



# Another Perspective

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**By Monsignor Timothy P. Stein**  
**There Is A Future For Religious Life**

It will be a source of sadness to her many friends and co-workers, and those whose lives she has impacted in 40 years of ministry in the Diocese of Altoona - Johnstown, to know that Sister Mark Plescher is returning to the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Agnes in Fond du Lac WI.

It is also a source of some sadness to note that with her departure, there will be no Sisters of Saint Agnes serving locally. A long chapter in our history is coming to a close.

The Sisters of Saint Agnes came to Altoona in 1877 to staff Saint Mary School. They would also serve, briefly, at Saint Michael School in Hollidaysburg, and for a longer period at Saint Mary School in Nanty Glo. Many local vocations were received by the Congregation. More women entered the Sisters of Saint Agnes from Saint Mary Parish in Altoona than from any other parish in which the Sisters served across the United States.

The situation facing the Sisters of Saint Agnes and their local ministry is not uncommon. The Sisters of Mercy, once the most numerous of religious communities in the Diocese is now down to about half a dozen Sisters locally. The Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Baden, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, can count only one or two Sisters in our local Church, where once they could be counted by the dozens.

The number of women entering any of these communities is not what it once was. Some of these communities will die out. They will be like a line addressed to Audrey Hepburn, as Sister Luke in the 1959 movie "The Nun's Story," who was reminded that a Sister's task is to "do good, and disappear." This is the same sentiment Jesus voiced when he said "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies it produces much fruit."

There is a good harvest of vocations still to be gathered, but perhaps not in the manner we have been thinking of. Instead of praying for vocations to communities that have fulfilled their purpose, we should be praying for God to raise up new foundresses who will bring forth new communities of Sisters ready to respond to the needs of our times.

It's happened before. It can happen again. God will grant the increase, if we ask Him for it. Grains of wheat will fall to the ground and die. Those who have done good will disappear. But others will come forward to meet the needs of the Church today, with the same sense of dedication as those who went before them.