Finding God

recognizing His voice
and the path He has woven for each of our lives
He has a plan for your life.
It's amazing: the same great God who created the billions of blazing stars in the sky and the countless grains of sand on the shore chose and loved each of us, personally, into existence. The most glorious landscapes of nature offer only the slightest hint of the grandeur of what the Catechism calls “the summit of creation:” the human person. Each one of us is chosen, willed and loved into existence by God. Each human person, from the moment of conception, is gloriously unique, unrepeatable, and has an intrinsic relationship with God that is sacred, inviolable.

God made us to be in communion with him – we matter to him. In baptism, this intimacy is given a new and unmerited depth– in Jesus, we can approach the Creator as Father and welcome the Holy Spirit to live within us as our counselor, our guide and friend.

God has a plan for your life, and he is personally invested in helping you discover it. This newsletter tells the stories of our newly professed Sisters and how they heard the voice of the Lord calling them to religious life. At some point in their young lives, they discovered that, when invited, Jesus comes into our ordinary, very human lives as the dearest of friends, His Spirit leading us to our greatest happiness. Such an intimate relationship with the Lord is not reserved for priests and religious. This is the call – and the joy! - of all the baptized. Little by little we grow in recognizing his voice in our heart, and his ways of letting us know when we are on the right path. The more we live conscious of his presence, the more clearly and confidently we can live our deepest, truest identity and freely share the good news of God’s communion with man with all we meet. May God bless you! In Christ our Life.

God made us to be in communion with Him

God loved you into existence...
God wants us to know him. He sent Jesus, his Word, to “show us the Father.” His Holy Spirit inspired Scripture and breathes into the teachings of the Church (Tradition). The Lord gives us these gifts as springboards for welcoming salvation, his Life – which is called grace – into our lives. When God’s Life has an open route in and through our hearts, we are united to him (think Holy Communion). But when we choose illegitimate means to fill a need (serious sin), the open route in our hearts for grace is cut off – it becomes much more difficult to know what God wants, we no longer see clearly what is right and what is wrong; and even if we do, we have less strength to choose the good. He is still with us, but we are not with him. Communion is restored through the spiritual re-construction of confessing our sin and receiving his forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These are the most necessary and basic means to a personal relationship with the Lord, but what many people don’t realize is that these are not stagnant “rules,” but conduits to a deep spring of living water!

The Father is reaching out to each of us, constantly trying to remind us of his love and mercy, of his desire for our good and his willingness to show us the way through the obstacle course of life. It may come through the beauty of nature, the smile of those we love, the little inspirations that come to mind. It may come from a word or passage that leaps from a page of Scripture. It may be a thought that pierces our heart, encouraging us, confirming us. It may be an experience before his Eucharistic presence that swells our hearts and tells us what we all, in the end, long to hear: “I love you.” Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

“The Life of God in us is the greatest treasure we have – if we knew it for what it is, we would guard it with our earthly lives, and that’s what the saints (especially the martyrs) do. The more conscious we become of the presence of God, the more easily we enter into prayer and come to know his protective, providential and healing hand in our daily lives. “Prayer is an encounter of God’s thirst with ours.” (CCC #2560) Prayer is intimate conversation with God, a mutual sharing Heart to heart. It’s a conversation he has already begun; hearing his gentle voice is only a matter of attentiveness, a willingness to clear a space for silence in our all-too-often overcrowded days, and the obedience of faith.

St. Catherine of Siena was once asked, “It seems in the past God was speaking to many people, but today he rarely speaks to anyone, why?” The Saint answered, “People use to pray, ‘Speak Lord your servant is listening’ today we pray, ‘Listen Lord your servant is speaking’.

Hearing the Voice of God
I developed a great affection for Our Blessed Mother as a child as I heard the story of her apparitions to the Fatima children. The day after my first communion, during a May Crowning, I consecrated my life to Jesus through Mary. As I look back, I see how faithful she has been to that simple act of faith and trust I made in giving my life to her. Shortly after as my second grade teacher was telling us about the apostles she suggested that some of us should consider the religious life. My eyes widened as she spoke and I knew in a way that the message was for me.

After I graduated from high school, I went to the U.S. Naval Academy. I had many aspirations and goals and wanted to do something truly meaningful with my life. I see now that it was Christ who inspired this and that He was the only one who would or could fill these longings. I was struck by my peers who were really living their faith. In the midst of a very competitive, and performance-based environment God was teaching me that His love was a free gift that I could not earn, I only had to receive.

Throughout my time at the academy we traveled in uniform and people thanked us for serving our country. I was aware that I was representing something, which was greater than myself. During my sophomore year, I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Walking through the Garden of Gethsemane, I saw a Sister from a distance. I was struck very deeply as I recognized that she too was representing something greater than herself-- she was representing Someone-- God.

I would think about religious life from time to time for the next several years although it remained a possibility far off in the future, because I had a five-year commitment to serve upon graduation. Once I graduated I was sent to San Diego to serve as the gunnery officer onboard a destroyer. Our ship spent hundreds of nights out to sea off the coast of South America chasing drug traffickers. The stress of the day was healed by the beauty and tranquility of the stars each night. When I went to the bridge of the ship at night to stand my watch, I was often overwhelmed by the beauty of the stars that covered the night sky like a blanket.

While I was at sea, I came to know God in the beauty of His creation and through the men and women with whom I served. I was continuously humbled by their generosity and learned the meaning of sacrifice through them. When we were hundreds of miles from land with few distractions, people began to ask questions and to seek meaning in their lives. I saw how my sailors longed to be with their families and I came to realize that each person has a great need for love, and I saw and experienced in my own heart this unquenchable thirst for love. I saw Christ reaching out to the lost and the broken and I came to know Him as I watched the movements of grace in the lives of those with whom I served.
I was assigned to be the Catholic Lay Leader on my ship because we did not have a chaplain. I was asked to bring the Eucharist on board so we could have a service each Sunday. Christ dwelt in a small tabernacle in my 7x5 foot stateroom where I slept and worked. It is astounding to me when I think of how He stayed with me, and went out to sea with me. What tremendous love!

After I finished my tour on the destroyer I was stationed in a little fishing village overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and worked on a base in Naples. Many of my friends in Italy were newlyweds and older couples with beautiful marriages. I had never been around so many happy and holy families and I began to wonder if this was the beauty that God was calling me to. God showed me that I could get married if I wanted to and that He would bless me and I would be happy, yet He let me know that He had made my heart for something else. He showed me that He was calling me to love Him with an undivided heart. Through this spousal union with Christ, I would take on the joys and sorrows of the entire world.

One weekend I traveled to Assisi; I was quite moved by the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare. I stopped in the church where Francis and Clare were baptized and knelt down before the tabernacle. I do not have words for what I experienced nor do I think I will ever be able to describe something so very subtle yet so deeply profound. Yet I walked out of the church a few moments later and I knew in the depths of my being that I would belong completely to God. I kept this experience to myself for many years because I had no way to share it, yet it would mark almost all of my decisions for the rest of my life.

I was limited in my understanding of religious life and saw it as an opportunity to serve God and His Church. I was surprised in a way to learn that the most important aspect of religious life is being in a relationship of love with God. He didn’t want me for anything I could or would do, but for who I was. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of God. While it was what I most desired and prayed for in the depths of my being, I feared that I was not worthy of it and that perhaps I was mistaken. Gradually, God gave me the grace and clarity to see that indeed he was inviting me to this intimate relationship of love and prayer.

When I finally met the Sisters of Life and learned about the charism, I could not believe that it existed! This charism of life, that highlights the dignity of the human person and cares for the most vulnerable amazes me. So many aspects of our community corresponded directly to what was written on my heart. As I learned about our different apostolates, and met some of the women we serve, I was humbled at the experience of being so close to God’s grace. What an extraordinary privilege to be an ambassador of God’s mercy; the mercy that continues to transform my own soul. It was as though I knew God in a completely new way after I met our community, yet in a way it is what I had somehow always known and hoped for.

After attending our discernment retreat, I began the total consecration to Mary by St. Louis de Montfort. On the 33rd and final day of the consecration, after Mass I knelt before the same statue of Our Lady that I had knelt before twenty years earlier. I once again offered my life to Jesus through Mary. When I went home, my acceptance letter to the Sisters of Life arrived in the mail. In the past two and a half years, I have come to know and love God more deeply and intimately. I am grateful to be invited into such a privileged life and know it is a complete gift.
I loved reading the lives of the saints, especially the early virgin martyrs, and I even sewed a habit for my Barbie dolls. While my friends' dolls were getting married and attending fancy parties, my veiled Sr. Catherine Barbie was living in a convent and taking in the abandoned. It was amazing to see how my young Christian friends, who didn't know what “Catholic” was, instinctively understood the spiritual maternity of my fictional character. Their more glamorous Barbies would come to the convent when they were in trouble.

I had a desire to pray and to sacrifice at that young age, though I had little instruction. I grew up going to Mass on Sundays with my parents and brother, and we both attended CCD, but that was the extent of our religious involvement. As I grew older, I started to have other ideas about “what I would do when I grew up.” At about age 12, a doctor warned me that if I were a nun, it would be like being in the Army. “They’ll tell you where to go and what to do,” he cautioned. This prospect was not attractive to my pre-teen self so I dropped the idea. I loved foreign languages in high school, and I thought it would be exciting and noble to serve our country as a spy. I actually had a teacher who had previously done some spy work, so I felt encouraged to head in that direction.

I went to Yale University where I planned to major in Russian and Eastern European studies. Curiously, though I was dating, the fascination with religious life remained somewhere in the back of my mind. That summer I had a flash of insight that the Lord might be calling me to be a Sister. Despite my anxiety, I managed to sign up to receive information from a staggering number of communities, but none attracted me. Once on campus, I pushed aside those thoughts and settled down to my studies. My freshman year marked the 30th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. There was not much of a pro-life response on campus, so some of the students from the Catholic Center and myself decided to form a pro-life group and started making plans for activities on campus.

In January of 2004, when I was a sophomore, I met the Sisters of Life for the first time during the March for Life in Washington, DC. When I saw the Sisters, I was inexplicably drawn to speak with them. I was attracted to the joy in their faces. I now know that it was the Holy Spirit leading me, and somehow I signed up for a Come and See weekend for that spring.

After that weekend, I did not know if I would be a Sister, but I did know that God loved and created me for a great purpose and that I owed it to Him and to myself to pray and ask the Lord what that plan was. During that retreat weekend, I had gone to my first good confession in a long time and was now ready to receive the graces that God had in store for me. Over the next two years I visited the Sisters as I continued my studies and began meeting with a Spiritual Director. I also started to grow more and more in the spiritual life – going to Mass almost every day, going to confession at least once a month, and making time for silent prayer and spiritual reading. Through these means, I tried to make room for the Lord to speak, or rather, to make silence, so I could hear Him. He is always speaking. He was gently calling even when I was 8 years old.

As my last semester came to an end, the Lord confirmed my call to the charism of life through a particularly bad ethics class I was taking. In the midst of the confused things I was being taught, I heard Jesus inviting me to offer my life to Him in love, to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This call brought me great joy and hope which have only grown as I follow Him.
Our new novices with Msgr. John Gallagher
(left to right)
Sr. Marie Noel Maximilienne
Sr. Maeve Nativitas
Sr. Ann Marie Guadalupe
Sr. Ann Catherine
Sr. Grace Dominic
Sr. Mariae Laetitia

SISTERS OF LIFE GUILD

What is the guild?

Each member of the Guild makes an annual financial contribution to the Sisters of Life that supports the formation of new members. Before professing vows, our Sisters engage in an intensive three year program of formation including:

- **Human Formation** Development of the life of virtue -- grace builds on nature!
- **Spiritual Formation** Guidance in prayer and spiritual growth
- **Intellectual Formation** Classes and study time
- **Religious Formation** Experience living the evangelical counsels in community
- **Apostolic Formation** Internships in our various apostolic missions at the service of vulnerable human life

**Mary our model, Christ our Life!**

Contributions from the Guild make this crucial time of formation possible as our Sisters seek to mold their lives in the likeness of Jesus Christ so that others may live.

For more information or to become a Guild member please call: Richard Stockley at: 732.530.6415 or email him at: baron1073@aol.com

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

“THE FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE: REVISITING THE VISION”

a new book written by Sisters from five different communities who are members of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. Our own Mother Agnes Mary and Sr. Mary Elizabeth authored the first chapter on Religious Consecration. Our novices can’t put it down - pick up a copy to learn more!
Rachel was born when I was seven, fulfilling the dream of every girl to have a little sister to play with and love. Rachel brought special blessings and joys, and also a summons to faith in God and His designs in human life. She was born with a deletion in Chromosome 8, a genetic defect unique to her which is manifested through spina bifida, severe mental retardation, blindness and a number of other small disorders. She was not expected to live a day, but now she is a happy eighteen year old. While we went to Mass every Sunday and my three brothers and I knew that faith was important to my parents, my sister’s birth revealed to us the depth of trust my parents had in the Lord. They had nothing to cling to but faith, hope and love. I have been told many times that children like Rachel do not live except through the love given them by their families. God has truly rewarded the faith of my parents, for He has revealed Himself through the pure, perfect love that Rachel returns to us everyday. She is the image of Trinitarian love in my life.

When I was in high school I realized that I could no longer ride on the wings of my parent’s faith. Jesus Christ was a mystery that I was not sure that I believed, but something in my heart really wanted to. And thus, sitting in the back of the church one day after Mass I prayed my first real prayer, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” These words must have pierced through this world into the heart of God, because from that point forward my life has been marked by God revealing the mystery of who He is.

For as long as I can remember I wanted to be a doctor. As I was getting ready to begin my premedical studies, I was plagued by a question in my heart. Here I am putting so much emphasis on my accomplishments and what I want to do in life; and there is my sister Rachel, who will probably always live at home, who at the age of ten cannot really speak, read, write, or do anything the world would consider of worth. And yet, she is alive, she is here. What then is the point of life? And in one moment, like those that happen only once or twice in one’s lifetime, the Lord pierced my heart with understanding. Rachel is alive because God wants her to be alive; God wants her to BE. I would never have to prove my worth by what I accomplished, because I am defined, in the same way as my sister Rachel; my life is given purpose because God wants me to BE. And so I went to college with a heart beginning to open to the will of the Lord, and with my plan to become a missionary doctor, marry, have ten children and live happily ever after.

During my senior year of college I applied to medical school, but was not accepted. I spent the next eight months working as a full-time “home health aide” for my sister. I would take care of her from the time she got home from school until she went to bed. I came to know her deeply, to learn to communicate with her in her silence and to love her from the depths of my being. I experienced a purity of love that came out of her emptiness, her utter vulnerability. I knew that she loved me and I loved her; and I knew that I would never have to do anything to earn her love and that she would never have to do anything to earn my love. We were participating in the pure, complete, love of the Trinity. This must be like the Love of the Father for the Son, and all His sons and daughters.

During my time at home I met a wonderful religious Sister. She asked me at one point whether I had ever considered religious life. I told her yes, but that I was going to go to medical school, marry and have ten children. She laughed and told me that I was welcome to come to the discernment group that she was starting. Two months later I did go to that group, wondering what God wanted from my life as I was making my plans to work on a Master’s Degree in Public Health. The January after I graduated from college I moved to Washington D.C. to start grad school and get myself into medical school. I was working full time...
in an emergency room, going to school, and taking an MCAT preparation class. I loved it all, and yet, there was something missing. I wanted to be with the Lord.

A priest suggested to me that I should echo Our Lady’s fiat everyday, hundreds of times a day, “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, be done unto me according to Your Word.” And so I did. I would say that all the time, asking that my heart be open to wherever the Lord was calling me. He also told me that if I was faithful to this prayer, that the Lord would reveal His will to my heart in two months. I didn’t really believe that part of it, but I decided to try it. It was actually less than two months later that the Lord called me to Himself. It was at the Mass of ordination to the priesthood for the Arlington Diocese that all my fears about religious life melted away. As these four men laid down their lives my heart swelled! No words can do justice to what happened in my heart at that Mass, and to be honest I am not totally sure myself. But I know that when I left that day, my heart was spoken for; it belonged to Christ.

Now God is a very generous Father and doesn’t force anything upon us. The same week that He revealed the deepest desire of my heart to be totally His, my MCAT scores came back. With these new scores I knew that I would be accepted if I applied to medical school. I had a choice to make, apply to medical school and enter religious life later or respond to the Bridegroom’s call immediately? The Lord spoke to my heart and told me I could go to medical school, do great work for Him and be happy. But what He wanted, all that He wanted was my heart, and “together we would do enough.” I followed the grace to let go of medical school.

The Lord is so faithful to a heart seeking Love. He is still answering my first prayer, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” He is still answering my second prayer, “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy Word.” He has shown His love and fidelity to me. All is grace. All is gift. And I cannot help but sing, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... the Almighty has done great things for me and Holy is His Name!”

Tips if you are discerning Religious Life

1. Pray! Go to Mass as often as possible; enter the silent alchemy of love in Eucharistic Adoration
2. “Do whatever He tells you”: entrust yourself to the Blessed Mother
3. Clean out the Pipes: go to confession at least once a month and get a spiritual director to guide your prayer
4. Finders Keepers: read up about vocations and different charisms in the Church (like the charism of Life!)
5. Go on a Diet: cut your intake of movies, music and magazines that don’t glorify God
6. Thought Revolution: don’t worry about what is most “useful” in religious life; study what you love to study!
7. Theology of the Body: learn it.

Let the Games Begin: contact communities and keep an open heart!
She was a giving person; sensitive and generous to others and easily able to forgive. When Kathleen first met the Sisters of Life I was pleased. Her pro-life activities had brought her into contact with a large number of individuals and organizations, so this was nothing unusual. When she went to visit a second time, I thought, uh oh, “Have I encouraged her to become too committed, too radical to the Pro-life cause?” When she announced that she was going to enter the convent, I have to admit my heart fell. I was afraid. Would Kathleen become separated from the rest of us, nearly a thousand miles away in the Bronx? But then we had telephone calls, her voice was the same, she was very happy. That was deeply reassuring to us. After her first vows, I was able to say to a friend of ours, Kathleen had become even more of who she was. It’s a deep blessing to us.”

- Jim Ross (father)

“I remember when she told us. We were at my mom’s house in the living room. I always knew how important her faith was to her in a special way. We were close in age and shared a room growing up. She was always on her knees praying longer than I was. It used to be something we would laugh about because I would be done and in bed and the light would still be on because she was still on her knees praying. I would tease her constantly saying, “Shirley, please, I’m tired. Can you turn the light out? You have said enough prayers!” So, it wasn’t a shock, it was a beautiful moment knowing that she finally found this peace. She finally found her place and her vocation and her happiness.”

-Lauren Moody (sister)
what’s been happening?

This year has been filled with abundant graces! Our Sisters continue to serve over 500 pregnant women each year through our Visitation Missions in New York and now in Toronto, new babies have been born at our Holy Respite in Manhattan, our vocations team and other Sisters were sent throughout the country (and beyond) to meet and give talks on love and life to hundreds and hundreds of young adults, the Sisters in our hope and healing retreat mission continue to walk with many women who have experienced abortion and are on the journey to reconciliation, healing and peace, and we have hosted packed retreats at Villa Maria Guadalupe (see retreat schedule below).

1. We were blessed to honor Mr. and Mrs. Carl Anderson with the John Cardinal O’Connor Award at our Annual Dinner Gala fundraiser in May.
2. On July 4th we hosted our first annual LIFE FEST at Villa Maria Guadalupe. Families and young adults packed the lawn for a festive day of music, talks, prayer, fun and games. (see right)

VILLA MARIA GUADALUPE UPCOMING RETREATS

• Frasatti Young Adults Retreat: October 16-18
• Gospel of Life: Oct. 30-Nov. 1; Jan. 30-Feb. 1
• Visitation Co-Worker Training November 6-8
• Come and See Weekend Retreat November 13-15
• Praying with Scripture Nov. 21-23 with Msgr. James Turro
• Advent Vespers & Holy Hour: Nov. 29, Dec. 13 & 20 from 4:00-5:30
• Fiesta Guadalupe – Bring the Family! December 13
• Intro to Ignatian Meditation: January 29-31
• Theology of the Body: February 19-21
• Retreat for all Women: March 5-7
• You are Salt and Light: A Retreat for Young Adults of the Generations of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI March 26-28 with Rev. Thomas Rosica,CSB

To register: www.sistersoflife.org/vmg

POST ABORTION HEALING MISSION

DAYS OF PRAYER & HEALING for women

| October 3, 2009 | February 27, 2010 |
| November 14, 2009 | April 24, 2010 |
| January 16, 2010 | June 19, 2010 |

For more information or to register please call the Sisters of Life: (toll free) 866.575.0075, or email: postabortion@sistersoflife.org

*Note: For more information or to register for the Day of Prayer and Healing for men please call: (toll free) 877.586.4621
The Secret to Religious Vocations...

BIG families!

Did you know...

The average family size of our Sisters families’ is 4.8 children

75% of our sisters come from families with four or more siblings.

The largest Sisters of Life family is fourteen!

Vocations are born in love, the family fosters generosity

*SISTERS OF LIFE

St. Paul’s Convent
586 McLean Avenue
Yonkers, New York 10705

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*Printed through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus. Written and designed by the Sisters of Life.