

For young women and religious, joy radiates at Fiat Days retreat in Emmitsburg

EMMITSBURG — Counting on her fingers to keep track of points in an ice-breaker game she was playing with a young woman at the Fiat Days discernment retreat, an aspirant for the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco rattled off the names of various scents from the Bath & Body Works collection: “Cucumber Melon,” “Lavender Vanilla,” “Country Apple.”

Thirty seconds later, the topic changed in the “Categories”-type game, to women in the Bible. Then it changed again, to clothing brands.

With each category, Fiat Days participants paired up with a new teammate, first introducing themselves, and then working together to list as many items in the category before tallying their own individual scores.

The ice-breaker session on day one of Fiat Days served a dual purpose: for the 41 young women participants to introduce themselves to one another, and to the consecrated religious and adult chaperones on hand; and to illustrate that each person comes to discernment with their own gifts, knowledge and experience.

Fiat Days is an annual discernment retreat for young women, ages 15-25, and hosted by the Office of Vocations of the Diocese of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This year, it took place July 1-3 at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Archdiocese of Washington will host Fiat Days at Mount St. Mary’s **July 27-29** for high school-aged young women (those entering the 9th grade to those who have just graduated). The retreat is aimed at helping participants mature in their faith, deepen their desire for holiness and explore the particular vocation through which God is calling them to pursue holiness.

The retreat takes its name from Mary’s “Fiat” to be the mother of our Lord, and offers attendees a time to learn about consecrated life and better discern God’s call.

One-third of this year's participants were previous attendees, and it led to a joyous scenario as long-distance friends reunited in the seminary's rec room as they arrived July 1.

"Most of the friends I've made at Fiat Days, I don't get to see but once a year here," said Zofia Joynt of Our Lady of Refuge Parish in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, a four-year participant. "We maintain a prayerful connection throughout the year, and because of that, our friendships are super strong."

For Zofia, 18, Fiat Days offers good conversation and quality time for discernment among like-minded women her age.

"I come from a small parish, and there are very few Catholics in my hometown, let alone Catholic women my age. Coming here every year is a treat, because I don't get this kind of interaction with Catholic peers and religious women," she told *The Catholic Witness*, Harrisburg's diocesan newspaper. "This retreat is a blessing."

The Fiat Days schedule included daily Mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual direction and discernment walks with the sisters, the rosary and night prayer, and camaraderie forged through small group discussion, recreation and meals.

Consecrated religious at the retreat this year included the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco, the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara, a consecrated virgin, a representative of the cloistered Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary and chaperones.

"Fiat Days is a wonderful experience for the young girls, because so many times, the religious aren't in their schools or even in their parishes, yet their desire for a religious vocation is there," said Sister Patricia Jean of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, from Walton, Kentucky.

"This gives the young women an opportunity to meet religious sisters, and to ask those heart-burning questions, like 'How will I know?' and 'I wonder if ...' Here, they can explore and discern in a relaxed and welcoming environment," she said.

"And they're not alone in doing it," added Mother Mary Christina, also of the Sisters

of St. Joseph the Worker. “They are with other women their age who have the same questions. They might be the only one wondering amongst their peers, but here, they’re not alone. There is common ground.”

As a three-year attendee of Fiat Days, Sister Patricia Jean encourages the women discerning a religious vocation to further their retreat experiences by visiting religious communities.

“If you’re interested in teaching, visit a teaching community. If you’re interested in nursing, go to a nursing community. God will direct you to where he wants you to be. He will fulfill all your desires,” she said.

*To register for the July 27-29 Fiat Days sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Archdiocese of Washington, **click here**.*

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