



Society of the Holy Child Jesus  
AMERICAN PROVINCE

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## **Sister of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus Creates a DVD to Urge More Women to Consider Religious Life**

**SAN BERNARDINO, CALIF.** — While watching the coming attractions at her local movie theater, Sister Pat Phillips of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus heard a call. And this call, although meant for another listener, reached her just the same.

“I saw this ad for the Marines and it stirred me,” Sr. Pat said of the recruitment clip. “It said, ‘We don’t take applications, we take commitments,’ and I thought, ‘I wish we had thought of that.’”

### **‘Jesus Calls Women’**

But, Sr. Pat, a movie buff, media maven, and executive director of Wordnet Productions, Inc., a Catholic television ministry headquartered in California, has devised her own tool to reach the masses. For the last year, Sr. Pat has worked behind the scenes with the Wordnet staff producing a 30-minute DVD titled, “Jesus Calls Women.”

The DVD features honest and compelling interviews with Sisters of various Catholic denominations – from habited to non-habited, cloistered to non-cloistered – explaining, in their own words, the importance of becoming a Sister and detailing the triumphs and challenges that arose during the discernment process.

Leilany Davila, a candidate with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, decided to enter religious life after praying and talking with other people. She advised prospective Sisters to consider religious orders where they feel happy and content.

“Every day you kind of get confirmation that this is what God wants,” Davila said in the DVD. “This is what you need to do in your life.”

The multi-cultural Sisters represent different Catholic sects and live in different parts of the country. The DVD for which they are featured, is even-handed in terms of religious orders highlighted. That generic quality is exactly what Larry Jilk had envisioned. Jilk, of Philadelphia, funded the making of “Jesus

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*For this is our mission: to help others to believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world, and to rejoice in God’s presence*



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Calls Women,” in hopes of spurring more vocations, as well as laying the groundwork for similar multi-media outreach efforts with the same intent.

“It’s my way of helping out,” said Jilk, who has had three cousins become Catholic nuns. “I think Sisters do an excellent job and the world would be a much poorer place without the work that they do.”

### **Answering the call**

Sr. Pat contends that the DVD aligns perfectly with the Holy Child mission of education and empowerment and carries on the legacy of the Society’s Foundress, Cornelia Connelly. “I believe that there are calls to religious life out there,” Sr. Pat said. “It’s a wonderful life and I don’t want prospective sisters to miss out.”

For Sr. Pat, a Missouri native, the call to become a Holy Child Sister came during high school. Since then, her religious service has taken her to classrooms in Waukegan, Ill. where she taught fourth- to seventh-grade and later to Rye, N.Y., where she taught religion, math, and English to high school girls during the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s.

She later served as Head of School at the Cornelia Connelly School in Anaheim, Calif. and began a King of the Hill Tennis Tournament with Hollywood stars. It was during that time that Sr. Pat found another calling – meeting and befriending various celebrities, including Bill Cosby, Charlton Heston and Chris Connelly. “Bill Cosby was so much fun, because he loved nuns,” Sr. Pat recalled. “Nuns taught him when he was a boy.”

Now, nearly two decades after her first celebrity experience and following service in the states and abroad, Sr. Pat’s ministry with Wordnet has brought her back to California. No longer in a conventional classroom, Sr. Pat has a much further reach. “Wordnet is not a direct service. We don’t feed the hungry or clothe the poor,” she said. “We’re feeding the hungry that are spiritually starved. We’ve made it possible for others to more directly touch people’s lives.”

### **Vocation outreach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

And touching people’s lives and bringing about positive change is the overall goal of women religious. But, these days, there are fewer Sisters nationwide to work toward these ends.

This downturn in new vocations has caused Catholics to become increasingly creative in outreach to prospective Sisters. A 2004 survey by Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Almanac showed there were approximately 71,486 nuns in the United States, down 50 percent from the 1960s.

Instead of waiting for women to call or visit Catholic orders, some are bringing the message to potential women religious. Like Wordnet’s DVD, Chicago-based VocationMatch.com is also trying to spread the word about religious life. Similar to dating Web sites that pair up prospective couples,

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VocationMatch.com gathers information from inquirers and then matches their profiles against those of religious communities in its database. As of September 2008, the Web site logged a record-breaking 6,930 women interested in religious vocations.

Father Mike Manning agreed that Catholics must find alternative means to reach out to wider audiences, for vocations and beyond. Manning, whose weekly ministry on Wordnet reaches an estimated 125,000 households, said connecting with people through the Internet, e-mail lists and through DVDs like the one Wordnet produced, is what he envisions for the future. "It's been my whole commitment for a long time – using mass media to share the gospel," Fr. Manning said. "There's a need for something more than what I can do with the television program. The work of people like Sr. Pat is what I see as being a real help."

For Sr. Pat, who is Executive Director for Fr. Manning's weekly series for Trinity Broadcasting Network, inspiring and encouraging women to follow in her footsteps was key in developing "Jesus Calls Women." As for advice she'd offer someone who feels called to religious life, Sr. Pat says simply, "Don't give up. Go for it. It's worth it."

### **About the Society of the Holy Child Jesus**

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ) is a religious order of Roman Catholic Sisters founded by Cornelia Connelly. The Society is composed of three provinces (American, African, and European). In addition to the United States, the American Province includes Chile and the Dominican Republic. Since the Society's founding in 1846, education has been at the heart of its mission. Today, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus continue to serve as educators in the broadest sense of the word through their ministries in teaching, spiritual direction, social work, legal work, health care, parish administration, and pastoral care. Throughout the world, the Sisters of the Holy Child serve in schools, colleges, universities, parishes, health care organizations, and social service and legal centers. The Society has also founded and continues to sponsor 14 schools, a college, and several social service programs. For more information, visit [www.holychild200.org](http://www.holychild200.org).

*Editor's note: Sister Pat Phillips of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus is available for interviews. To schedule an interview, contact Theresa Katalinas at 215-884-6499 or [theresa@comsolutionsgroup.com](mailto:theresa@comsolutionsgroup.com). To learn more about the DVD "Jesus Calls Women," visit <http://www.holychild200.org/home/Sr.PatsVocationDVD.html>.*

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