

## **N28e -- BEST REPORTING ON VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD RELIGIOUS LIFE OR DIACONATE**

### **Series on Monasticism**

**NOTE:** *Our series on Monasticism grew out of the death of Mother Angelica, PCPA and looked at many aspects of monastic life. Additional links can be found at the end of this submission pdf.*

<http://aleteia.org/2016/04/06/what-is-the-use-of-monasticism/>



Photo: Jeffrey Bruno/WETN/CNA

# What Is the Use of Monasticism?

# *The death of Mother Angelica has brought attention to the unique religious vocation of enclosed monasticism*

By Elizabeth Scalia April 6, 2016

*In virtue of the absolute primacy reserved to Christ, monasteries are called to be places in which space is made for the celebration of the glory of God, where one adores and chants the mysterious but real presence of the divine in the world and where one tries to live the new commandment of love and mutual service.*—Pope Benedict XVI, November 2008 address to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Last week's [wake and funeral](#) for Mother Mary Angelica, PCPA, brought monasticism somewhat to the fore for many people who have little exposure to the idea of a religious enclosure that is so complete it [includes grilles](#), or other barriers, that ensure a physical separation from the world beyond their cloister. The bars may seem severe, even forbidding — [as though the monastics are prisoners](#) — but they will joke that if so, they are prisoners of love. And then they will say, “The grilles are not to keep us in but to keep you out — they prevent intrusion and distraction that can take us away from our work.”

The work, of course, is prayer, and what sustenance is required so that there can be more prayer.

The people who end up as monastics don't usually start out heading in that direction. When [Sr. Mary Jacinta, OP, made her solemn profession](#) as a “moniales” — a nun of the Order of Preachers — it was after a journey that had included a turn in an “active” religious order, as was also true of her novice-mistress. Frequently in interviews monastic women will say that a cloister was [the last they they ever thought they would be drawn to](#). “When I first visited some Carmelites, I thought to myself, *These women are crazy*,” Sr. Mary Magdelene, OP, has said. “Then I thought, *I might be as crazy as they are* ...”

**[Read more: These nuns live in a strict cloister, so why are they on Facebook?](#)**

It is not unusual for non-Catholics, and even some Catholics, to wonder, *But what use is it?*

*When you have become God's in the measure he wants, He himself will know how to best bestow you on others. Unless he prefers, for thy greater advantage, to keep thee all to himself.— St. Basil*

In our utilitarian era, we want everything to be obvious and immediate, but that's not really what life is. How often do we look back on something and say, "Ah, I hadn't realized then what I see now ..."

In the life of faith things are even less obvious, less immediate. A life of faith often means conforming oneself to taking the "long view" of things — looking at where we are in one particular moment and realizing that some things, even if we prefer they would not happen, must happen in order for something else to occur, later. That, [as St. Philip Neri taught](#), "All of God's purposes are to the good; although we may not always understand this, we can trust in it."

Monasticism can be said to *train* that long view. Monastics build their day around two things: the conventual Mass and the prayers of the Divine Office (the Liturgy of the Hours), which complement each other and bring a theme, as it were, to the whole day, sanctifying its hours.

All of their work, their chores, even their meals, are meant to prepare and support monastics in their larger job, which is the Office — totaling five to six hours of liturgical prayer in choir — and their private prayer, as well.

As firefighters and cops refer to "the job," monastics refer to "the life." The life is prayer, constantly, for the praise of God and the good of the whole world.

It's understandable that people might think praying all day, every day, could render a community out of touch with the world, but monastics seem to understand society very well. The psalms in which they immerse themselves are — when unabridged, with their darker tones left intact — perfect reflections of the human condition in all its despair and hope. They show us that there is nothing new in the human heart.

***Read more: [What is it really like to be a Mother Superior?](#)***

Monastics do get news, but they don't wallow in it. They do not need to read the awful headlines constantly before our eyes to know that people suffer and go hopeless, and hurt or kill themselves, for lack of one person telling them that they are good, and lovable and beloved. They do not need to read about governments [obstructing religious freedoms](#) to know that such governments often lose sight of the God-given gift of human liberty, or that a culture inhospitable to inconvenient life is in serious, fundamental conflict with itself.

In sanctifying the hours of each day through prayer, in growing much of their own food, monastics look at time differently — they know that almost nothing worthwhile is immediate, or immediately apparent, and that usefulness itself can be over- and underdefined.

What *use* is it? Charities in the world, missionaries, church movements, “active” religious orders who work with the poor, the disadvantaged, and so forth, their work is supported by the quiet prayers of the monastics. When they rise at night — the time when so many are lonely, or lost, or deeply enthralled in their harmful behaviors — monastics are praying for exactly those people, and for all of us. It is prayer that is concentrated, not limited; prayer with a far-reach of love.

And if you ask them to, they will pray for you and your specific intentions. No matter who you are. They don't first question whether you're a good person, whether you're a Christian, whether you are saved, whether you are gay or straight, or in a state of grace or in deep sin. They'll simply pray for your good.

*[In order to help our readers become better informed on the subject of monasticism, look for further pieces on the subject throughout 2016 – Ed.]*

# These Nuns Live in a Strict Cloister. So What Are They Doing on Facebook?

*With a little help from a friend, an important apostolate for priests gets exposure from within the enclosure*

- See more at: <http://aleteia.org/2016/04/20/these-nuns-live-in-a-strict-cloister-so-what-are-they-doing-on-facebook/#sthash.qYkOg6UA.dpuf>

By John Burger - April 20, 2016



[Handmaids of the Precious Blood with Permission](#)



You won't find these nuns frittering away their time playing Facebook games or watching cute cat videos.

But [the Handmaids of the Precious Blood](#) want to be on social media to get the word out about what they *do* spend their time on — praying for priests — and how [the laity can assist](#) the clergy in their spiritual needs.

The small contemplative community has been building a motherhouse in New Market, Tennessee, about 40 minutes northeast of Knoxville. They've also been building a presence online. It is not without its dangers.

Their history goes back to 1947. [Father Gerald Fitzgerald](#), founder of the Servants of the Paraclete, wanted a women's community dedicated to prayer for the clergy to be a spiritual complement to his clinical work with troubled priests. In his view, that meant prayer and sacrifice, and a focus on Eucharistic adoration.



The nuns wear a distinctive full length red habit, symbolizing the Blood of Christ. Their white veil symbolizes the Eucharistic host.

“All that we do, in union with and in imitation of the Precious Blood, is directed so that priests be holy priests,” said Mother Marietta, the prioress. “We offer ourselves in immolation and reparation for all priests, particularly for those who have lost sight of their sublime calling, praying for the grace of their conversion. We sacrifice our lives completely for the souls of priests, mindful of the vast numbers of souls just one priest can influence in his lifetime.”

In 2013 the congregation moved from Jemez Springs, New Mexico, where they were founded, to the Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee. There are 16 nuns, but the congregation also has a house in Lake Villa, Illinois, in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

In 2009 Mother Marietta asked a nun to design a [website](#) so the community could better publicize the ways that lay people can participate in their prayer for priests. That spiritual work is important, but in the wake of the clergy sex abuse scandal, it has taken on a new urgency.

“What we are trying to do now is help people realize who a priest is and his unique ministry and fatherhood,” the prioress said. “Going through these difficult years helped us find our voice and hone our message: Our priests are under constant attack by forces that want to destroy our sacramental bond to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

She sees that happening in several ways, including the direct persecution of clergymen — the kidnapping and murder of priests in the Middle East and Africa, for example, and the attacks on priests in Mexico by drug cartels. “How many priests are left to bring the Eucharist and absolution?” she asked.

In addition, sensationalism in the media gets people angry at the Church and her priests. “This outrage often replaces prayer,” she said.

Finally, there is “our own toxic indifference and criticism,” she said. “How often is a priest treated like a fast food worker to produce what we want and immediately; we live in a consumer-driven world full of noise, while the priest acts *in persona Christi*. The Real Presence is spectacular, the most important event in history. We can miss Emmanuel-with-us by superficial expectations.”

And yet while most of the world seems to “live” on social media these days, tending to increase the noise in people’s lives and distract them from the transcendent, the nuns felt they needed to have a presence on platforms such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). But as cloistered nuns, they also need to “keep the world out” of their enclosure in order to maintain the contemplative life to which they are called. Would letting the world in through social media be safe?

Essentially, no.

“A microchip in an iPhone is tiny and is very hypersensitive,” Mother Marietta said. “It is made in a clean room where no foreign contaminants are able to enter — or the chips are hurt or ruined in their efficacy.” Likewise, the “contaminants” to an enclosed monastery are “those things which interrupt the focus of those who have given 100 percent to the call of Jesus to share in that phase of his redemptive mission described as ‘Christ praying,’ and in his total sacrificial love which led him to his death on the cross. We want to be keep the atmosphere ‘pure’ (like a clean room), so we can live our lives perpetually centered on Jesus.”

But how?

Enter Scott Maentz, a candidate for permanent deacon in the Diocese of Knoxville. Maentz, who worked in the personal-computer industry for more than 20 years, serves as communications director for the nuns, acting as a “one-way gate through whom we pass materials out,” Mother Marietta said. “We don’t interact with these vehicles, or read them ourselves after they are posted; he checks the sites for inappropriate or obscene comments and passes on to us any contacts that he thinks we might want to respond to.”





©2105 Handmaids of the Precious Blood/with permission

The nuns also have a little “inhouse” help to assist in getting their message out. Sister Regina, who was a meteorologist and an Air Force veteran who served in Korea and Saudi Arabia, has been “doodling” for years and “turning out [cartoons](#) just for fun,” Mother Marietta revealed. She doesn’t have any formal art training, but after she entered the convent, Mother Marietta discovered her talent.

“We realized that we could communicate some of the simple joy we find in daily life [and] let people know that enclosed life is not intimidating or particularly mysterious,” the prioress said. “And it is a good means to inform people about our way of life.”

The Internet has its benefits and drawbacks, to be sure. As it has broadened the possibility for communication for millions of people, it allows the Handmaids of the Precious Blood to reach people all over the world with greater speed and less expense. “We can also receive prayer requests from people not involved in our prayer associations, and we continue to hand write them in a book kept at the adoration prie-dieu,” Mother Marietta said.

“It is important for us to do everything we can to make our response personal and not packaged.”



*All images used by permission of the Handmaids of the Precious Blood.*

# What's it really like to be a Mother Superior?

*Mother John Mary, C.P., tells us what goes on behind  
the quiet walls of her monastery*

By [Zoe Romanowsky](#)

[October 14, 2016](#)



*Passionist Nuns of St. Joseph with Permission*

<http://aleteia.org/2016/10/14/whats-it-really-like-to-be-a-mother-superior/#sthash.w127bQfY.dpuf>

What is it really like to be a new mother superior of a monastic order? Mother John Mary, C.P. knows all about it and graciously agreed to talk with Aleteia.

Mother was actually *Sister* John Mary for 21 years before being elected new leader of her community this past June. Originally from Indiana — “a born and bred Hoosier,” she tells us — Mother entered the monastery in August 1995 when the community was in the process of a major relocation. In December that year they moved 13 miles from their original location in Owensboro, Kentucky, to 170 acres of hills, woods and fields in Whitesville, Kentucky. There are now 15 nuns, one Passionist Oblate Affiliate, and two aspirants (who plan to enter the monastery this December 8). Mother John Mary might

live behind closed doors among the fields and trees most of the time, but her life is never dull.

***Mother, what is the charism of the Passionists?***

We were founded by the greatest Italian mystic of the 18th century, St. Paul of the Cross. As cloistered contemplative nuns, we dwell in spirit with our Lady of Sorrows on Calvary bringing souls to the living waters flowing from the pierced side of Jesus, our Crucified Bridegroom. Through our hidden life of prayer, penance, work, and joy we seek to be little co-redeemers with the great Co-Redemptrix [Mary]. We also have a small retreat house where persons can come to be with us at the Foot of the Cross through silence, solitude, prayer, and liturgy. Our motto is: May the Passion of Christ be ever in our hearts.

***What are your duties as the mother superior?***

My main duty is to be present to my sisters and seek to assist them in their spiritual and temporal needs...to be a mother. I have a good role model in Mary our Mother of Sorrows; our Founder appointed her as the true superior of each monastery. I am to be her representative – tall order! Therefore, each day I beg her to take me by the hand and inspire in me what I should do next. On a practical level there are a lot of administrative duties. We are missing a generation of vocations so there are not many sisters to whom I can delegate; therefore, I *try* to keep things simple.





Passionist Community of St. Joseph's newest members, with Mother John Mary/Supplied image

### ***What is your typical day like?***

As contemplative nuns at the Foot of the Cross, our life is devoted to prayer and recollection. Therefore, my life, like the other sisters here, revolves around the liturgy with the Mass as the high point of the day.

We begin our day with Liturgy of the Hours at 4:45 a.m., then an hour of contemplative prayer, Morning Prayer, Mass, mid-morning prayer, and then breakfast. New members then have class and professed sisters take time for spiritual reading. We then begin our work time. With prayer as our apostolate this leaves us about five hours to get duties accomplished in a day.

My duties consists in being the “CEO” of the monastery (personally, I’m more naturally drawn to middle-management, but God likes to take us outside our comfort zone!). I am also the Vocation Directress which involves keeping in touch with the young women who are interested in our life; keeping our [vocation blog](#) current and making sure our vocation promotion materials are out there so young women know that we exist.

At noon we meet again in chapel for Angelus and Midday prayer. We have a short recreation period after lunch and then silence time... time for a siesta! During this quiet, free time we can read, pray, rest, study, exercise, work... On some days we have a longer silence after which we resume our study or work duties. Other days of the week we gather at 2:45 p.m. to pray Mid-afternoon prayer, Offerings of the Precious Blood and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Then we either have study or more time for work. Professed sisters pray the rosary privately and at 4:30 I go for a much needed rosary walk (also called a “sanity walk”!).

Five o’clock brings us back to our Lord in chapel for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Evening Prayer, and another hour of contemplative prayer. Supper follows with another recreation period. During our recreation times we can go for a walk, play cards or a game, work on a puzzle, etc. During our evening recreation time we often gather in a large circle and work on crafts projects and chat. At 8 p.m. we have Night Prayer and the Great Silence begins at 8:30 with lights out by 9:30.

***Read More: [These nuns live in a strict cloister, so why are they on Facebook?](#)***

***What is it like to become a monastic superior, particularly following someone who led the community for many years?***

We are a small community so it was easy to see this coming, although that still did not remove the holy dread that came upon me weeks before the elections. I was vicar (assistant superior) for the previous six years and now my former superior is *my* vicar so we have worked together for many years. It is helpful to have a “go-to” sister who knows all the events first-hand that have transpired over the past 15 years and beyond. She has a lot of experiential knowledge and I often find myself asking her what she did in this or that situation.

***How long did it take for the nuns to call you “Mother” instead of “Sister”?***

This took a good two months! One day Sr. Catherine Marie (former superior) and I were out running an errand and as we stood in line I introduced myself to the woman next to us by saying, “My name is Mother Catherine Marie.” It was quite funny as I did not realize I had said anything amiss and Sr. Catherine Marie gave me the oddest look!



***Did it change the way you relate to your sisters?***

This new role helps me to see my sisters in a new and more profound light. I feel I have a greater love for them and understanding of them that I never had before. I understand this to be one of the gifts of the “grace of office.”

***What is it like to be a spiritual mother accountable for souls?***

In my role as mother superior it has been a very meaningful experience for me to get to know my sisters on a profound level. I am continually struck by the level of deep prayer and redemptive suffering going on in their hearts, minds, and bodies. They are an inspiration for me to strive for greater fidelity to virtue in the small trifles of daily life. Some days I just find myself begging God all day long to help me and give me sufficient prudence to meet the situations and trials of that day. Sometimes I am struck by how ignorant and nothing I am; this actually is very freeing and helps me put all my confidence in God. I just have to try to be faithful to Him in each moment. Without Him I can do nothing, but with him all things are possible!

***What is the biggest challenge to taking on this calling?***

To have to be “spokesperson” for the community is a bit daunting at times. There are certainly smarter and more articulate nuns in the community. But I just give my littleness to the Lord and seek to keep my eyes on Him *not* on me!

***Read more: [When I Prayed for Vocations, I Didn't Mean God Could Have MY Daughter!](#)***

***Do you miss anything about being “Sister”?***

I miss having a “Mother” figure; but when I realize I am missing this, this longing becomes a gift as it compels me to turn to our Blessed Mother for my comfort, consolation, and guidance.

***As a mother superior, where do you turn when you need counsel, guidance, or assistance, besides the Lord?***

First of all, our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph! Then I have my vicar and a wonderful council. I also have my spiritual director and a few friends who are a source of light and peace to me.

***When you think back on your vocational journey, what do you wish you knew before you entered the convent?***

St. Ignatius of Loyola's Rules for Discernment of Spirits. My favorite resource is [taught by Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV](#). And there's also a podcast I like that [explains 14 rules for discernment of spirits](#).

***What is your greatest joy in being a Passionist nun?***

In faith I can say that my greatest joy is "to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2: 20)



*The Passionist Community of St. Joseph's Monastery/Supplied image*

More in this series:

<http://aleteia.org/2016/02/23/a-bride-of-christ-on-her-29th-birthday/>

<http://aleteia.org/2016/11/21/happy-pro-orantibus-day-what-it-is-and-why-you-should-care/>