatican Council, 1965). In my 50 years of experience in Catholic schools, it has been the consecrated teacher who has been the principal catalyst in furthering the religious maturity of students, and introducing them to the person of Christ. Others do it, but I have noticed that religious do it instinctively and intuitively. The Congregation for Catholic Education specifies this “evangelical completeness” as a fundamental contribution of consecrated persons to the educational mission of the schools.

The second gift I bring is my lifetime daily experience with formation, my working knowledge of the component parts of formation, and how to interact with the school as a formation community. It is this skill, honed by many religious communities of men and women over centuries of use, that the document claims leads to learning by way of the relational. The formational aspect of religious life has prepared consecrated persons in a special way to offer a personalized education by way of attentive listening and dialogue. “They are, in fact, convinced that ‘education is a thing of the heart,’ and that, consequently, an authentic formative process can only be initiated through a personalized relationship” (CCE, 2002, art. 62). The school is a place where the heart can be formed to be open to caring for others.

Consecrated Persons particularly fueled my increasing realization and conviction that Catholic schools must promote the relational dimension of the person and foster the care that needs to be taken in establishing authentic educational relationships with young people and in teaching them to nurture relationships with others, and ultimately with God. While the document maintains that the presence of consecrated persons is particularly helpful in facili-

tating this dynamic in schools, I am hopeful that this can happen at the hands of all teachers. Vowed religious model the way in which it happens.

I believe there will be a dramatic shift in emphasis in our Catholic schools in this new millennium, a shift to include the relational in a much more explicit manner than we have in the past, and if the Congregation is urging vowed religious to be in the forefront of the movement, then I also hear the document sound a call for religious not only to stay with the schools in partnership with their lay colleagues, but to increase in number so that they can share the gifts of their chosen lifestyle more effectively. In addition, I read into the message of *Consecrated Persons* a need for vowed religious to examine their motivation for ministry and to consider the needs of the People of God before the natural inclinations of self.

Third, the consecrated person, as a visible and living sign of God's love relationship with each individual, is best able to foster a climate in which one addresses the global questions of life and is led gradually, through the educational process, to discover life as a gift from God and to discern the specific task God has for each of us. The Congregation for Catholic Education uses the concept "culture of vocation" to describe this "fundamental component of the new evangelization" (CCE, 2002, art. 56). I interpret this as a willingness to reveal to others the fact that I am in love with my God, and will exhibit a generous spirit in sharing with others the details of my love. In so doing, I necessarily share the educational charism and spirituality that animates me.

Thus for me, *Consecrated Persons* not only marks an anniversary of the Vatican II document, *Declaration on Christian Education*, but it also provides a complementary companion to *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, and it unfolds a contemporary, exciting and enriched vision of the role of vowed religious in the schools. Parts of the vision may have been understood by some in the past, but changing conditions of the Church, the social needs and challenges of today, and the new importance of the ministry of schools brings the vision into a new and sharper focus.

As a religious I also bring to the work of education a freedom that allows me to pick up my bookbag and go where I am sent. There are many advantages to being able to go anywhere, anytime to meet the needs of the Church. This reality helps keep the place of evangelization uppermost on the list of the purposes of education. As a religious woman I can continue the unbroken contribution that American religious have made in founding the largest and most successful private school system in the world. Our achievement is unparalleled in the annals of history and our particular mark on the schools is a matter of record.

The document concludes with a thank you to the vowed religious from the Congregation of Catholic Education; it is appropriate, I believe, that we religious thank the Congregation, not only for writing this important document that points to both the past as a model and to the future as a possibility, but for

the call it has sounded to religious world-wide. And while many of the Church's documents make use of past declarations, encyclicals, exhortations, and teachings, this particular work brings many of the Church's best expressions of the value of the ministry of schools and the role the religious play in that ministry, and presents it to us in one document.

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The Vatican document, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* was made public on the 37th anniversary of *Gravissimum educationis* (October 28, 1965), and written by the Congregation for Catholic Education. *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* highlights the unique role of consecrated persons in the mission of education. This document, which not only captures the evangelical witness of consecrated persons in schools, also supports the missionary dynamics and core values of Catholic schools. Reflective of previous post-Vatican II documents regarding the mission of Catholic education: *To Teach as Jesus Did* (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972), *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977), *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (CCE, 1982), and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1998), the text consists of four sections, organized into two chapters. The introduction calls the consecrated person "to live the evangelic councils and bring the humanism of the beatitudes to the field of education and schools" (CCE, 2002, art. 6). The document provides reflection and guidelines on the profile and educational mission of consecrated persons in the modern world. Words of appreciation to consecrated religious conclude the document.

Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools certainly speaks to all the baptized. It provides a threefold interlocking call that stems from our baptism: a call to holiness, a call to vocation of service, and a call to Christian maturity. The Second Vatican Council embraces all baptized persons as equally called and fully challenged to participate in the community of Christian living in solidari-

ty with the *anawim*. The document states that “this mission requires a commitment of holiness, generosity, and skilled educational professionalism so that the truth about the person as revealed by Jesus may enlighten the growth of the young generations and of the entire community” (CCE, 2002, art. 6).

The call to Christian maturity takes shape in the document’s challenge for believers to be educated and formed. Education, which is anchored in the life of Jesus the Christ and formed in the freedom of living a prophetic life of chastity, poverty and obedience, is certainly a witness and testimony. This is where consecrated persons become true witnesses to Gospel living. *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* calls those women and men to be witnesses to Christ, and to care for all humankind in faith, hope, and love. Renewed by this call, consecrated persons, along with all baptized in the faith, live out the foundation of the human condition, growing in the image and likeness of God, the Trinity of Persons in community - a community of oneness which has no hierarchy of holiness.

The vocation to service is another spiritual aspect which is well stated in this document. Preferential option for the poor, intercultural education and coexistence, the defense of children’s rights, and creation of a culture of peace are all opportunities by which transformation of the modern world through evangelization becomes essential in the mission of consecrated persons. Through Christ’s love, consecrated persons must be able to transform the Gospel message into the search for meaning and purpose for those they serve. “Young people.... expect to see persons who invite them to seriously question themselves, and to discover the deepest meaning of human existence and of history” (CCE, 2002, art. 50).

Omitted from *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* is the invitation to consecrated life. Although it may be implied by the very nature of their witness and testimony, the call to such a vocation and the need for personal invitation could have been captured more directly in this document. There is a reference to the “culture of vocations” (CCE, 2002, art. 56) but is noted more as a sharing of the consecrated persons’ charism with the laity involved in the school or an awakening of Christians to a vocation rooted in the Gospel living.

As we begin the third Christian millennium, the system of Catholic schools in the United States is currently in crisis with an enrollment decline, school closures, and a shifting educational market. The presence of consecrated persons has diminished over the past decades to approximately 6% of the teaching staff. The document cites this “estrangement from the teaching apostolate” (CCE, 2002, art. 6) as problematic. Globally, Catholic education has been on the rise especially in Africa and Asia. As these continents are also experiencing steady increases in religious vocations, one might wonder if Catholic education, and especially the presence of Catholic schools, is related to vocations to the consecrated life.

Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools makes reference to the dignity of women. "The presence and appreciation of women is therefore essential for preparing a culture that really does place at its center people, the search for the peaceful settlement of conflicts, unity in diversity, assistance and solidarity" (CCE, 2002, art. 64). It is always reassuring to see Church documents in support of the great contributions women over the centuries continue to make within the institutional Church and the global world. We can never forget St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and her witness and testimony to Catholic schools in the United States.

The core values addressed in *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* include: the mission of education as it supports the investment of building community; sharing of resources especially with those less fortunate; moral developments that provide for the critical questioning in life, appreciation of families, the support of the greater Church, and the worth of our individual and collective faith. These core values testify to our mission and legacy. Summoned by the Church, consecrated persons have been the building blocks for such an endeavor. Consecrated persons will continue to be living witnesses and a testimony of what has been a fruitful past and hopeful future in the ministry of Catholic education.

Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools could have strengthened its position if the vision of this document was broadened to include further reflection on the role of all baptized in the faith. The document raises several theological points that apply to all baptized persons who are called, educated and commissioned within the Church for the ministry of education. It is disappointing to discover the lack of attention to inclusive language in this document, though recent Vatican documents have also ignored this courtesy. But especially with this topic and this context, namely vowed religious in schools, it would seem especially important to display such sensitivity and inclusivity. Great attention to detail and language have obviously gone into the document. It would only add to the Christ-like character of this text had inclusive language been employed. Furthermore, by writing a document titled, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, the Congregation for Catholic Education sends forth a subtle, negative message to the laity, who through their baptismal commitment live a personal witness and testimony of a consecrated life in Jesus the Christ. Through baptism, we are all consecrated to the royal priesthood of Christ...women and men. Through the sacredness of baptism we are called to live a "consecrated life" of holiness, Christian maturity, and vocation to service. We are, all of us baptized, consecrated for service, and it would be energizing to see such consecration welcomed and celebrated.

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A growing phenomenon today is the large number of young lay people who, upon graduation from college, choose to serve in Catholic schools through faith-based volunteer programs. Most of these programs adhere to a similar formula: the volunteers commit to 1 or 2 years of service to Catholic schools; living in faith-based community with other volunteers (often taking up housing in unused convents or rectories); and usually earning little more than is necessary, sharing money – as well as time and prayer – with each other.

When reading of the praise often lavished upon these worthy endeavors, I am always reminded of the words of an inveterate parish priest in South Texas who, after having such a program explained to him by an eager new volunteer, calmly remarked: “Sounds kinda like a short-term version of good old-fashioned ‘poverty, chastity, and obedience’ to me.”

That so many young people in recent years are choosing volunteer teaching programs in today’s society is remarkable; perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that men and women have been making even deeper commitments to Catholic education through their religious vocations for centuries. For Catholic schools, the ideas of these new programs are nothing new at all. Their genius lies in that they imitate, in a smaller way, the roles, rules, and responsibilities that have been assumed largely by priests, brothers, and women religious throughout the history of American Catholicism.

It is good then, in the face of our newest plans for the revitalization of schools, to be reminded of the continuing primary importance of the men and women religious who are at the very heart of the Catholic mission in education, such is the argument of the recently released *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines* (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 2002). The document, an offering from the Curia's Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, was presented by Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski and Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau, respectively prefect and secretary of the Congregation, on November 19, 2002. Among other things, the document sets out to reflect on the nature and importance of the consecrated life in the school setting, to praise the many contributions that vowed religious have given to Catholic education, and to exhort consecrated persons to a continual renewal of mission and purpose in their work in schools. The overarching vision it offers for Catholic education is consistent with centuries of Catholic teaching and as such, it is truly a foundational model from which all schools find the real root and origin of their mission. The document should be welcomed, studied, and embraced by both religious and lay alike as an important entry into the continuing dialogue among all who work in Catholic schools.

Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools refers to men and women religious as "vitally important" (CCE, 2002, art. 6) to the work of Catholic education. Its primary intended audience is consecrated persons working in school settings, and its purpose is to thank them, motivate them, and sustain them in their dedicated service. The document was reportedly conceived as a companion piece (Grocholewski, 2002) to the 1982 document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (CCE), which is now more than 20 years old, and offered similar praise, exhortation, and motivation to lay people. Both of these documents in turn have great affinity with the 1997 document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (CCE, 1998), which looked at the challenges and opportunities facing Catholic schools today.

When reading through all of these documents, one is struck by the near-uniformity of tone and approach found among them: they are marked by honesty about the difficulties faced in Catholic education today, and yet at the same time are pervaded by a sense of hopefulness and joy. Like its predecessors, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* expresses sympathy and understanding for the challenges faced by consecrated persons both in their work as teachers and in their life in community: "We are painfully aware of certain difficulties which induce your Communities to abandon the school sector [such as] the dearth of religious vocations, estrangement from the teaching apostolate" (CCE, 2002, art. 6). Cardinal Grocholewski, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, acknowledges this directly in his pres-

entation of *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*:

...the context of school today is marked by great trouble. In the school world, especially in the West, a widespread weariness can be perceived on the part of teachers, who feel unmotivated and frustrated in their educational task. Another very disturbing sign is the increase in violence at school and among adolescents. (Grocholewski, 2002, p. 4)

Anyone who has tried to grapple with a room full of adolescents during last period on a Friday in late May will be able to identify all too well with the ‘widespread weariness’ mentioned by the Cardinal. From a teaching perspective, it is comforting to know that they seem to realize a good deal of this truth even in the upper reaches of the hierarchy.

The other major challenge addressed by the document and its presenters is the troubling lack of vocations to religious life. Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau states in his presentation: “In the short period of 30 years [since Vatican II], the presence of consecrated persons has fallen drastically, radically changing the features of the Catholic school, and making it much more difficult to preserve the Catholic identity” (Pittau, 2002, p. 5). Comments such as this are present to such an extent in all of these documents that it becomes clear that this issue weighs especially heavily on curial minds. It is further evident that the concern over vocations is rooted in an even deeper concern, which is the need to uphold Catholic identity in today’s schools.

The challenge, then, is to continue to hope – to continue to affirm, support, and renew the importance of Catholic education in today’s world. And as it has often done, the Church responds to this challenge by offering a vision or ideal – an overall conception of education and schools based on the teachings of Christ and the Church. In brief, the Catholic view is one in which the value of the human person is only fully revealed in God, confirming both the great dignity and the fragile dependence of the human being. In the educational setting, the formation of the human person must be based on an understanding of each human person as divinely created in the image and likeness of God. There must be a marriage of faith and reason in schools, as both are integral parts of a full understanding of humanity. It is a vision of a Christianity wedded to humanism, or “plenary humanism” (CCE, 2002, art. 37), as the document calls it.

Schools that are Catholic must therefore be places of formation, where education and evangelization take place simultaneously (CCE, 2002). And, the document suggests, it is the consecrated persons who are best suited to lead in this mission, because of their own commitment to ongoing personal formation in the footsteps of Christ by choosing a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. “The first and fundamental contribution to the educational mission in schools by consecrated persons is the evangelical completeness of their lives” (CCE, 2002, art. 25). Indeed, the entire first section of the document contains

an extended profile of consecrated persons, explaining their “radical response” to the call of the gospel as the first and best form of “teaching” that they offer. Their very life choices have made them inherently “authentic” in the eyes of others. In schools, therefore, consecrated men and women are called to a special role – to be “experts of communion”: present-day prophets of the Church’s vision (CCE, 2002). In short, by word and deed, they are expected to be leaders.

Through their example and efforts, the vowed religious serve as the Church’s chief agents of formation for all members of school communities: modeling for them and calling them to a Christ-like life of self-giving, both vertically in their relationship to God, and horizontally in their relationship with others. Drawing upon the wisdom and insight they learn and practice through poverty, chastity, and obedience, they also become experts in bringing others to a greater awareness and understanding of important church teachings that are especially important for modern times. These teachings include social justice advocacy, intercultural understanding, the preferential option for the poor, the proper uses of the gift of sexuality, and promotion of peace and non-violence (CCE, 2002).

Ultimately, they are the people who make the visions and ideals of the Church a reality here on earth, by living out Church teaching “in the flesh.” Their very lives show that “the evangelical message possesses considerable importance for living in today’s world and is also comprehensible for those who live in a competitive society such as ours,” as well as testifying that “holiness is the highest humanizing proposal of man and of history” (CCE, 2002, art. 12). Therefore they are “indispensable” to Catholic schools, for through their lives they become living signs of the truth and real-world potential of the Catholic vision.

In order to remain authentic leaders, consecrated persons must continually contemplate and examine their own lives in response to their calling. The final sections of the document call consecrated persons to a life of continual renewal, where they must strive to “revive their educational passion living it in school communities as a testimony of encounter between different vocations and between generations” (CCE, 2002, art. 82). This is yet another way in which consecrated persons serve as powerful and living models, for this “state of permanent formation” (CCE, 2002, art. 83) is one that must be undertaken regularly by all who work in schools, and indeed by schools themselves, as a continual examination of their effectiveness and their Catholicity: “It is a matter of discovering and renewing an awareness of one’s own identity” (CCE, 2002, art. 82).

Today, the question of Catholic identity in schools appears to be shifting to new ground. While vocations to religious orders continue to decline, the volunteer programs mentioned at the beginning of this essay are thriving as never before. New programs are created every year, and most of them enjoy waiting lists of willing and qualified would-be teachers. Before long, it may

well be the case that the majority of the lay workforce in Catholic education will be alumni of such programs – a new generation rapidly assuming important roles throughout Catholic education.

Sadly, however, this is a generation of Catholics who are largely unfamiliar with many Church teachings, and certainly unconnected with the deeper vision and theology of Catholic education expressed in Vatican pronouncements such as this one. There is a danger in this disconnection, for as these young people become more and more involved in schools, there is an increased chance of the initial fervor fading or burning out, not unlike the seed on rocky soil, whose flowers soon withered due to lack of roots.

Perhaps the most important realization that a document like *Consecrated Persons* can offer to the young lay teachers of today is that there is a way to connect with those roots, by seeing them, deep and alive, through the witness of consecrated persons. If properly communicated to all who work in Catholic schools, the common vision and mission of Catholic education can be a powerful, unifying, and uplifting force in the face of all the struggles faced by schools today. Therefore, it is important that the Church's vision of a "plenary humanist" education, as lived and taught authentically by consecrated persons, be taken to heart by the new generations of lay leaders.

In fact, this document itself might be a very good place to start that discussion in schools across America. In its present form, it is not ideal for direct dissemination to faculties, boards, and other important groups. But if the essential ideas could be distilled and the main points extended to apply to the mission of all schools and all who serve in them, it could have a great impact as an impetus for open and honest dialogue about the past roots and future directions of Catholic education.

As a member of the 'new generation' myself, I can say that such dialogue and connection with tradition is greatly desired and needed. I think that my generation, by and large, is one that is seeking always for confidence and authenticity, both in beliefs and in people. Furthermore, I wholeheartedly agree with the idea, also expressed in the document, that in their hearts young lay people truly want the religious in schools to be the "authentic leaders" in the faith that they are envisioned to be: "Young people, in fact, and often also the other members of the educational community, more or less consciously expect to find in consecrated persons privileged interlocutors in the search for God" (CCE, 2002, art. 58). Younger Catholics today, whether students or colleagues of consecrated persons, want and need to be led by the boldly spoken and lived convictions of consecrated men and women – proclamations of a different vision of schools, life, and the human person than that which the world offers. Their guiding voices are urgently needed in the seemingly endless discussions and dialogues, often contentious and sometimes fractious, which characterize the inner workings of Catholic schools at all levels.

In the face of the decline in religious vocations, it is good to know that

there is certainly something real and positive going on in the hearts and minds of many young Catholics who are willing to offer time and talent to Catholic schools. But 1 to 2 year volunteer commitments are just the beginning. What is needed is a new corps of dedicated men and women who are willing to assume the mission and the struggle that is Catholic education today. And there is no better model for such commitment than those who have in effect taken the basics asked of all who work in Catholic schools and extended them into a lifetime's worth of service. We would all do well to honor, encourage, praise, and imitate them as fully as we can.

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The purposes of *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*, as described by its authors, are to “share some reflections, offer some guidelines and incite some further investigations of the educational mission and the presence of consecrated persons in schools” (art. 3). Certainly, the authors accomplish the first of these goals in sharing a multitude of reasons that consecrated persons must remain active in educational institutions. However, what might become more interesting are the dialogues and investigations that follow the reading of this document.

Like so many leaders in the Church, Catholic educators are challenged to recognize the valuable roles that laypersons play, and to understand the unique roles of consecrated persons. Although *Consecrated Persons* fails to give full recognition to the growing talents of lay persons to minister to youth, it does an excellent job of pointing to specific gifts consecrated persons offer our school communities.

Throughout the document, the authors discuss scores of goals that educators aim to fill. At times they state, and at other times imply, that consecrated persons have special gifts, unique experiences, or different understandings that enable

them to meet these goals. For example, the authors suggest that consecrated persons are able to educate and form young people. In other words, consecrated persons are able to help students understand their identities and propose ways to live out those identities. While this may be true, it ignores the fact that countless lay teachers do this as well.

Another area in which the authors' arguments are weak is concern for the human person. "Because of their vocation consecrated persons undertake to promote the dignity of the human person" (art. 31), yet are not all Christians called to promote the dignity of the human person? Moreover, are not all who choose to answer the call of educator committed to promoting the dignity of the human person? Further in the text, the authors advocate, "consecrated persons must be careful to safeguard the priority of the person in their educational program" (art. 61). Again, one could easily exchange "educators" for "consecrated persons" in that statement, for all educators, religious or lay, must strive "to discover and cultivate each person's talents and help young people to become responsible for their own formation and to cooperate in that of their companions" (art. 61).

The authors continue with this idea of respect for all human life in their discussions of the preferential option for the poor and the defense of children's rights. Once again, the duties to the poor and to children that the authors invoke as those of consecrated persons in fact belong to all. It is unlikely that any educator would remark that because he is not ordained, he is not bound to exert a preferential option for the poor, or that because she is not a member of a religious community, she does not need to defend the rights of children.

The experiences of living in community and of contemplative prayer, the authors contend, provide consecrated persons with unique gifts to share with the school community. While not all lay persons may have the benefit of life in community or a deep prayer life, it seems that the authors have overlooked the experiences of countless men and women. Many individuals form intentional faith communities when they participate in volunteer programs, such as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and other faith-based initiatives. Although these commitments typically last only a few years, they are characterized by that same "experience of communion" as life in religious communities. And we must not ignore the lasting faith communities that form when men and women heed the call to Christian marriage. Without a doubt, the bases of these small faith communities are "truth and love." Thus, both religious and lay may act as "leaven that is able to create relations of increasingly deep communion" (art. 41).

Prayer, especially quiet, contemplative prayer, is another area that the authors submit that consecrated persons are particularly suited in which to lead and instruct others. Certainly, consecrated persons are a great source for learning about discernment and how to deepen one's prayer life. Yet how many lay ministers take on this role beautifully? Personally, I know of at least a dozen

campus, university, and parish ministers who educate others “to a silence that leads to listening to God, to paying attention to others, to the situation that surrounds us, to creation” (art. 24).

Despite these several questions raised, the authors do repeatedly assert this point: consecrated persons fill an essential and unique role in schools. The most potent argument the authors make in defense of this is “the specificity of the consecrated life lies in its being a sign, a memory and prophecy to the values of the Gospel” (art. 20). In many, if not most ways, however, it seems that all faculty and staff, lay and clergy, married and celibate, single and vowed religious, share in all aspects of the unique mission of Catholic schools. Imagine how much is added to school culture when the signs of faith are living people: men and women who embody sacrifice and selflessness. Blessed are the schools that house the living signs of Gospel values, of whatever state in life.