



Where Two or More Are Gathered

The varieties of religious community today

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have communities—family, friends, your parish, other members of the Church—mediated your individual religious practice?

2. Have you ever spent time in a community of the sort described in these pieces: a religious order, a lay ecclesial movement, or a house of hospitality? What was your experience like?

3. What aspects or charisms of these communities resonate with your own experiences of religion?

4. How should the Church seek to be a “contrast community,” distinguishing itself from mainstream society or secular power by its way of life? Is “contrast” the right way to think about the Church’s position in the world? What might others be?

5. Many of these groups seek to balance work with prayer, and community life with solitude. What can we learn from their process of negotiating between *ora et labora*, the collective and the individual?

6. How should religious communities address declining numbers? In what ways might they be adaptive, welcoming new ways of worship and new definitions of membership?

7. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, practicing hospitality, advocating for justice: all of these communities, to different degrees, emphasize service to poor and marginalized people. Why do you think service is important to the lives of these communities? How can we foster this kind of care for vulnerable people in our own communities, religious or otherwise?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

St. Rafael Arnáiz, translated by Catherine Addington, “The Antics of the Turnips,” March 2021:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/antics-turnips>

Jonathan Malesic, “Taming the Demon,” February 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/taming-demon>

Griffin Oleynick, “Freedom in Solitude,” April 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/freedom-solitude>

Katherine Lucky, “The Last Shakers?,” November 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/last-shakers>

Lynda McDonnell, “Religious Sisters on the Border,” October 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/love-attention-el-paso>