Religious life in our times is changing before us day by day and past expectations and current images no longer fit. Familiar questions are asked: “Why be a sister today when a woman can be a nurse, social worker, and teacher without entering religious life?” “Why do you stay when so many left and few are entering?”

With a decrease in numbers and a rise in the ministerial roles for women and men in the Church, religious are faced with these basic questions of identity and validity. Together we try to find the words that articulate the meaning of religious life today and give us the excitement to carry on the mission of our communities and forge into new ministries for the life of the Church.

We believe that the Spirit still stirs in the hearts of men and women, gifting them with the charism of the vowed life for the Church, calling them to live in community, to serve God’s people, and bring about the kingdom of God in the world. The call is heard and they are challenged to respond. “For some people, religious life is the way that best calls them to be their best and most spirit-filled selves. It’s as simple as that.” (words of Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB)

As we believe that the spirit continues to stir in the hearts of men and women calling them to religious life, we also deeply feel the spirit stirring in our own hearts compelling us to faithfulness. Why do we stay? We stay because we are convinced that this is God’s desire for us. We continue on this journey of religious life because we see the value of the vowed life, community prayer and the spiritual growth that come from our lives together. We are committed to this life because we value our call to share in the ministry of Jesus to bring all people into the reign of God. The resulting peace and fulfillment that comes from knowing this call cannot be satisfied elsewhere.

The women who choose religious life today are older with more varied life experiences

(Continued on page 3)
Sister Ruth Ann grew up with the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine and has always known CSA to be part of her family. Born in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, sister attended school at Immaculate Heart of Mary where her mother taught alongside the sisters as a first grade teacher for over twenty years.

“When I realized God was calling me to consider religious life I never looked farther than CSA”, reflected Sister Ruth Ann during a recent interview. It was when she attended a prayer day at Mount Augustine that Sister Ruth Ann knew that she “had come home.” Her search to do more with her life had finally ended and she entered the community of the Sisters of Charity in 1982. When sister talks about her decision to become a CSA she states, “I knew that these sisters were women just like me...ordinary women I could easily identify with. Women who were open to my gifts and excited that I would consider being one of them.”

Sister Ruth Ann is in a position to invite other women to become part of CSA. She was asked to be the Vocation Director in 1994. When asked if she found Vocation work challenging, she responded with optimism, “I know there are women with the same restlessness that I experienced...the same yearnings I had. My task is to be where they are.” Sister brings an enthusiasm to life and to her ministry and says of CSA that “we need to promote and celebrate who we are!”

 presently, Sister Ruth Ann works in the Social Services Department at St. Vincent Charity Hospital. She has been at the hospital for ten years. She lives with two other CSA’s at the Beaumont Avenue local community.

When Sister Ruth Ann reflects on her years with the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, she states emphatically, “I believe what I am doing is right and not to do it would be denying myself before God.” When she further reflects on the future of religious life, sister states that “nothing is clear about where religious life is going or what it will look like in the future. Living with ambiguity is uncomfortable for me,” she admits, “and I prefer everything in life to be logical and orderly. Learning to live with questions and uncertainty is hard.”

Sister feels sustained by the community as the other CSA’s provide her with the energy to do what God has called her to do both as Vocation Director and in her ministry at the hospital. “How we live our lives will draw women to us and they will feel our rootedness and become part of our journey.”
including education, travel, independent living, financial and professional success. Many have a developed spirituality and have been serving the Church for a long time, yet are still hungering for something more in their lives. In contrast to the women of the past who most often chose religious life because of a particular ministry, women today are drawn by a variety of factors: the charism of a community; the style of community life; a counter-cultural way of life; a desire for a life of prayer; or a yearning to live the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

What is “Given up” is minimal compared to the new found freedom that is experienced as each vow becomes a way of life for religious.

The three vows are at the heart of consecrated Religious Life.

They challenge religious to be of one mind and heart as they:

• listen and respond to God individually and as a community; (obedience)
• give of their time, talents, material and spiritual resources and very selves to meet the needs of others; (poverty)
• grow in a singular relationship with God and become free to be in loving relationship with others in such a way as to draw them into a deeper relationship with God (chastity).

In the past the more negative aspects of the vows were stressed. It is true that the vows make some demands, but what is “given up” is minimal compared to the new found freedom that is experienced as each vow becomes a way of life for religious.

The prophetic voices of those who write about the future maintain that there will always be men and women called to live religious life. Sr. Joan Chittister says, “It has existed and survived in every great culture of every period in every major spiritual tradition the world has ever known.” Communities of the future will most likely be smaller and membership will vary from one community to the next. It is a challenge for religious living vowed life today to shape the future by their conscious choices which will effect the way they live community life, the social justice issues that become a focus for their ministry, their governance structures, and the makeup of their membership.

Sr. Joan also says of the future: “...religious life will be viable, worthwhile, authentic only if it does something to bring the reign of God where God’s will is most missing right now.” Challenging words indeed! But a viable, worthwhile, authentic future for religious life is worthy of our very lives.

(We wish to thank Sisters Kathy Andrews and Ruth Ann Patrick for contributing material to this article)

CSA VOCATION MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION

Mardi Gras is a time noted for its celebration. CSA celebrated the event a little earlier than usual but with the same enthusiasm and pizazz than can be seen on Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

On February 18, 1995 CSA Vowed Members, Associates and friends gathered together in prayer and reflection to celebrate their own personal calling by God in the Church. A video presentation by Joan Chittister, OSB on vocations and the challenge “why not religious life?” sparked a sharing of insights on the future of the vowed life and vocation ministry in CSA. The practical aspects of the “how to” of inviting others to join CSA as Vowed Members or Associates were discussed followed by a commitment to personally participate in vocation ministry in CSA.

The day ended with a Mardi Gras party to celebrate who we are today and how God is calling us into a new future.
Sr. Mary Denis Maher

“Blessed be a God whose many faces reveal us to ourSr. Mary O'Grady and Sr. Ancilla Smyth, CSJ

Sr. Eileen Keating

Sr. Rosalyn Lang

Sisters Mary Jean Eucker, Mary Dorothy Tecce, and Ruth Ann Patrick
CSA RECALLS, REFLECTS, AND RESPONDS

While the CSA community contemplates the future, members were asked to look back and recall what originally attracted them to this congregation and what sustains them today. They were asked about their hopes for the future and what it is they most value about their life at the present time. On this and the following page, we present the words and faces of some of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine.

WHAT DREW ME TO CSA?

"The sisters I knew were dedicated to God...and were deeply in touch with the people they served.”
(Sr. Carole DeCme)

"The variety of ministries, especially the care of the orphans, since I was an orphan at the age of ten.”
(Sr. Dorothy Surgala)

"The care of children at Parmadale and of the poor in the clinic at St. Vincent Charity Hospital. I was attracted by the spirit of joy of the sisters.”
(Sr. Joan Gallagher)

"A desire to work for the Lord and the example of Sister Ignatia and Sister Ellen Slattery.”
(Sr. Xavier Gorman)

"The CSA Sisters I knew were women of faith who loved and laughed and lived fully each day. They were real women attentive to all they experienced and their spirit sparked something in me.”
(Sr. Nancy Hendershot)

"In All Things Charity”, our motto, was one of the deciding factors for me...an awesome and ultimate goal to try to live into.”
(Sr. Elaine Nimberger)

"My first encounter as a child of eleven as a patient in Charity Hospital and Sister Anita who was in charge of the floor.”
(Sr. Martha Connelly)

"I was edified by their (the sisters at Parmadale) kindness, their caring, and their giving. I knew this was the community I wanted to be with and serve people as they did.”
(Sr. Pauline Panik)

WHAT SUSTAINS ME?

"I am sustained by my prayer life and the belief that CSA is on the brink of a new direction and new beginnings. CSA has a future; and however that is played out is in the process of discovery.”
(Sr. Regina Fierman)

"Jesus, my sisters in CSA, my family and friends...all who believe as I do in the value of vowed life.”
(Sr. Sharon Anne Yanak)

(Continued on page 6)
“The knowledge that I am daily called by God to continue doing what I am doing...by prayer and support both in CSA and from others especially my family.”

(Sr. Marian Durkin)

“Prayer and the example of all our sisters, especially those on the second floor who are in pain. My belief that establishing Regina Health Center was a great thing to do and it will be a great blessing.”

(Sr. Verona Porter)

“Daily Mass and Communion with Our Lord and with others who also devote their energies to peace, justice, unity in this world and sharing God’s love.”

(Sr. Assumpta Kneier)

“I am sustained by the spirit of the community, kindness and personal interest expressed by the sisters.”

(Sr. Adele Hart)

“The love of God which is renewed daily and the understanding of those who are community and are sustained by the same God of love.”

(Sr. Mary Jean Eucker)

“The grace of God and his blessed mother, faithfulness to prayer, and a love of religious life.”

(Sr. Ancilla Eilingher)

“WHAT GIVES ME HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?”

“There is a place for religious women in the Church. The roles may differ as times change, but even if some congregations dissolve, that does not mean all will die. God and the Church need us.”

(Sr. Cabrini Ferritto)

“I have hope for the future because there is so much we can need to do...we can make a difference with God’s help.”

(Sr. Joan Nicholas)

“My faith and utter trust in God’s love.”

(Sr. Helen Agnes Ballah)

“Real desire among CSA to determine the future of religious life. There is a willingness to risk, to rise above individual agendas. There is care for each other. There is energy for ministry.”

(Sr. Judith Ann Karam)

“CSA’s willingness to expand into new areas.”

(Sr. Petrina Scelfo)

“CSA will find unmet needs to fulfill. An example of this is taking the Marycrest girls into the former school of nursing at St. Vincent Charity Hospital.”

(Sr. Catherine Browning)

“The faithfulness of God and the belief that religious life in various forms will always be a part of the Church, and the awareness of the multiple needs of God’s people that need to be served.”

(Sr. Mary Denis)

“My trust in God’s Providence gives me hope for the future. I believe the community is serving the needs of God’s people and will continue to be a blessing to the church and society.”

(Sr. Lillian Fries)

“WHAT DO I PERSONALLY VALUE ABOUT RELIGIOUS LIFE TODAY?”

“I value our call and our ability to be counter-cultural and prophetic. If we don’t capitulate to pressures of our power hungry and consumeristic culture, we can stand as witnesses to the world of the humility and simplicity of Jesus Christ as well as his care for the poor. It is a powerful challenge to which we respond.”

(Sr. Carol Kandiko)

“The freedom each sister has to develop her own talents without being restricted. Also, the spirituality of the community with its love, compassion, encouragement, and peace are all values I appreciate very much.”

(Sr. Eugenia Hosfeld)

“I value our community life, our support of one another, and our celebrations.”

(Sr. Rosella Holleman)

“That we are free to relate to God in the way we find best for us.”

(Sr. Margaret Mary Flory)

“I value the opportunity to seek the needs of today and be fired by the Spirit to find ways of meeting the needs. Most of all, I thank God for allowing me to live into these times...times of freedom to let go of controlled thinking and render deeper faith, hope, and love to God’s indwelling presence.”

(Sr. Rosalyn Lang)

“New possibilities to live out my call from God and the various opportunities and materials with which to be enriched daily.”

(Sr. Mary Virginia Wamffler)

“The opportunity to draw ever close to God.”

(Sr. Mary Virginia Wamffler)

“The freedom to be myself but influenced by the Holy Spirit. No longer have to be a ‘goosestep’ personality.”

(Sr. Bernard Rostas)

“BLESSED BE A GOD WHOSE MANY FACES REVEAL US TO OURSELVES"
Glimpses

Srs. Marian Warta, Agnes McMahon and Mary Leo Liotti are now residing at Mt. Augustine. Having traveled to El Salvador to visit Sr. Catherine Walsh doing mission work there, Sr. Judith Ann Karam was inspired by the faith of the people. Sister traveled with Sr. Celine Metzger, HM...In a new part-time ministry, Sr. Kathy Andrews now serves as a Bereavement Minister at the Busch Family Funeral Chapels in addition to her other CSA responsibilities...Sr. Elaine Nimberger has fulfilled the requirements for National Certification as a Diocesan Natural Family Planning Instructor and conducts some of her classes at the Womankind Center in Garfield Hts. She also serves on the Diocesan Pro Life Advisory Council...As Administrative Assistant for Philosophy and Mission at Timken Mercy Medical Center, Sr. Mary Lois Phillipp has recently had two articles published in Health Progress...Sr. Mary Ann Andrews was elected to the Board of Governors of the Canon Law Society...Sr. Nancy Hendershot has been appointed as one of the sister representatives to the Cleveland Diocesan Pastoral Council...In August of 1994, Sr. Mary Denis had a poem entitled "Inchworm" published in the Yankee Magazine. She also received an honorable mention for a polar bear picture in the ZOO-Dodd Camera Competition...CSA Associate, Sharon Chester, completed her Masters degree in Counseling in 1993 and is working on licensure while employed as a child and family therapist at the West Side Community Mental Health Center in Cleveland.

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Please have her contact
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THE DREAM TEAM COMES TO CLEVELAND

In the fall of 1992, four sisters from the Cleveland Diocesan Vocation Committee met and began "dreaming" about the future of religious life and how it impacts on the communities of Cleveland. This “dream team” decided to invite sisters from a variety of communities to attend a series of four sessions in 1993. The first meeting was held in February and sisters came representing five religious communities. They called themselves the “Dream Catchers.”

Sister Marian Durkin CSA, one of the original members of the “dream team,” reflects on the meetings that took place in 1993 and continued into 1994. "It was a wonderful time for CSA's to share with sisters from other communities around such topics as Community, Leadership, the Vows, and Membership. Religious women in the Cleveland Diocese have always worked well together going all the way back to student days at St. John College. It was exciting to hear from the 'dreamers' in other communities and to discover the common elements of our vision."

The dream catchers have begun the meetings for 1995. Twenty sisters from five congregations were invited to the first session and it is the hope that the group will grow in number. After two years of dreaming together, action steps are beginning to take shape calling for collaboration among communities. Such actions will only strengthen the bonds that already exist between the women religious who serve the needs of the Diocese of Cleveland.
“As religious women we bring to our times a bolder new imagining, the bolder imagining of Christian hope; and yet, we know that, in the end, this hope bears a promise beyond all our imagining!”

T. Kelly, A New Imagining

The CSA congregation has been in reflection and faith sharing with each other on the values that unite us and the future of religious life since the Chapter of 1993.

As CSA, we truly believe in a future for religious life and the giftedness of the charism of religious life in the Church. We are willing to live that impelling vision.

As Joan Chittister, OSB, has stated “Religious life was started by small groups of people with vision so impelling that nothing less than its completion could give satisfaction.” As CSA, we truly believe in a future for religious life and the giftedness of the charism of religious life in the Church. We are willing to live that impelling vision.

The world in which we live is in a crisis of meaning. There is true destruction in numerous spheres affecting the fabric of our lives. Our ministry is calling us to bring hope to this world, to reconstruct a new vision of the world, to enter into the suffering of the people of the world with compassion and love. We look at the emerging needs of the people we serve and determine what CSA stands for today.

How can we be about systemic change in our world? We believe it is by choosing simplicity of life, single heartedness in God, being a voice for the poor and transforming existing organizations from within.

In our core apostolates of education, social service and health care, there are new needs to be met and new ways of meeting the needs. Responding with action to respect our earth, providing direct services to the poor, advocating changes in our health care system, impacting social justice issues, educating for values consistent with a non-violent attitude toward life are just a few of the ways that CSA lives out of the new vision that is being created.

Religious are called to live in community. This value is counter-cultural to the individualism of our world today. Although the forms have changed with the times, community is a place that makes us want to give up some of our individualism in order to make a commitment of trust in relationships. We need others to help us in our conversion. We need others to help us achieve a new vision for the world. Community is a way of life embraced by a common vision of persons willing to be committed to each other and to engage the giftedness of each member.

We are witnessing to another choice of a way of life than is present in the consumerism and individualism of our world today. Our hope is to walk with others who strive to find this meaning, this new vision in their lives.

Religious life entails risk, letting go, increased inclusiveness, active identification with the poor and oppressed and a clear call to generosity and prayer. Meeting the unmet needs of God’s people, shared community life, simplicity of life, and contemplation are criteria for our success.

With much hope, we as CSA, take responsibility to be prophetic ministers and visionaries in collaboration with others to shape the future of religious life. There is some sorrow in letting go of the past but hope in building on the past in creating the future.

“May your inner vision be transformed so that you can see more clearly your own journey with all humankind as a journey of peace, hope, and bondedness.”

(Nm24:15-17; Jn.20:20)

References to Sr. Joan Chittister OSB from:

In Memory Of...
Please remember in your prayers the following Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine who have died since July 1, 1994...

Sister Gerarda Fry
Sister Thelma Nickel
Sister Emmanuel White

May They Rest in Peace.