

Press Release

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Vocation Recruitment Makes Big Strides on the Internet

On a hot Thursday evening in July last summer, a twenty-year-old college student from the South clicked on an internet ad which invited her to take a quiz called, "Is Jesus Calling You?"

The young lady took the quiz, put out by a community of teaching sisters in the Midwest. Over the weeks, she was sent a series of newsletters and other quizzes. Five months later, when the community announced its spring discernment retreat, she asked if she could visit the sisters.

This young woman's experience is an example of a growing trend of young Catholics who are finding religious communities on the internet.

The social media ads worked well for the religious community the young woman contacted. "Of the eight girls who came to our fall discernment retreat, one came from a recent quiz," said Sr. Jeanette Estrada, vocation director of the Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, in Cleveland, OH.

"And three others came because even though they took the quiz two years ago, they kept receiving the newsletters."

Online vocation recruiting has recently developed into a system that not only finds candidates, but nurtures the relationship with them, said Kevin Banet, whose Chicago-area based company TreeFrogClick provides this service.

"There are lots of good vocation prospects out there," Banet said. "You have to know how to find them, and then engage their interest in the community."

Banet said that it's important to use the latest online marketing technology, such as social media targeting, auto-generated newsletters, and freebies in the form of ebooks and PDF flyers. "Of course, you must have a vibrant community that is living out its charism to start with, he said. "Marketing isn't magic. But it's part of the vocation-finding system."

“Most vocation directors don’t have the time or expertise to use online software and communicate with hundreds of candidates,” said Banet, who spent six years living in a lay Dominican community and twelve years working for the Institute on Religious Life.

Traditional online advertising methods in the Church have been “a one-shot deal,” he said. “You have to do more than make people click on an ad. You need to follow up with a system that builds relationships. And there is software that does this in ways that were unheard of ten years ago.”

Banet added that he uses a five-star rating system that identifies the best candidates, and then contacts and works with those people.

He said that over the years, his company has helped both men’s and women’s communities, and his company in turn has learned a lot about how to get through to these candidates. “You can’t just dump a lot of literature in their lap,” he said. You must find out about where they are coming from. And it’s good to be altruistic and help them on their discernment journey, even if they don’t choose religious life.”

Another community, the Visitation Sisters in Washington, DC, was helped by TreeFrogClick, which brought in five of eight vocation retreatants recently.

Sr. Anne Francis Nganga, Visitation vocation director, said of the retreat, “It went very well and seven of them want to come back for further discernment. There are two more from Facebook who still want to come.”

The online behavior of vocation prospects is significant. A 2016 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that 33% of entrants to religious communities said that they first became acquainted with their religious institute in an internet search. Thirteen percent said they found the community through web or social media promotional materials.

The CARA study was based on 279 novices or postulants who entered religious life for the first time in the United States in 2015. But over the years however, the number of religious priests, brothers and sisters have been dropping steadily from 1965 through 2014, the latest year for which data is available, according to CARA.

“The Church needs to put that trend back in the black,” Banet said, adding that there are signs of hope. His data showed that among 121 women respondents, 18% said they would like to pursue a vocation as a religious sister. Sixty-four percent said “maybe.”

TreeFrogClick data also showed that in a group of 354 men, 42% agreed with the phrase, “In prayer, God seems to speak to me in a positive way about religious/consecrated life.” In that same group, 40% said that they had a spiritual director or parent who guided them in their vocation.

“We must put out into the deep,” Banet said, echoing the words of Pope St. John Paul II. “To be honest, there aren’t many Catholic fishermen on the internet, and we have to increase our efforts there to bring about the new evangelization.”

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References

Sr. Jeanette Estrada quote, in article on TreeFrogClick website, about the [Come & See Vocation Assessment Program](#)

Sr. Anne Francis Nganga quote, [Georgetown Visitation Sisters](#)

CARA 2016 study of new religious, [Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate \(CARA\)](#)

Number of religious dropping: [CARA religious life research](#)

TreeFrogClick [Come & See Vocation Assessment Program](#)

Article about Come & See Vocation Program in Institute on Religious Life's [Vocation Blog](#).