



CULTURE OF VOCATIONS ASSESSMENT TOOL



NRVC
National Religious
Vocation Conference

5401 SOUTH CORNELL AVENUE, SUITE 207
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60615
773-363-5454
NRVC@NRVC.NET | NRVC.NET

CULTURE OF VOCATIONS ASSESSMENT TOOL

BROADLY SPEAKING, culture is a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that identify a group of people and serve to support the goals and work of that group. By extension, a “culture of vocations” within a particular religious community would be the set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices that support the cultivation and retention of vocations in that community. With that in mind, this Culture of Vocation assessment instrument is designed to help individual communities evaluate their current culture of vocations and direct their efforts to reinforce and build up that culture within the congregation for the express purpose of retaining and attracting new members to religious life.

NRVC has gathered input from experts in a number of areas, including ecclesiology, sociology, psychology, and theology, in developing this assessment tool aimed at addressing two key questions:

1. How does our religious life encourage or discourage the *attraction* of new members to our community?
2. How does our religious life encourage or discourage the *retention* of new members in our community?

The assessment tool may be used in various ways depending on the nature and structure of the institute and can be adapted to a number of settings—such as, for individual reflection, for use in a series of small group discussions, or for use by leadership in the institute to generate strategic initiatives.

The overarching aim of the assessment is to identify areas of strengths and areas that need development. Assessment questions are organized under six broad categories with specific goals outlined under each these categories: Charism; Community; Spiritual life & prayer; Work; Preparation for celibacy; and Relationship to the larger church.

CHARISM

Goals:

- To have a clearly articulated and shared sense of the community's charism.
- To live a charism that continues to be valuable to the building-up of the Church.
- To live and witness to the charism in practices that distinguish the community from other forms of religious life and other vocations in the Church.
- To ensure an effective indoctrination into the charism as part of initial and ongoing formation.
- To refer continuously to the charism in the community's discernment of works, lifestyle, and spiritual/religious life.

Questions for evaluation:

1. What is the charism of our religious congregation?
 - a. Is there a shared vision of our charism within our congregation?
 - b. Would every community member be able to answer the following question in the same way:
What is the particular charism of our institute?
2. Is this charism reflected in the religious life of the members in our institute?
 - a. How is this charism incorporated in the everyday life of the institute? In other words, what are the concrete ways we live out this charism?
 - b. In what ways is our current manner of religious life unfaithful to our charism?
 - c. Name some additional specific ways our community might more closely live out our charism in an everyday manner of living.
3. How effective are we in teaching this charism to new members?
 - a. What are the specific means of communicating our charism to new members?
 - b. Who specifically is in charge of passing down this charism to new members?
4. How effective are we in continuing to form professed members in our particular charism?
 - a. How do the professed members continue to study the charism as a form of religious renewal?
 - b. Whose responsibility is it to ensure the ongoing formation of members in the charism? Is it being done effectively?
 - c. Is the question of our community's charism regularly considered when discussing important community decisions (i.e., regarding works, lifestyle, buying and selling of assets, etc.)?
5. How clearly and accurately is our charism represented and communicated in our vocation materials?
 - a. Would the majority of our members agree with the way our charism is communicated in our vocation materials? If no, why not?
 - b. Is it clear in our materials what contribution a young person can make to the Church by being a member of our community that he cannot make in any other form of religious life or vocation in the Church?
6. How does our founding charism continue to be relevant to the needs of the Church in our current times?
 - a. Do our works serve the current needs of the Church but within the limits and demands of our founding charism?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to more effectively live out our charism.
- Name two or three initiatives that would require more effort or adjustment to more closely live out the founding charism of our community.
- Name two bold or prophetic steps the community might take to more radically live out the founding charism of the congregation.

COMMUNITY

Goals:

- To focus on the priority of communal living as evident in prayer, meals, recreation, and living situations.
- To provide avenues for support, encouragement, and accountability from other members.
- To encourage strong attendance at community exercises (i.e., prayer, meals, community meetings, etc.).
- To provide availability and accessibility of superiors to the members.

Questions for evaluation:

1. Does each community within the congregation have a clearly established horarium or schedule for common prayer, meals, and community exercises?
2. Are all members adequately present for:
 - i. common prayer?
 - ii. common meals?
 - iii. community meetings and conferences?
 - iv. community retreats?
3. Is there age diversity in most of our religious houses?
4. When work obligations conflict with community exercises, which typically asserts priority?
5. What are the structures of personal support in our community (e.g., common recreation and prayer, community meetings, ongoing formation programs, clearly established systems of expressing grievance, clear channels of communication, etc.).
 - a. Are these effective in building up individuals within the life of the community?
 - b. Are these effective for the general good health of the community?
 - c. Do any of our current systems of support need adjustment? Are there other systems of support that would be helpful?
6. Are there clear systems for accountability in our community?
 - a. Who is responsible for intervening when members are not attending prayer, meals, and other community exercises?
 - b. Who is responsible for addressing an individual whose behaviors are inappropriate or harmful to community life?
 - c. Are these systems of accountability and support effective?
7. Do we have many members living on the margins of the community (i.e., not participating in the daily life of the community or who are living outside of the community structures)? Do we have many members who live alone or independent of a community house?
8. How are the superiors/directors of the community present and accessible to the members of the community? How is authority exercised in local community, especially when it has fewer members?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to strengthen the common life of our institute.
- Name two or three initiatives that would require more effort or adjustment to strengthen the common life of our institute.
- Name two bold or prophetic steps the community might take to strengthen the common life of our institute.

SPIRITUAL LIFE & PRAYER

Goals:

- To emphasize the priority placed on the spiritual and prayer life of the community and the individual.
- To encourage and support individual prayer and healthy piety.
- To celebrate a style of liturgy within the community that is both faithful to the Church's tradition and is consistent with the charism of the congregation.
- To demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the theological and spiritual development of members.
- To deepen the witness of prayer and devotion by all members of the community.

Questions for evaluation:

1. Do we have a clearly established and honored times for prayer in common (Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist)?
2. Do we have clearly stated and enforced expectations regarding attendance at prayer?
3. Does our prayer life take priority over other obligations?
 - a. Are community members regularly excused from prayer for work obligations?
 - b. Are community members regularly excused from prayer for social opportunities?
 - c. Does the horarium or community schedule include or allow set times for private prayer and devotions (e.g., *lectio divina*, meditation, rosary, eucharistic adoration)?
4. Do we allot adequate resources for the maintenance and growth of the liturgical life of the community?
 - a. Is there an adequately trained and capable director of liturgy for the institute?
 - b. Do we devote adequate resources to enhance the liturgy with quality preparation and music?
 - c. Do we allot time for music practices and the development of other liturgical skills (e.g., reading, serving, presiding, etc.)?
 - d. Is there careful consideration of texts, translations, and music selected for the liturgy?
5. How are Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick incorporated into the common life of our community (e.g., Penance services, Culpa services, Anointing services)?
6. How do we cultivate an atmosphere of recollection within the community?
7. Are adequate resources and encouragement provided for the continuing theological and spiritual education and development of members?
 - a. Do community members generally avail themselves to spiritual direction?
 - b. Are opportunities available for continued theological education?
 - c. Do we provide for occasional spiritual conferences by superiors, community members, or outside speakers?
8. Do we have opportunities for shared theological reflection on the religious life within our community?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to strengthen the prayer and spiritual life of our institute.
- Name two or three initiatives that would require more effort or adjustment to strengthen the spiritual life of our institute.
- Name two bold or prophetic steps the community might take to strengthen the spiritual or prayer life of our institute.

WORK

Goals:

- To promote an appropriate balance of work in the life of the community.
- To strive for a set of apostolates that is appropriate for the size, age, and resources of the community.
- To support apostolates that contribute to the mission of the Church and are consistent with the charism.
- To promote communal apostolates that allow members to work together.
- To promote works sponsored by the community.

Questions for Evaluation:

1. Do our works or apostolates serve the mission of the Church while remaining faithful to our charism?
2. Do our works allow members to be present for liturgy and community exercises?
3. How many members are engaged in works:
 - a. not sponsored by the Catholic Church?
 - b. not sponsored by our community?
 - c. that require them to live outside the community?
4. How many members of our community have more than two ministries?
5. Are the current number and type of apostolates of our community appropriate for the current size and age of our community? Will the number and type of our apostolates continue to be appropriate for the size and age of our community in the next 10 or 20 years?
6. Are community members regularly absent from community exercises (i.e., meals, prayer, meetings) due to work obligations?
7. Do we encourage our members to work together? Do our works allow community members to work together?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to strengthen the value and place of work in the life of the institute.
- Name two or three initiatives that would require more effort or adjustment to strengthen the value and place of work in the life of the institute.
- Name two bold or prophetic steps the community might take to strengthen the value and place of work in the life of the institute.

PREPARATION FOR CELIBATE CHASTITY

Goals:

- To establish a strong formation in celibate chastity, including human sexuality and emotional maturity.
- To teach the theology of celibacy and chastity to all members, especially those in formation.
- To assist men in formation in understanding and evaluating their motives for choosing a life of celibate chastity.
- To help build skills for effective, healthy, and life-giving celibate living.
- To foster perseverance in consecrated chastity.

Questions for evaluation:

1. What is our program for initial formation in celibate chastity?
 - a. Do we have a syllabus and structured program in place for initial formation in celibate chastity?
 - b. Does this program address the following dimensions:
 - i. Examining and better understanding personal motives for celibacy?
 - ii. Education in the theologies of celibacy?
 - iii. Education in human sexuality and affective (emotional) maturity?
 - iv. Promotion of skills for successful and meaningful celibate living?
 - v. Promotion and practice of theological reflection on the experience of celibate living?
 - c. Who specifically is responsible for coordinating initial formation for celibate chastity?
 - i. Does this person feel adequately prepared for this responsibility?
 - ii. Does this person feel he has the adequate resources available to him for this work?
 - d. How do the members who are currently in formation and who are recently professed rate the quality and effectiveness of their initial formation for celibate chastity?
2. What is our program for ongoing formation in the area of celibate chastity?
3. Do members who are finally professed within the past 10 years have adequate support for dealing with loneliness and challenges to celibate chastity?
 - a. Are they continuing in spiritual direction?
 - b. Do they have regular contact with superiors and other members of the community close to their age?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to strengthen our initial and ongoing formation for chaste celibacy in the institute.
- Name two or three initiatives that would require more effort or adjustment to strengthen our initial and ongoing formation for chaste celibacy in the institute.
- Name two bold or prophetic steps the community might take to strengthen our initial and ongoing formation for chaste celibacy in the institute.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE LARGER CHURCH

Goals:

- To balance the prophetic role of religious with fidelity to the teachings of the Church.
- To celebrate Eucharist in a fashion consistent with the liturgical norms.
- To ensure that our teaching and preaching is reflective of Church tradition and teaching.

Questions for evaluation:

1. How do our works help to build up the mission of the larger church while remaining faithful to the demands of our specific charism?
2. In what ways are our witness and manner of living prophetic in the world?
 - a. In what positive and meaningful ways does our manner of living differ from the rest of the world's ways?
 - b. What would an outsider find inspiring about our works or manner of living?
 - c. What aspects of our religious life are truly and visibly radical in their attempts to live the Gospels?
3. Does our initial and ongoing formation include reading and reflection on the Church's documents on the role of religious life in the Church?
4. Do our vocation materials make explicit how our community relates to the mission and identity of the larger Church?
5. Are any members of our community engaged in works, practices, or teachings that are inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church?
6. Are our community's liturgical practices consistent with accepted liturgical norms?
7. Are the teaching and preaching of our community members consistent with the teachings and tradition of the Church?

Action:

- Name two or three easily implemented initiatives to make our vocations materials more explicit about how our community relates to the larger mission and identity of the larger Church.
- Name two or three initiatives that would make more explicit to ourselves and others how our particular religious life is vital to the life of the Church in our current times.
- Name one or two initiatives our community might adopt to make our witness as religious men truly and visibly prophetic in the life of the Church in our times.

*Special thanks to Br. John Mark Falkenhain, O.S.B., of Saint Meinrad Archabbey
for his generosity in developing this assessment tool.*