

## Called to Serve

Each baptized Christian is called by God to do something special, to become something special. Our call, or vocation, is to become more Christ-like. Each person is gifted with special graces, special talents that will help that person to serve God and others. Service is the vocation that is common to all Christians.

Each person is called to live that life of service through a particular lifestyle. God calls some women to be single or wives and mothers. Others are called to be religious sisters. The "steps to becoming a sister" in this brochure will help you to know more about religious life for women. Prayer, reflection, and talking with others will help you to best discern how you are called to serve the Lord.

### What is a Religious Sister?

A sister is a woman who is a member of a particular religious community and commits to vows. These vows often include:

- **poverty** (to share all in common),
- **chastity** (also called celibacy – to love universally and not be committed to one person),
- **obedience** (to listen to God's will through prayer and others in her community).

Her life is a life of loving service to others. A nun is a woman who has taken vows committing her to life in a cloister, a monastery or convent not accessible to outsiders. For more definitions, see the back page.



### Helpful Definitions.

**Vocation.** Through the sacrament of Baptism, each person receives "a call" or vocation. All are called to holiness and service. This call can be lived out in a variety of ways—married, single, or as a sister.

**Laity and clergy.** Within the Church there are two groups of people: Those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders (called clergy) and all others (called lay people). Sisters and brothers are lay people.

**Religious.** Everyone is called to be "religious" or holy in the broad sense of the word. Some men and women, however, choose to live a particular life-style called religious life. These people join a community of people that follow a specific tradition of spirituality. Many profess vows of poverty, chastity (celibacy), and obedience.

**Sister.** A sister is a woman who is a member of a particular religious community, lives the vows and is involved in serving others.

**Nun** A sister in a Cloister.

**Cloister** refers to religious men and women who live in an enclosed space, not accessible to outsiders and who may not go outside the area without permission. Solemn vows are made by those in monasteries and convents where there is *clausura* (cloister).

**Contemplative** – the "loving gaze of the soul upon God" – is, in its widest sense, the goal of every Christian. Its highest earthly fulfillment is applied to those religious men and women who do not engage in active ministries; who live in seclusion, apart from the world; and whose lives are taken up in prayer and meditation. In order to sustain themselves, contemplatives perform such tasks as keeping bees, farming, translation, artistic work, baking, and more.

**Novice.** The word "novice" means "new." This is the first stage for someone who is joining a religious community. Novitiate is the name given to the process as well as the place where novices live.

Diocese of Syracuse Office of Vocation Promotion  
240 E. Onondaga Street, Syracuse, NY 13201  
315.470.1468  
[www.vocations-syracuse.org](http://www.vocations-syracuse.org)



# Sisters Today

# steps to becoming a sister

## Pray.

The most important place to begin is to pray (or continue praying) about this call you sense. Your feeling that God is calling you is not some fluke or self-conjured up idea; it is a gift from God, an invitation into a deeper relationship with God. No matter how your vocation ends up expressing itself (nun, spouse, parent, teacher, advocate, etc.), you are being called right here, right now, to draw closer to God.

**Be open** to listening to God, no matter how crazy or confusing it feels.

Remain **faithful to pray** even when it is difficult or feels like it is going nowhere.

**Read scripture**, particularly the stories of people trying to figure out how God is calling them and how they can respond. Imagine yourself in the story. How would you respond? What words is God speaking to you?

**Pray with others.** Participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy, attend to a bible study or faith-sharing group, pray with others who can encourage and support you.



## Meet sisters.

What are some ways you can do **nun surveillance** or interact with nuns?

- attend Mass or a prayer service at a religious community's Motherhouse or convent
- go on retreat held by or led by nuns
- help a nun fix her computer or start a Facebook page
- get a spiritual director who is a nun
- attend an event where nuns will be present

If you are in a place where there are no nuns around, you can do **online nun surveillance**.

## Talk with a mentor.

There's nothing like saying something out loud to make it really real! So start talking to trusted people about your attraction to religious life. These mentors could be family or friends. Talk with people whom you know that will be supportive of you while you explore religious life and this feeling of being called to become a nun. You may also consider talking with someone like a nun or a priest.

A more intense way of doing this is by looking into **spiritual direction**. A spiritual director is someone who is trained to help you discern, think, and pray about how God is moving in your life. Most are familiar with religious life (many in fact are religious) and can be great mentors and sounding boards as you consider where you are and where you are going.

## Contact a Religious Community.

You'll know when it's the right time for you to move from learning about nuns and religious life to formally exploring religious life with a specific community. It can be a leap of faith making this transition, but remember,



just because you contact a religious community doesn't mean that you are signed up for life. Religious communities know that it can take a while for people to get to know them and religious life in general. They welcome you where you are at and are there to help you discern if God is calling you to their particular community.

So how do you contact a religious community? If you know a nun in the community you are attracted to, ask her. The Diocese of Syracuse Vocations website has links to all the orders that serve in the area or have had a local girl join them recently. Also, check out [www.vocation-network.org](http://www.vocation-network.org) for a directory of Catholic religious communities which you can use to find contact info for Vocation Directors. They also have a very innovative and helpful online Vocation Match feature.

## Work with the Vocation Director.

The vocation director of a particular religious community is the official person who helps you to get to know the community and to discern God's call for

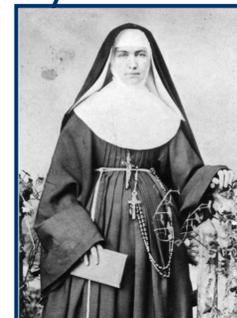


your life. Her job is to help you get to know the community and to help the community get to know you. She'll be the one that leads you

through all the formal steps of becoming a nun within that particular religious community. While you are relating with the vocation director, you are not under any obligation to stay with that community. You may decide to look into other communities or to date someone. Don't be afraid to do this. Explore and experience the things you need to in order to find out if religious life with a particular community is for you. Vocation directors are very understanding of this and know that it is a normal part of discerning.

As you come to your own sense of commitment to becoming a nun, you'll grow in your own sense of wanting to be committed to this particular community. That's when you move toward "breaking up" with other communities you've looked into or with the person you've been dating. You'll know when the time is right to begin the formal application process.

## Join the Community.



Once you and the community have discerned that yes, in fact, God is calling you to one another, you go through the formal steps of joining. These include:

- Aspirancy / Pre-Candidacy
- Postulancy / Candidacy
- Novitiate
- First Vows
- Final Vows