

Did You Know? Religious “Charisms”

“Charism” is a word that comes up a lot when describing Catholic religious orders and communities. In some ways, you can think of an order’s “charism” as its personality, although that is an oversimplification. “Charism” is the inspirational purpose that starts communities and keeps them going. It is their community mission and animating spirit. It gives religious communities distinctive flavors and imbues their daily practice with meaning. In times of change, communities turn back to their founding charism or spirit—their purpose—to discern how to move forward and sustain themselves

Over centuries of Church history, religious orders have been founded by dynamic personalities (think people such as Francis and Clare of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia and his sister Scholastica, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Basil Moreau) who felt compelled to address particular problems the people of their time and in their local orbits faced. The talents and traits needed to meet those challenges differed, and thus the charisms that define each community vary; still, as much as Jesuits, Sisters of Mercy and Dominicans may vary from each other, all are living out their undeniably Catholic calls to holiness. In the next few weeks, we’ll take a look at the distinctive charisms of the Congregation of Holy Cross.