

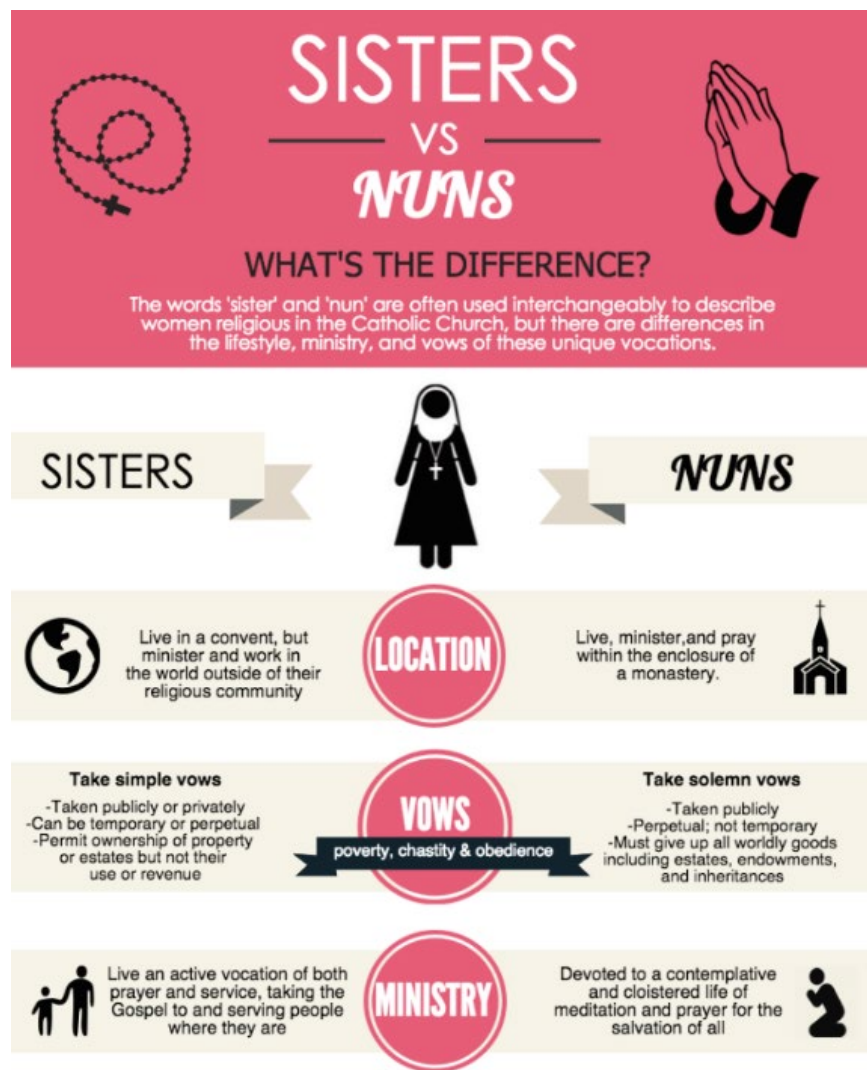
Faith in 5

The Vocation of Consecrated Life



1. Consecrated men or women live out their love for God in total dedication and through the gift of themselves to the Church . They live out a type of spousal relationship with God and for the priests, a spousal-like relationship with God and the Church. The consecrated propose to follow Christ, pursue the perfection of charity in service, and proclaim in the church the glory of the world to come (CCC, 916).
2. The life consecrated to God is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. Some examples of forms of consecrated life are Monasticism, Religious Life, Secular Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, Consecrated Virgins and Hermits. Each of these forms expresses itself in a variety of different orders.
3. Each order has a unique spirituality and charism which comes from the person who founded the order. **The charism** of a religious congregation refers to the distinct spirit that animates a religious community and gives it a particular character. **The works (apostolates)** of the community reflect the charism. **(An excellent source from Catholic Link: [See the infographic on How to Identify 9 Religious Orders in the Catholic Church](#)).**
4. Within a religious order may be a hierarchy: **a first order** (the male religious, who were generally the first established), the **second order** (nuns, established second), and then the **third order** of laity. A third order is typically an association of the lay faithful who try to live the spirit of a particular religious order. As an association of the faithful, the members can be male or female, married or single, young or old, but they must be practicing Catholics. They live at home and not in the convent or monastery, and work in various kinds of occupations fitting to their state as laypeople.
5. According to canon law, there are Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life today, commonly known as orders or congregations.
 - a. **A religious order (religious institute)** is composed of either men or women, living in community of consecrated life but apart from the world. Its members profess solemn vows.
 - b. **A religious congregation** are legally distinguished from religious orders in that they take simple vows. Their focus service to the Church is usually in education, health care or other corporal or spiritual works of mercy.
 - c. **Solemn vows** are those in which there is an irrevocable consecration of oneself accepted by the Church, on the part of one who takes them. Anyone who takes the solemn vows is irrevocably consecrated to the service of God. The obligations are greater.
 - d. **Simple vows** - Any other vow, public or private, individual or collective, concerned with an action or with abstaining from an action.

- e. **A brother** is any male religious, vowed to poverty, chastity, and obedience; is part of a community of those so vowed. They interact with lay people and are involved in apostolic work within the world.
- f. **A monk** is a contemplative brother, (usually cloistered, or isolated from the world), devoted to prayer, contemplation and meditation. They have little contact, if any, with the outside world. ** All monks are brothers, but not all brothers are monks.
- g. **A priest** is a man ordained to the ministerial priesthood who can consecrate the Eucharist and perform other sacraments. A priest may be monastic, religious or secular. An ordained priest who is a monk or a friar is a **religious priest**. A secular priest is better known as a **diocesan priest** - or one who reports to a bishop. Brothers, monks, friars, priests - all are clergy.
- h. **Women religious**, refers to women who have taken vows of chastity, poverty and obedience and who give their life to serve humanity. These women are also commonly known as sisters or nuns. (Source infographic: [Catholic Extension](#))



“While a nun is not a sister, both are addressed as sister. And while this analogy may not be perfect, a nun is more like “Mary” while a sister is more like “Martha.” Both fulfill essential tasks in the Church, but the first is focused on the contemplative life of prayer, while the other is dedicated to the active life of work sustained by prayer. Without prayer, no one can persevere in a good work” ([Source](#)).

6. Catholic nuns must be members of the Catholic faith. Nuns must be single and have no dependent children, but they do not need to be virgins. If a woman was previously married, she must obtain an annulment through the church, unless she was widowed. Age requirements may vary. Most religious communities encourage their applicants to have at least a bachelor's degree, preferably from a religious college. Debts must be paid off before entering the novitiate portion of the process. This is usually one or two years into becoming a nun.

Women who are considering becoming Catholic nuns go through a one- or two-year process of discernment, in which they spend some time speaking with nuns, visiting convents, attending retreats, and praying in order to determine if they will become a nun and what order to join. The process of discernment may be done at least partly online by communicating with nuns from different orders or by attending virtual retreats. Once a woman decides to become a Catholic nun, she applies to join a specific order by undergoing an aspirancy, which is a period of two to four weeks where she lives with the other nuns of her order. If the nuns of her order determine she is a good fit, she will be accepted into a **postulancy**. After several months of living in the order and taking classes, a prospective nun then enters a **novitiate**. This "training period" is a time of introspection when she decides whether she really wants to be a nun. At this time, she will be assigned a new name. After two years as a novice, the nun then takes her first vows (also known as temporary vows), and then after three or more years, takes her final vows.

7. **Discerning the consecrated life** – before professing solemn vows, one must discern the ability to make and commit perpetually to promises made to God. There should be an examination of the following:
 - a. the ability to change the current lifestyle and enter into a new way of living, giving up the affections of worldly desires, interests and pursuits. The vocation may change current relationships with family and friends.
 - b. the ability to take direction and criticism from those in authority, in charge of one's work or spirituality
 - c. finding joy and satisfaction in the task or work assigned
 - d. the capacity to value human relationships, cultivate them and respond positively to conflicts and confrontations
 - e. the ability to spend time in solitude that fosters creativity, growth and holiness
 - f. an assessment of personal prayer life; the discipline and acceptance that prayer may be relentless and lifelong as in contemplative religious orders.

8. Those in consecrated life have totally dedicated their lives to God; taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; serve the Church in special way; work for the salvation of the world; and strive for the perfection of charity in their own lives. They are an outstanding sign of the Church, and a witness to Jesus Christ.

This is a free resource! For further information, visit www.acatholicmomslife.com

For further study: The following table has been extracted from:

<https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/ReligiousGroups.htm>

Popular Name	Official Name	Abbr.	Founder [or Namesake]	Founding Date/Place	Emphases/Highlights
Benedictines	Order of St. Benedict	O.S.B.	St. Benedict of Nursia	529 / Montecassino	large monasteries; liturgy; music; books
Carthusians	Order of Carthusians	O.Cart.	St. Bruno	1084 / Chartreuse, France	hermetic (live in isolation & silence)
Cistercians	Order of Cistercians	O.Cist.	St. Bernard of Clairvaux	1098 / France	rural monasteries; agriculture
Franciscans	Order of Friars Minor	O.F.M.	St. Francis of Assisi	1209 / Assisi, Italy	service of the poor; peace & justice
Dominicans	Order of Preachers	O.P.	St. Dominic Guzman	1216 / Spain	preaching; philosophy & theology
Augustinians	Order of St. Augustine	O.S.A.	[St. Augustine of Hippo]	1244 / Tuscany, Italy	almsgiving; hospitality; "Black Canons"
Jesuits	Society of Jesus	S.J.	St. Ignatius of Loyola	1540 / Rome	education; missions; spirituality
Trappists	Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance	O.C.S.O.	Armand-Jean de Rancé	1664 / La Trappe, France	Thomas Merton
Redemptorists	Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer	C.S.S.R.	St. Alphonsus Liguori	1732 / France	rebuilding post-Revolution Church
Sisters of Charity	Sisters of Charity	S.C.	St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	1805 / Maryland	schools; hospitals; first U.S. women's cong.
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth	Sisters of Charity	S.C.N.	Catherine Spalding	1824 / Kentucky	teaching; medical care of Civil War soldiers
Holy Cross Fathers & Brothers	Congregation of Holy Cross	C.S.C.	Basil Moreau	1837 / France	University of Notre Dame
Salesians	Salesians of Don Bosco	S.D.B.	St. John Bosco	1854 / Turin, Italy	education of urban youth
Paulists	Congregation of St. Paul	C.S.P.	Isaac Hecker (1819-88)	1858 / New York	ecumenism; publications
Legionaries of Christ	Congregation of the L.of C.	L.C.	Marcial Maciel	1941 / Mexico	fidelity to Christ, Mary, and the Church
Missionaries of Charity	Congregation of the M.of C.	M.C.	Mother Teresa of Calcutta	1950 / India	service to the destitute & dying