

9th Grade: Religious Life

OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on lesson's scripture.

During the time young Samuel was minister to the Lord under Eli, the word of the Lord was scarce and vision infrequent.

One day Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was. The Lord called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am." He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "I did not call you," Eli answered. "Go back to sleep." So he went back to sleep.

Again the Lord called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me." But he answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep."

Samuel did not yet recognize the Lord, since the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me."

Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the Lord came and stood there, calling out as before: Samuel, Samuel!

Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

- 1 SAMUEL 3:1-10 ^[1]

RELIGIOUS LIFE

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VIDEO



LIGHT OF LOVE DOCUMENTARY

This outstanding documentary was produced by an organization called Imagine Sisters, which travelled across the United States to interview sisters from various religious orders.



FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF THE RENEWAL VIDEO

This is an astounding documentary-style exploration of how religious men sacrifice for their neighbors.



CLEAR CREEK ABBEY VIDEO

This video portrays the monastery as a center of prayer which draws the community together.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible>.

VOCATION LESSONS | 9th Grade: Religious Life

REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible>.



VIDEO

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

OVERVIEW:

Discuss main ideas based on the following videos about men's and women's orders, active and contemplative. It is important to stress that the Church and the world desperately need both active and contemplative vocations, and that both vocations are beautiful and heroic.

GOALS:

Students will:

- Communicate a reverence for the religious life
- Pray for people called to the religious life
- Be encouraged to pray for God's will in their own lives regarding a vocation to the religious life.

PREPARATION:

Review videos in student section and choose one or more to view in class. Note interesting parts and choose 2-3 parts to discuss with students.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Watch video with class and discuss according to the options below:

1. Have students discuss what parts most caught their attention.
2. Have students write out their thoughts on the video, then share with the class.
3. Break up students into groups to discuss the video, then a spokesperson from each group shares the group's conclusions with the entire class.

SOME DISCUSSIONS STARTERS:

1. Were there any words or concepts with which you weren't familiar? Let's go through those.
2. What would be hard about this life? What would be beautiful? If you were there, what would you look forward to? What would you worry about if you were in their shoes?

RELIGIOUS LIFE

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VIDEO



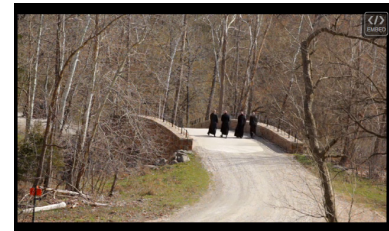
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INSTRUCTIONS:

Cover the following points via lecture, or print out handouts and discuss with students.

1. What is Consecrated Religious Life? ^[2]
 - A. (CCC 915) A permanent state of life characterized by a formal profession of the evangelical counsels—celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty, and obedience. While all Christians are called to practice these “counsels” according to their state in life, religious formally and permanently commit themselves to a way of life which lives out these “counsels.” Christ Himself lived these counsels; we imitate these counsels because we wish to imitate Him. By vowing to live by these counsels, the “characteristic features [of] Jesus—the chaste, poor and obedient one — are made constantly “visible” in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.” ^[3] By this overt and radical commitment, religious testify to the beauty of these counsels and the possibility for every human being in every age to live out these counsels according to his state in life.
2. The Purpose of Religious Life and its Fruits
 - A. Religious life seeks God and His service ultimately. It bears witness to important truths necessary for salvation:
 - i. *That we are all made for God and destined for heaven.* By embracing a life completely devoted to prayer and service of the Church and neighbor, religious remind us daily that we are called to seek heaven and that nothing can satisfy us but God alone: religious “signify and proclaim in the Church the glory of the world to come” (CCC 916).
 - ii. *That Christ completely emptied himself to be available to others and that true charity is this kind of love.* Religious imitate this radically and remind us of the kind of love Christ has for us; they manifest Christ’s self-emptying to be present to others (CCC 933).
 - iii. *That Christ loves His Church to the point of death, and He will not abandon her or stop protecting her.* The Church has no purpose but to live for Him alone. Christ likened this relationship to a marriage; in a spiritual way, religious take Christ as a spouse. They even wear wedding rings to signify this. And this relationship serves to remind us of the unity between Christ and the Church. As Lumen Gentium puts it, religious life serves “to represent the unbreakable bond of union that exists between Christ and his bride the Church” (LG, 44; CCC 925).
 - B. Religious life exists for the holiness of its members (CCC 917). Thus, every approved religious order has a rule which provides for a balanced life, preserving physical, emotional, and mental health. It offers structured prayer and liturgical life, frequent sacraments, and spiritual direction for the good of the soul. It offers regular intellectual and physical work to help its members put their gifts to use. It offers recreation, time for conversation, solitude, and common meals. It offers a thousand opportunities to serve and be served, love and be loved, forgive and be forgiven. Religious life offers the chance to grow into a full human and spiritual maturity through a life completely centered on God and interaction with committed adults also seeking the Lord.
 - C. Religious life exists for the good of the Body of Christ (CCC 917). The focus on God and His service in company with committed others has always born fruit in service to the Body of Christ. The whole church benefits from the witness of religious life. There are a number of other benefits.
 - i. Religious aid us with their prayers. Religious commit to an ongoing cycle of prayer. Many religious devote all their time to this work of prayer. All over the world, there are men and women getting up at 4 AM, stopping whatever they were doing at noon, even getting up in the middle of the night to pray for someone in need—maybe you. This is an amazing thing. Many orders take prayer requests by email, telephone, or mail. A life of prayer does not sound like a hard life to some. As an experiment try saying a rosary three times in a row at 5:30 AM keeping awake and your attention focused. That is life for a Poor Clare or Carmelite. And they are doing it for people they love and know, but also for people they don’t know.
 - ii. Religious aid us with their company. Religious often choose to live in or stay in centers of crime, poverty, and upheaval—they want to be Christ to whoever needs His presence. Imagine: I am homeless, poor, unbaptized, sick, dying, or orphaned, and living in a dangerous and disgusting area. I see a man or woman giving complete attention to me. I see that this man or woman is beautiful, intelligent, that he or she could have dated and mar-

[2] If needed, use Sophomore Unit to explore in more detail about the practical joys and challenges of religious life. Or simply let students know that practical questions about chastity, enclosure, active vs. contemplative life, etc. are treated in the Sophomore Unit.

[3] John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996, paragraph 1 at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata_en.html

ried, could have been wealthy, owned the biggest house, run the biggest business. But instead this man or woman looks at me and says: “How are you doing?” Religious give us their complete attention. They give us themselves.

- iii. Religious aid us with their work. It is remarkable how many institutions that we take for granted were invented and run by religious for centuries. Free hospitals, hospices for the dying, free schools, orphanages, homes for the elderly, homeless shelters, meal centers—these things did not exist in the world before Christ. The fact that they exist now bears witness to the thousands of religious who did these things and taught the human race that we ought not to stand by and let our brothers suffer. To this day, many religious continue to give free care for the poor, sick, imprisoned, dying, ignorant, lonely, and afflicted, and thousands who would not be cared for otherwise. Cardinal Newman explained just how much the world depends on religious life when he wrote about the Benedictines: “St. Benedict found the world, physical and social, in ruins, and his mission was to restore it in the way not of science, but of nature, not as if setting about to do it, not professing to do it by any set time, or by any rare specific, or by any series of strokes, but so quietly, patiently, gradually, that often till the work was done, it was not known to be doing. It was a restoration rather than a visitation, correction or conversion. The new work which he helped to create was a growth rather than a structure. Silent men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing and building; and other silent men, not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister, tiring their eyes and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully copied and recopied their manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one who contended or cried out, or drew attention to what was going on, but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning and a city.”^[4]

[4] This story is good read after the story of Thomas More and John Fisher in the Marriage Unit. It can also stand alone.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Reinforce the main points below. Optional stories and resources are provided to illustrate the points, generate discussion, or use as meditations / homework readings. Teachers may wish to summarize some stories in their own words.

1. All of us are called to support religious life, whether we are religious or not.
 - A. A beautiful example of this comes from the Cristero families. (*See story*)
2. A life that serves religious life is a life that practices prayer and practices virtue. All the virtues are needed to support religious life. One especially important virtue is trust in God.
 - A. Trust in God: Read the story of Mother Luisita (*student section*) and then decode the letters of Mother Luisita. See her confidence in God and her advice to the sisters struggling against sickness and poverty.



CLOSING

CRISTERO FAMILIES SUPPORT PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

The 1917 Constitution in Mexico passed a number of anti-Catholic laws. These laws were not enforced right away, but in the late 1920s under President Plutarco Calles, punishment suddenly came for celebrating mass, wearing a religious habit or having a religious house, and churches were closed. Thousands of priests and religious were exiled or even killed. Religious were forced to leave the country or hide in the homes of families. And families stepped forward.



Cristeros with the religious sister they were protecting.

At great personal risk, families sheltered priests and religious. One religious order, the Carmelite Sisters of the Sacred Heart, tells how novices fled under bullet-fire to shelter with their superior Mother Luisita. Twenty sisters, along with vestments and vessels for mass, were hidden in a tiny space behind a door covered with straw. When soldiers entered the house looking for feed for the animals, Mother Luisita told the sisters to make an examination of conscience and prepare for the worst: "If they find us," she said, "They will surely kill us... Place yourself in the hands of God."

They could hear the owner of the house arguing with the soldiers. Then silence. Whatever the man said, he had convinced the soldiers to leave!^[5] This was one of hundreds of anonymous families that sheltered the sisters in the coming years and made possible their work of caring for the sick and orphaned.

A bishop of Lubbock, TX was a son of one brave Cristero family. When some Catholics rose up to fight the new anti-

Catholic laws, these "Cristero" fighters were helped by families like his. Bishop Plácido Rodríguez tells how his parents Eutímio Rodríguez Cárdenas and María Concepción Rosiles de Rodríguez supported the Catholic religion and fostered his own vocation. In an interview,^[6] Bishop Rodríguez says:

"All I remember is my mother, María Concepción Rosiles de Rodríguez, telling me of her participation with the Feminine Brigades, and passing through the tough security of the Mexican army, without suspecting that these valiant women were carrying ammunition.



The Feminine Brigade of St. Joan of arc consisted of women who fought to protect priests, religious, and faithful members of the Church.

"My mother in the year 1927 was 22 years old... 25 years later she would share with me how scared she was when they crossed the enemy line of government forces. Once they crossed this critical point, they felt more secure and delivered the ammunition to the Cristeros."

He was asked, "What do you wish you could tell everyone about your mother?"

Bishop Rodríguez responded, "My mother contributed and participated in the Feminine Brigades (BB); she maintained the family together and supported my father in his underground mission of protecting and hiding both priests and bishops during the persecution.

[5] Darryl V. Catherine, *Conservative Catholicism and the Carmelites: Identity, Ethnicity, and Tradition in the Church* (Bloomington, IU: Indiana University Press, 2001), 32.

[6] See Kathryn Lopez' interview at her blog <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kathrynlopez/2012/09/son-of-cristero-talks-for-greater-glory-religious-freedom/>. Lopez is editor for National Review Online.

HOMEWORK

Choose and assign one of the following options:

1. Read about or research another saint /story not covered during the class. Some examples are Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Francis, John of the Cross. Write a reflection answering these questions about the saint/story:
 - A. Have you ever gone through any experiences like these people (serving the family, being sick, mourning the death of loved ones, being afraid or in danger, standing up for your beliefs, doing work that didn't seem to fit you, having tension with someone you loved, etc.)? What did it feel like? How did you deal with it?
 - B. What would be hard about this life? What would be beautiful? If you were there, what would you look forward to? What would you worry about if you were in their shoes?
2. Coded letters of Mother Luisita. Let the students take this handout home and figure out the code. The letters themselves teach much about the religious vocation and a life faithful to Christ.
3. Based on the information from this lesson, have students answer the following questions:
 - A. What are the evangelical counsels?
 - B. Why does God call some people to be religious? What is the purpose?
 - C. Who is benefited by religious life?
 - D. How does religious life benefit others not in religious life?



RELIGIOUS LIFE

CLOSING *continued*

"I would also like to tell everyone about my father, Don Eufímio Rodríguez Cárdenas, that he dedicated his life and money to the cause of Christ the King in the defense of the Catholic Church; protected the Church property and sacred vessels, would read the Mass prayers as if it were the Mass, because the faithful would gather on Sunday for prayer. He would run the risk of being confused with, or taken for, a priest, and be executed. He would organize and conduct "field Masses" in the rural areas of Celaya or other small towns. These were very dangerous undertakings in which, on one occasion, three leaders were killed by the government forces. He conducted and led the burials of these three fellow Cristeros; while in procession to the cemetery, the government forces fired upon a peaceful procession and more pilgrims were killed. My father received only one abrasion with a bullet on a leg."



A Cristeros field Mass

Bishop Rodriguez goes on to tell how his father avoided even an assassination attempt. The Feminine Brigades of St. Joan of Arc comprised more than 20,000 women who secretly ran ammunition, information, food and medical supplies, while sheltering priests and religious in secret.

Throughout history, families help religious and religious help families.

VEN. MARIA LUISA ^[7]

When Maria Luisa de la Pena married Dr. Pascual Rojas, no one could have predicted what would happen to this beautiful and clever young woman. Born the oldest of 14 children, extremely mature, she grew to love God and even considered a religious vocation. In those days, parents often played matchmaker; when Maria's parents matched her with Pascual, this was not a terrible cross. In fact, Maria and Pascual fell deeply in love and had a very happy marriage. When they discovered they could not have children, they decided to build a hospital for the poor. They served the poor for the next fourteen years.



Mother Luisa

In 1895, the doctor died. In one of their last conversations, while he was dying, Pascual told his wife that she would make a good religious sister, and that he knew this is where God would take her next.

Eight years later, Maria did indeed join the Carmelites. The next decade saw Maria become completely obedient and available to the Bishop. After less than a year as a Carmelite, the bishop told her she was needed back at the hospital she had founded with her husband. She went back to work there, and founded a school and orphanage. Next, the Bishop said it would be better for her to return to religious life. She did. Four years later, the bishop said—"Your hospital needs you." She obeyed and went back.

After such remarkable obedience, it is almost no surprise that the Bishop decided Maria was just the kind of woman who should found a religious order. He told her to do this and thus was born an order uniting the Contemplative Carmel with the active life: The Carmelite Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Maria began to be called Mother Luisita.

[7] For more information see <http://www.carmelitesistersocd.com/mother-luisita>



CLOSING *continued*

Family life had supported Maria in learning to love God; it had introduced her to her future husband. Their married love had created the hospital, which set in motion the events that led to the start of this new religious order.

However, the order had barely begun before Mexico's 1920 religious persecution almost destroyed it. Families saved the sisters and that story is told earlier in the lesson. The sisters finally fled the country and made a foundation in California. They say Mother Luisita kissed the ground when she crossed the border because she could finally wear her religious habit again.

Nevertheless, as soon as it was safer, Mother Luisita returned to Mexico. She spent the last years of her life disguised and hiding with families while she took on new postulants and carried on the work of the order. Letters she wrote to the sisters on practical and spiritual matters were full of code words and code names to protect the persons involved. Mother Luisita died in 1937.

Mother Luisita's own obedience had played a key role. At each request, she could have fought against what was hard, demanding, and seemingly meaningless. It would have been easy to ask: "What is the point of leaving the Carmel? What is the point of going back to the hospital? What is the point of going back to religious life?" And she could have asked, "How is this good for me?" She could have refused. But she did not—and the very meaning of her life slowly became clear as each step led to the next. Today thousands of sisters, poor people, sick, orphaned, and students owe their own story to Mother Luisita's obedience.

Coded Letters of Mother Luisita

Use the code to figure out what Mother Luisita is talking about in her first letter, and then read the second letter to see what advice she gives about trusting in God.

Because religious orders were outlawed for most of the period Mother Luisita was alive, she had to use code when writing to her sisters. There could be no evidence in the letter that they were running a religious order. That meant not using religious names, not referring to the towns where the sisters were living, not referring to things like the "novitiate" or religious "profession." Below are some of the code words she used. See if you can understand the following letter using this key.

CODEWORD	MEANING
Lupita	Sister Guadalupe of the Sacred Heart Vazquez
Girls	Sisters
Carmen	Sister Carmen of the Sacred Heart Becerra
Little town	Atotonilco, the town where the motherhouse was located.
Alberto	Father Alberto Urdanivia, S.J.
Family	The Community
Job	Novitiate
Maria	Mother Mary of Christ Castellanos
Celebration	Profession
Maria	Sister Mary of St. Joseph Espinoza
Magdalena	Sister Magdalena of Christ Ibarra
Soccorito	Sister Socorro of the Holy Spirit Cholico Rodriguez
Settle your accounts	Go to confession
Grandmother	The persecuted church

March 10, 1934 ^[8]

My very dear daughter, Elenita,

I had the pleasure of receiving your letter and invitation. May God our Lord reward you.

I'd be delighted to spend a day in that little house so dear to me. God our Lord can do all things. Right now, though, I'm quite in turmoil because of what happened to Carmelita [9] and now she's in danger of contracting meningitis. Over here our own Carmen is critical. She contracted influenza and was anointed two days ago. She's very discouraged. Lupita has had a lot of problems in the school. The altar bread machine is out of order and our clients, of course, want to stop their orders. And as for myself, I'm more swollen every day. Let us bless Our Lord for everything. He only allows what is best for us to happen. Let us go forward, good seamen, for our Love is waiting on the seashore.

[8] Letter 329, to Mother Elena of the Cross and the Holy Spirit Heredia Alonzo. See more at <http://www.carmelitesistersocd.com/writings/> collected in *In Love's Safekeeping: The Letters and Spiritual Writings of Mother Maria Luisa Josefa of the Most Blessed Sacrament, OCD*. Translated by Fr. Basil Frison, CMF and Sr. Maria de la Paz Ayon, OCD. Los Angeles, CA: Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart, 1999, Vol. III, p. 548-550.



CLOSING *continued*

I hope that you've received my note telling you that the comedy you were asking for has been lost, but that you can obtain it in the little town.

Regarding Alberto, I haven't seen him. Consequently, I don't know what his decision is. Please don't say anymore about it. My hope is that he'll be writing to you. Be calm. Be calm. Try to be calm. Socorrito mentioned to me that Alberto told her that it wouldn't be possible for them to go on Friday, feast of Our Lady of Sorrows because they've already made other commitments. To my way of thinking, it would be better for the children to make their retreat when the priests are free, perhaps on the feast of the Sacred Heart for example.

How are Magdalena and Maria? I hope they're feeling better and will be able to come on the fourteenth, which is Wednesday.

We're studying something for the girls' celebration which will be taking place on the fifteenth. Try to come because Gabriel probably won't be receiving his first Holy Communion on the nineteenth. You could either go back before the nineteenth or stay here, according to your needs.

Today I received a card from Maria telling me that Carmelita is feeling better. Her temperature has gone down and she's sleeping better. Blessed be God!

It seems that the job for the girls in Mexico City is becoming a reality. Mr. Soberon has taken a lot of interest. He says that he learned about our family in Duarte. Only God knows. I'm afraid that he's already thinking of having the girls study nursing because that's one of his current projects.

Carmen, who lives here with us, is gravely ill. Pray for her. I can't [write] anymore. Good-bye. May Our Lord bless you.

This next letter is unsigned; it was written when a large reward had been posted by the government who was conducting a search for Mother Luisita.

Guadalajara, 23 September 1932 ^[10]

Miss Margarita Maria of the Sacred Heart,

My beloved daughter, to whom I wish the holy peace of God.

I've received your two letters. The last one came today. May God our Lord reward you for the joy you give me with your letters. Don't be a foolish little girl, daughter. All the works of God have the stamp of contradiction, difficulty, and great sorrow and humiliation. If none of these is present, don't be so sure of the work and be afraid of its execution. Therefore, with this in mind, you should be at peace and happy to see that it has His stamp. Be positive that it will be done when God our Lord wants it so. Let's confide in Him and not in this or that person. The Holy Spirit says, "Cursed be the man who places his confidence in another man." This is why, when I see that you girls are too solicitous and seem to take everything from one individual, it makes me sad. Certainly I'd like to see you have more confidence in Divine Providence. Otherwise you'll be suffering many great disappointments and your projects will meet with failure. Everything human is changeable and the one who is for you today, will be against you tomorrow. Trust, my daughter, only in God and try to please Him at all costs. Thus, you will have everything. He will move hearts and do everything as long as we confide in Him. (Pardon me if I continue this letter in pencil). It seems to me that God our Lord wants me without any more suffering since He's given me so much confidence in His Divine Will. I leave everything in His hands and I'm at peace.

Lately, there have been rumors, or at least fears, that we'll be left very poor, without any work aside from our own. Not even this worries me. Maybe because everything has been quiet and this is why I've asked for your prayers. Maybe your prayers are the ones that have given me this tranquility. I've been hidden away from people to avoid being seen and soon they'll forget all about the money.

Good-bye.

[9] Mother Carmen of Jesus Chavez Martinez's eye was extracted.

[10] Letter 210 to Mother Margarita Maria of the Sacred Heart Hernandez Gonzalez. See more at <http://www.carmelitesistersocd.com/writings> collected in *In Love's Safekeeping: The Letters and Spiritual Writings of Mother Maria Luisa Josefa of the Most Blessed Sacrament*, OCD. Translated by Fr. Basil Frison, CMF and Sr. Maria de la Paz Ayon, OCD. Los Angeles, CA: Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart, 1999, Vol. 1, p. 319-320.