

The nature of apostolic religious life

Mary Ann McGivern | May. 29, 2012 NCR Today

In his *NCR* [news story](#) [1] about the Loretto celebration of its 200th anniversary, Arthur Jones reported on a forum where speakers proposed a center for spirituality and sustainability and actions on community-building and care of the earth. Several bloggers zeroed in on the mention of global warming, deepening my own suspicion that climate-change deniers set their search engines and write hot, angry responses without reading the entire entry.

One of these hot blogs got me thinking about the nature of apostolic religious life.

I'm a twenty-six year-old Catholic woman. If the Sisters think that "Mother Earth and the effect of climate change is the issue of the 21st century," they can't expect to have any vocations to religious life. What I and my peers are seeking is intimacy with God and the opportunity to lead a God-centered life. I'm sorry to see that these Sisters didn't find time to talk about that. By the way, I'm a second-year resident in cardiology and active in campus ministry at my alma mater, UC-Davis, so I'm no neo-con. As long as the Sisters listen to the sound of their own voices, they will never understand what young women are thinking today.

In Loretto, we say, "Community is for mission." People join us for spirituality, community and mission, but from the first log cabin schoolhouse, we came together as community to do the work. And just now, as I was writing, I heard a public radio interview of a sister in Los Angeles who said, "It is our obligation to help others." Intimacy with God, like happiness and the experience of community as well, is a by-product of mission.

In fact, in my own religious training, I was taught to be suspicious of feeling of intimacy with God. Of course, we all relish those feelings, but that's not what we are supposed to be seeking. Whether we experience a warm flood of God's tenderness or arid cold, we continue to send those darts of love into the Cloud of Unknowing.

We are apostolic religious communities, not contemplative orders. So we don't sit in a chapel, work in the garden or make altar hosts while we practice loving God by loving one another. This is very good work, but it is not the work of apostolic communities.

Apostolic communities practice loving God by obeying Matthew 25:31-46. We feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, clothe the naked, bury the dead. In this day and age, care of Mother Earth is part of the task of feeding the hungry. We may feel infused with joy in God while we do these things -- or not. The point is that we do them. We do them because we have made a commitment to follow Christ by doing them.

Perhaps the end of apostolic religious life is near. That is up to the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, sisters will continue to do the work we understand to be our call.

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/node/30422>