What vows does a nun take and what do they mean?

Before answering your question, here's some background.

Over the centuries, some Christians, women and men, led by a grace of the Holy Spirit, have sought to follow Jesus in a stable form of life that helps them imitate him who was poor, chaste, and obedient unto death. The church describes them as leading a consecrated life. They may belong to a number of groups in the church that differ according to the graces given them. Some follow Jesus in his prayer, some as he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and did good to people, some as he taught others. In a special way they seek to serve God, to build up the church, and work for the salvation of the world.

To answer your specific question, nuns are women who may belong to one of these groups. They take the three vows--poverty, chastity and obedience--which flow from the evangelical counsels of Jesus Christ.

**Poverty**

The vow of poverty leads a nun to imitate Jesus who for our sake became poor, although he was rich. It helps her to be poor in spirit as well as in fact, and to live a life of labor and moderation. By the vow of poverty, she gives up the right to control or benefit from personal property and commits herself to live interdependently within a community, according to its constitutions. The purpose of this vow is to free her from being fascinated by material things so that she may be free to serve others.

**Chastity**

The vow of chastity leads a nun to imitate Jesus who was chaste. This vow frees her from the demands of an exclusive human relationship so that she can give all her love to God, and through God to all people. By the vow she promises not to marry or to engage in romantic behavior or sexual acts.

**Obedience**

The vow of obedience leads the nun to imitate the obedience of Jesus Christ. by seeking God's will for her and obeying her lawful superiors according to the constitutions of her particular group. As a member of her religious community, she searches for the will of God, not in arbitrary commands, but in prayerful reflection and dialogue with others.

This "Ask a Catholic" response written by Mary Ann Strain, C.P.
How to Become a Catholic Nun

The job description calls for chastity, poverty and obedience, and apparently that's not everyone's cup of tea. In the past 30 years, the number of Catholic nuns in the United States has fallen by about 100,000. But if you're seeking spiritual commitment and the opportunity to provide service to the community, you might be one to boost the numbers.

Instructions

Step 1 Be Catholic or convert to Catholicism. Talk to your priest about the steps involved.

Step 2 Do not get married--or divorced. Married women can't become nuns, and the Church frowns on divorce. You may apply if you're a widow, though.

Step 3 Get a college degree. Many religious communities like applicants to have at least a bachelor's degree before they take their vows. See 149 Decide Which College Is Right for You.

Step 4 Find an order, or a religious community, that suits your beliefs and personality. For instance, do you want to be out in the community or do you prefer a cloistered life? (Technically, if you're out in the world you're a sister, and if you're cloistered you're a nun.) A priest or nun at your church usually can point you in the right direction, or check out ReligiousMinistries.com.

Step 5 Look for an order whose work interests you. You'll find everything from beekeeping and winemaking to teaching and family counseling. Benedictine sisters, for instance, work in education and service ministries, whereas Cistercian nuns are devoted to prayer and contemplation. You don't need to be quiet and passive to be a nun--some are antiwar protesters and others lead the fight against AIDS in Third World countries.

Step 6 Contact the vocation director at the community you choose. Spend some time there and ask plenty of questions.

Step 7 Move in for a year or two while you're still studying or working outside if that's an option. This period of residency will give you a good feel for the everyday life of the order you're considering.

Step 8 Go through the novitiate, or training period, which may last another year or two. You'll spend your time studying, praying and deciding whether you really want to become a nun.

Step 9 Take temporary vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. Depending on the community, these vows may last from one to nine years.

Step 10 Take your final vows. If you made good on your temporary vows, you're ready for the religious life.

http://www.ehow.com/how_138305_become-catholic-nun.html