



# What Is My Vocation?



**Student Edition**



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# What Is My Vocation?



**Student Edition**

## ***Discipleship in Jesus Christ***

*As baptized Catholics, we are all called to be followers of Christ,  
and from this calling we discover the individual path God invites  
us to follow in our lives.*

*Nihil Obstat*: Reverend William H. Woestman, O.M.I., J.C.D.  
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*Manuscript Development: Ruben M. Hernández, Genevieve Yep*

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## *Vocation Prayer*

*Lord Jesus,  
Make me your disciple,  
With your joy fill me,  
By your love form me,  
In your hope lead me,  
Show me the vocation that you desire for me,  
The path to love and follow you.  
Amen.*

# Called to be Disciples of Jesus Christ



## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP?

Everyone wants to do something great with their life. We want our lives to be meaningful, to make a difference, perhaps to be heroic. Maybe you want to be great in sports, science, music, or acting. The truth is, God also wants you to be great. He created you to be great and gave you all the gifts and talents you need to become

great. He not only created you to be great, He also created you to become a saint and be with Him in Heaven.

God invites each of us when we are baptized to become followers of Jesus Christ. Someone who follows Jesus Christ is a Christian **disciple**. Being a Christian disciple means forming a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by getting to know Him, becoming more like Him, and sharing our faith with others.

Christian **discipleship** is the most important part of being Catholic. When you are baptized as a Catholic Christian, it is the beginning of a life that you will live in friendship with Jesus Christ, learning more about Him and becoming more like Him. We can pretend to be Christians just by saying we are, but to be a true Catholic means to be a real Christian disciple of Jesus Christ.

## HOW CAN I FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST?

The disciples in the Gospel were able to follow Jesus from town to town and listen to His teachings. Today, Jesus is not walking around in our towns but He is still here with us. The only way we can follow Him is if we know how to find Him. We can find Jesus in four main ways: by speaking to Him in daily prayer, by participating in the worship of God at Mass, by receiving the sacraments often, especially the **Eucharist** (Holy Communion) and **Reconciliation** (Confession), and by seeing Him in other people.

Following Jesus is something you can do right now. You can imitate Him in your thoughts, words, and actions. You can imitate Him when you play sports, listen to music, or make friends, as long as you do it the way Jesus would have done it. By doing this, you are already doing great things with your life and growing in holiness.

The first heroes of the Christian faith did not need to say that they were Christians. Everyone knew they were Christians because they lived their lives in a special way. Ask yourself: do people know that I am a Christian disciple by the way I live?

### Christian Disciple:

Someone who follows Jesus Christ by trying to be like Him in everything they do.

**Christian Discipleship:** living as a Christian disciple.



## GO AND CHANGE THE WORLD

A Christian disciple realizes that a living faith is the key to a truly happy life. Living our faith leads to our happiness because it leads us closer to God. If it leads us to God, it can lead others to God as well. This is why our Catholic faith is a treasure to be shared with other people, so that they can be happy too. The twelve **Apostles** were the first to spread Jesus' message throughout the world. Jesus said to them, "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19).



Looking out at the world, we can see, as the Apostles did, that there are many people who are unhappy or suffering because they do not know Jesus Christ. In addition to knowing Jesus through prayer and the sacraments and imitating Him in our words and actions, we must also be willing to share our Catholic faith with other people, as the Apostles did. God knows that young people can do good things but we will only be ready for greatness if we practice it now by living as Christian disciples in our own homes, in school, and at play. Jesus is calling you to a special relationship right now and only you can choose to accept it.



*In the name  
of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the  
Holy Spirit*

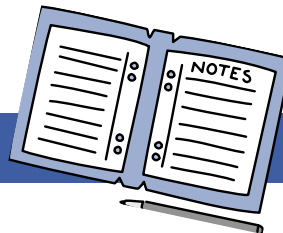
### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. There are over 60 million Catholics and many other Christians living in the United States. What would our country be like if every Christian was serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ? What would your community be like?
2. What are some ways we can live as true Christian disciples in our everyday lives, trying to live as Jesus taught us, to love God and love neighbor?
3. What are some ways that we can share our Catholic faith with other people? If we meet someone who does not know Jesus Christ, what could we tell them about our experience of being a Christian disciple?

### VOCABULARY

Disciple  
Discipleship  
Eucharist  
Reconciliation  
Apostle

### Write about it!



#### Journal options:

- Write about one good thing you can do at home, at school, and at play to live more like a disciple of Christ. How would doing this show others that you want to be like Jesus?
- What do you think is the greatest challenge in trying to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? How can you meet this challenge as a Christian disciple?



# Discipleship Prayer

by St. John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M.<sup>1</sup>

*O my Divine Savior*

*Transform me into yourself.*

*May my hands be your hands.*

*May my tongue be your tongue.*

*Grant that every faculty of my body may serve  
only to glorify you.*

*Above all, transform my soul and all of its powers, that  
my memory, my will and my affections, may be the  
memory, the will and affections of you.*

*I pray you to destroy in me all that is not of you.*

*Grant that I may live but in you, and by you, and for  
you, and that I may truly say with St. Paul,  
“I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.”*

*Amen.*



# God Calls Us to a Specific Vocation in Life

## A VOCATION IS A CALL FROM GOD

God created each one of us for a specific purpose, and gave each one of us a mission to fulfill in our lives, just like He gave His Son. He has a plan for us to be happy, known as a **vocation**, and if we follow this plan, it will lead us to be saints with Him in Heaven.

Our vocation is an invitation from God to follow the best path for our lives, the one that will lead us to true happiness on Earth and to become saints in Heaven. But how does God know what is best for us, what will make us happy, especially if we are not even sure of that ourselves?

God is the one who created us. Long before you were born, when He created the world, He knew you. One of the psalms in the Bible says:

*You wove me together in my mother's womb; I praise you, for I have been sketched wonderfully – awesome are your works! Even my soul you deeply know, and my frame was not hidden from you, I who was made in secret, who was skillfully made...my days were lined out before one of them ever was. How precious are your plans for me, O God, how great their beginnings!* *Psalms 139:13-15, 16-17*

When God created you, He knew your name, what color your eyes would be, and whether you would be short, quick, smart, funny, or shy. He knew what would make you happy, what would make you holy, and what part you would play in the history of the world. After all, He designed you to be just the way you are, and He did it for a reason.

God does not think of our vocation randomly. The vocation we are called to best fits how God made us. He considers not only what will make us happy, but also how we can improve the world around us. God sets apart a special mission just for you, and only you can fulfill your vocation. No one else is capable of completing the plan God designed especially for you.

It is important to remember that God will not force you to do anything. A vocation is not a set of orders; it is an invitation, a suggestion God makes and hopes that you will respond to it. This invitation from God will include a specific way of life that will make you the most happy: either a single life, a married life, a religious life, or a priestly life. We cannot invite ourselves to a specific way of life. It is God who invites, and it is up to us to respond.

Because our vocation is the way to our greatest joy and deepest fulfillment in life, God wants us to know what this plan is. If you ask Him, He will help you discover it when He knows you are ready.

*Vocation:*  
A plan that God invites us to live that will lead to our happiness on Earth and eternal life with Him in Heaven.



*God makes each person for a specific vocation*

## GOD CALLS EACH PERSON DIFFERENTLY

God is always with us. He is always there to guide us in our lives, even when we do not realize it. He calls to us throughout our lives. We must listen intensely, with our hearts, and pay attention to what He could be trying to tell us. God's call is like a constant whisper, trying to get our attention and guide us to the kind of life He is calling us. He might speak to us in prayer, or through our experiences and desires, or He may choose to speak to us through other people like our parents, a priest, a teacher, or a friend.

God calls each of us in a different way and at a different time in our lives. Some people know what God is calling them to do when they are still very young. There are priests who knew they were meant to be priests from the time they were in the first or second grade. For other people, the understanding of their calling may be slower and take a long time. It may come as a growing awareness of the plan God has for them. Other times a calling may become clear in a sudden moment, as if you had your hands over your ears and then removed them to discover a call that was there all along. Each one of us will hear our call to a vocation in life in a unique way. It's a matter of listening, of paying attention to what God is asking you to do with your life.

Married people often have similar experiences. Many people describe realizing their vocation to marriage at a very young age. Many young people first hear God calling them to be parents while caring for their younger sisters and brothers or babysitting other children. Throughout our life experiences, the voice of the Lord whispers in our ear to give us a growing awareness of the vocation He created for us.

Your parents, teachers, priests, or other people who know how to hear God's voice are good people to talk to about your vocation, especially if they are already living their own vocation.

## God's Call:



*Different times  
Different ways  
for  
Different people*

**Religious  
Vocation**

**Married  
Vocation**

**Single  
Vocation**

**Priestly  
Vocation**

## HEARING THE CALL

To hear God speak to us, we need to learn to be silent and listen. The prophet Elijah was told by the Lord to wait on a mountain, for the Lord would come and speak to him.

*A great and strong wind rent the mountains,  
and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but  
the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an  
earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and  
after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire;  
and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11)*

The voice of the Lord was in the tiny whisper. That is why we must give God the opportunity to speak to us in the silence of our souls.



## HOW WILL YOU RECOGNIZE GOD'S CALL?

When the time comes, you will know that your vocation is the right one because it will fit who you are; it will complete your life, fill you with joy, and match your gifts and abilities. That does not mean that it will be the easiest path, or that it will be the one that you always thought you would take. God often surprises us, and His plans are not necessarily the ones we had in mind, but the day He taps you on the shoulder and points the way, you will know it, and you will have to make a choice.

Once you understand where God is calling you, you must ACT. You cannot hesitate because you are waiting for a better time, or because you are afraid. Have faith, believe that God will guide you down the right path, open your heart to Him and do not be afraid to say "Yes" to God's invitation.

*"Each Christian vocation comes from God and is God's gift... whose purpose is to build up the Church and to increase the kingdom of God in the world."*

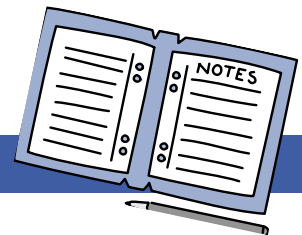
—Pope John Paul II<sup>2</sup>

### VOCABULARY

Vocation

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. Consider this passage from the Gospel: Mark (10:17-27). Why did the young man come to Jesus? Was Jesus inviting him to something? How did the young man respond? Why did he respond this way and how did he feel afterwards?
2. What are some different kinds of callings that a person could have in life? Think of someone you know who is doing something good with their life.
3. Why would you want to know your vocation in life? Why would you want to fulfill it? Are there any reasons that you would not want to know or fulfill it? If you do not follow God's plan for you, whose plan will you follow?



### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- How does the following scripture passage from Isaiah (43:1) make you feel about your own relationship with God and your own vocation in life? "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine."
- What are some distractions in your daily life that make it harder to listen to God? What can we do to set aside these distractions and spend time focused on God?

## Vocation:

*A plan that God invites us to live that will lead to our happiness on Earth and eternal life with Him in Heaven.*

Sr. Margarita Ramirez is a sister of the religious order called the Oblates of Jesus the Priest. When she was young, she used to walk past the church everyday on her way home from school. One day, she felt she wanted to visit Jesus, who she knew was in the tabernacle in the form of the Blessed Sacrament (Holy Communion). Even though she only stopped a moment, she knew that Jesus was waiting there for her, and she spoke to Him in prayer for a while. She decided to stop and visit Him more often. She spoke to Him in prayer like she would speak with any other friend: talking to the Lord, then taking time to listen. One day when she was 15 years old, she realized Jesus was asking her, Margarita, to spend the rest of her life with Him. She was surprised, but at the same time it seemed to make sense. She felt a great joy and realized at that moment that God was calling her to be a religious sister. At first, her family would not let her do it, and even tried to keep her from becoming a religious sister. After a while, they noticed that all she really wanted was to follow Jesus as a religious sister. Eventually she was able to follow her vocation, and Sr. Margarita has been full of joy living as a religious sister ever since. Have you ever visited Jesus in the tabernacle? Do you ever speak to Him in prayer?



*Sister Margarita  
of the Oblates of  
Jesus the Priest*

# Discovering a Vocation

## JESUS HELPS US DISCOVER OUR VOCATION

It is Jesus Christ who “brings to light (our) exalted vocation”. What allows a Christian disciple to hear and understand their God-given vocation is a lived relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you, to be your friend by listening and talking to you. The three main ways Christ speaks to us are through daily personal prayer, through the Church, and through the people and experiences in our daily lives. These things strengthen our relationship with Jesus and make it easier to hear His voice and discover our vocation.



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## WHY DOESN'T GOD JUST TELL US DIRECTLY?

Mary had a special vocation to be the Mother of God, and so God sent an angel to call her to this vocation. However, God does not usually send angels to call us. Instead, he uses other ways to speak to us. He speaks to us when we pray, especially when we pray in silence or in Church. He speaks when we receive the Sacraments, especially during Mass and Confession. We hear him when we serve others, whether it is our family, friends, grandparents or those who are sick or poor.

Luke 1:26-38

God calls us to live our vocation but He does not force us to follow it. He wants us to choose our vocation freely. For example, if your mom comes to your room and says, “Do you want to come and help me with the dishes?” you would feel like you had to say yes whether you like it or not. You are not really free to choose, because you feel like you have to obey, even if you hate doing the dishes. However, if you walked past the sink full of dirty dishes, you might freely choose to help your mom wash them. Even if you do not like doing dishes, you would feel good because you chose to do something good on your own. Your mom would be grateful because she would know that you did it because you love her, not because you had to. In the same way, God wants us to freely choose to follow a vocation because we love him, not because we have to do it.



Prayer is a conversation with Christ

## PRAYER: GOD SPEAKS TO US AND WE SPEAK TO HIM

Prayer is a two-way communication with God. It should be a real friendship where we talk to God throughout the day, especially in the morning when we rise, before meals, and when we go to bed. Sometimes we forget to pray except when there is a crisis or when something wonderful happens and we want to thank God. Other times people fall into the trap of telling God what they think He wants to hear.

## Monologue



## Dialogue



When you pray, it is not so important to say big words like “Omnipotent God.” Just like any friendly conversation, say what is in your heart. God knows us better than we know ourselves, so we must be honest and sincere when we pray. Tell him your troubles and desires, thank and praise Him for who He is and what He has given you, and tell Him about the different things that happened in your day. Pray about what is truly important to you. This way of praying invites God to be part of the important concerns of your life.

Like a conversation with a friend, we need to have a dialogue with God, not a one-way conversation when we pray. It is important to listen for God’s response if we want Him to guide us along the right path.

However, it is not as easy as talking on the telephone to hear the voice of God. In time, as we sit with God for moments of silence, we can begin to notice God’s presence, to sense God’s guidance at some times more specifically than others. It can be a clear thought that pops into your head and makes you realize what you are supposed to do. Sometimes it is more like a hint of what would be good for you to do. Many times it seems like your own thoughts, but it may be God talking to you through your conscience. However, even if we do not get immediate answers to our prayers, the important thing is to spend time with God and have a close friendship with Him because He is the source of our vocation. Jesus taught us that “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).



**You have  
12 new e-mails...**

## OTHER WAYS OF COMMUNICATION

Since God wants to show us our vocation in a way that will bring us closer to Him, He uses many different ways to get the message across. We have to be aware of these ways so that we can hear God’s messages. Otherwise, it will be much more difficult to know what He is trying to tell us.

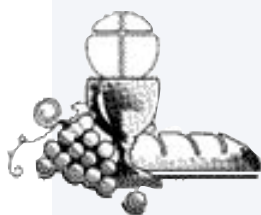
In the Gospel, Jesus tells us how to pray: “Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:6). He is not telling us to hide, but He knows that when we are quiet and not worrying about what everyone else thinks, we can hear what God is trying to say to us.

# How does God communicate?

**The Pope, Bishops, Priests, and Religious** – The Church, especially through the Pope, continues to guide God’s people on earth. When the Pope speaks about our faith and morality, it is Jesus speaking through him. Jesus promised this to Peter, our first Pope, when he said “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (Luke 10:16). God also guides us in our local diocese under the guidance of the bishop and in our parish communities, looked after by our parish priests and religious sisters and brothers, and lay ministers. They are there to teach us and give us advice on how to grow in our relationship with Jesus.



**The Sacraments** – The sacraments are visible signs that God is present among us. They give us the graces we need to live our discipleship. They change us in visible and invisible ways. One example of a radical change brought about through the sacraments is the life of Charles de Foucauld, who was from a rich family and lived a wild life. He fell into serious sin and did not go to church for ten years. One day he went up to a priest who was in the confessional and said, “Come out, I want to talk to you about a problem.” The priest responded “No, come in; I want to talk to you about your sins.”<sup>3</sup> Charles went to Confession and immediately after his confession he was shocked to feel God in him in a powerful new way. He felt the joy of finding Christ, changed his life, gave away his wealth, became a priest and moved to Africa to teach the people in the desert about Jesus. In this example, we see clearly how honest and frequent reception of the Sacraments deepens our relationship with Jesus Christ.



**The Bible** – “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thes 2:13). The words of the Bible were inspired by God and given to us through its authors. Since the words come from God, no matter how many years pass, they will continue to speak to all people and give them inspiration, guidance and consolation. The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are especially important, because they will help you learn more about Jesus and what He taught so that you can grow even closer to Him.

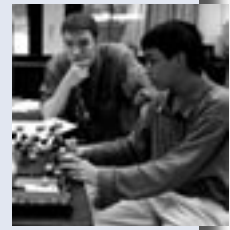


**People in our lives** – God places people in our lives to help us. Our parents, teachers, priests, friends and neighbors can inspire us to live better lives, and if they have a good relationship with God, they can help us become closer to Him. Often trustworthy family members and friends have the ability to see God working in ways that you may not have noticed before. It helps to speak to them about how God might be calling you.

The Old Testament tells us that when the prophet Samuel was a young man, he heard a voice call his name while he was asleep, but he did not know who it was. Samuel ran to Eli the priest, who was in the next room, and said, “Here I am.” Eli said, “I did not call you, go back to sleep.” Three times this happened. Finally, Eli said, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” (1 Sam 3:10). When Samuel did this, he discovered that it was God calling out to him with a special message.



**Helping others** – When we help others, we share in the love that God has for all people. This is also a very powerful way that God speaks to us. Someone who helps the sick may discover that God is asking them to be a doctor or nurse, and someone who teaches others about Jesus may discover that they can serve God as a missionary. If you enjoy helping in the parish, maybe God is calling you to work in parish ministry. Serving others out of love for God prevents us from becoming selfish and opens our hearts to God’s plan for our lives.



**Joy and Suffering** – God is always with us, even in the most ordinary days of the week. When something great happens, we are more likely to remember that God has given us a gift, and we thank him. However, God also works in us during times of difficulty and suffering, to help us grow and become better. The times when we are hurt or ill, when we are disappointed, or even when we lose someone we love can be opportunities to grow closer to God and to open our hearts to His will. There are many things that are out of our control, and only by trusting in God can we survive the most difficult times.

### **LET’S TALK ABOUT IT!**

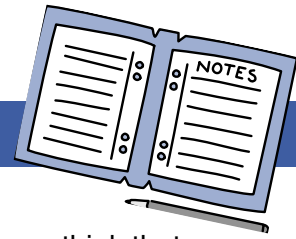
1. What are some moments or places that we can pray?  
How does prayer help us to hear God speak to us?
2. Who are some people we can talk to about our vocations?  
When can we speak to them?
3. Are there things that have happened to you that have helped you to see how God is working in your life?



Courtesy of The Institute of Jesuit Sources

**St. Ignatius of Loyola** was once a young soldier, who was full of pride and had no time for God. During a battle, a cannon ball shattered his leg and he had to spend a long time in bed recovering. To pass the time, he read the only books that were available: *The Life of Christ* and *The Lives of the Saints*. In his suffering, Ignatius became less concerned with the things of the world that had previously filled his mind. He became more open to God, and heard the voice of the Lord calling him in a way he had not recognized before. With the courageous examples of the saints to inspire him, Ignatius turned his life over to God, became a priest, and founded a group of religious priests and brothers called the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits.

## Write about it!



### Journal options:

- When do you pray? How do you pray? How much time do you think that you should listen, and how much time should you talk so that your prayer is a dialogue with God? Write 3-5 things that you can do to pray better and hear God better.
- Write your own personal vocation prayer (3-6 lines) asking God to help you discover your vocation.



## Prayer for Guidance

by St. Teresa of Avila<sup>4</sup>

*Lord, grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by you, always follow your plans, and perfectly accomplish your holy will.*

*Grant that in all things, great and small, today and all the days of my life, I may do whatever you require of me.*

*Help me respond to the slightest prompting of your grace so that I may be your trustworthy instrument for your honor.*

*May your will be done in time and in eternity by me, in me and through me.*

*Amen.*

---

The Bible says, “The Lord searches all hearts and understands all the mind’s thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let Himself be found by you” (1 Chr 28:9). God wants you to find Him. Be honest with Him. Have patience. If you look for Him with trust and sincerity you will find Him.

---

# The Vocation to Single Life



## CALLED TO DO GREAT THINGS

Now that you know what a vocation is, as well as what you can do to discover yours, we can begin to discuss the different kinds of vocations. Every person has a unique path; however, we can group vocations into four major categories: **single life**, married life, priestly life, and religious life.

There is one vocation that we all live at some point in our lives, even if it is only for a short time while we prepare for another vocation. This is the single life. This way of life, whether temporary or lasting one's whole life, is much more than just waiting for something to happen. Single people are called by God to do great things and to become saints.

You too  
can be  
a saint!

## THE SINGLE VOCATION: PREPARED FOR GOD'S CALL

A vocation is something that you choose because you have found your greatest joy living in that certain way. In marriage, the priesthood, or the religious life, a person promises before God to live a certain way for the rest of their lives.

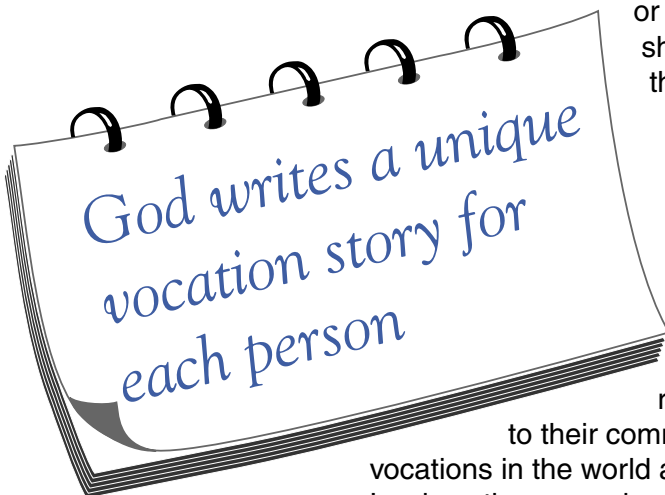
Single life is different because it can be either a stage of life that a person will live until God calls them to another vocation, or a permanent vocation for those who will remain single their whole lives. Some people choose to remain single because of the desire to serve others in the world.

Since everyone is single for at least some part of their lives, our time as a single person should be spent preparing ourselves for what God might ask of us in the future.

Men and women who are called to be married should focus their single lives on forming themselves to become a good spouse for someone. Those who are called to the priesthood or the religious life can prepare themselves by shaping their lifestyle to prepare themselves for their vocation.

Those people who are called to be single for their entire lives must also be prepared to do God's will. Single people have a special freedom to serve God and others while they are single. Other vocations do not have the same special freedom. Married people are committed to taking care of a family, priests are responsible for serving the Church, and religious brothers and sisters have obligations

to their communities. Single men and women live out their vocations in the world and have a unique opportunity to serve the Lord anytime, anywhere and with their whole hearts. They are like a special task force that can be sent wherever God needs them.



**Question:**  
How did Jesus show his unselfish love?

**Answer:**  
Jesus showed unselfishness by giving everything He had to other people: He gave time when He listened and talked with people, He gave cures to sick people, He gave teachings to people who did not know about God, and even when He was tired Jesus did not stop serving others.

## SELFISH VS. UNSELFISH

While a person remains single, they have the opportunity to offer more of their talents and time in generous service to others just like Jesus did. If a single person does not make the effort to serve others, they can be tempted to serve only themselves and use their talents selfishly.

By being unselfish we grow in our ability to love and be loved. Being selfish, on the other hand, limits our ability to love and our ability to be loved. Selfishness makes us shallow of heart, and can make us feel isolated. Single people should find ways that they can serve others so they do not become selfish. Some of the ways a person's talents and time may be shared are:

**Professionally** in the workplace or at school, by acting honestly, fairly, and generously

**Personally** by offering sincere friendship to others or being a good role model for nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters

**Spiritually** by going to Church every Sunday and praying daily for others

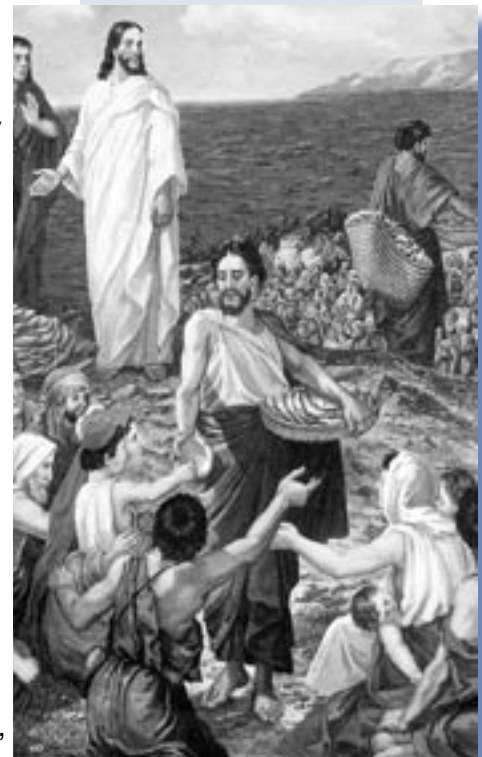
**Apostolically** by giving time working for the Church as the Apostles did, visiting the sick and teaching about the Faith

**Materially** by helping the poor and needy and not becoming too concerned about material things

## A SPECIAL MISSION IN THE CHURCH

Being part of a family teaches us how to love others. A single person may appear to be alone, "but no one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family to everyone."<sup>5</sup> In the Church, a person can find many ways to serve this community. Priests, religious, married people, and single people can all help in the parish, in various professional and voluntary positions including:

- Religious Education Teachers who teach children about the Catholic faith
- Pastoral Associates who help organize the liturgy, church music, caring for the sick, supporting the poor, instructing new adult Catholics (RCIA), etc.
- Catholic School Teachers who teach faith and knowledge to the next generation of young Catholics
- Volunteers who work in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, young adult groups, choirs, and evangelization missions



*Then I heard  
the voice of the  
Lord saying,  
“Whom shall I  
send? Who will  
go for us?” “Here  
I am,” I said,  
“send me!”*

Isaiah 7:8

A single person has many opportunities to live the call to serve others; the only thing they need is a generous heart and openness to the Lord's call. God gives each person the opportunity to live this unique vocation in a holy way.

These activities and many others offer a single person the opportunity to serve God and others as a part of their vocation.

In recent years, many new groups and movements have sprung up to help **lay people**, both married and single, to live their discipleship more intensely through prayer, service, and spiritual growth. There are also various volunteer organizations that offer exciting opportunities for people to give one or two years in full-time service to the Church. Many young people choose to volunteer after graduating from high school or college.

Some religious communities (also called congregations) have branches specifically for lay people who wish to live like members of the community. For example, secular Franciscans follow the example of St. Francis in his detachment from material things. Third Order Carmelites seek to live their vocation by praying and listening to the word of God. There are many other religious communities that have ways for lay people to be involved and grow within their vocation to marriage or the single life.

*A lay person is  
someone who  
is not a deacon,  
priest, or bishop.*

## THE VIRTUE OF CHASTITY

**Chastity** is a very important part of every vocation because it prepares a person for whatever God might be calling them to in the future. Chastity also helps single people to live their single vocation to the fullest extent. Chastity is the virtue that guides the way we express love with our bodies. Our bodies are a gift from God, so we must learn to use them appropriately and not to disrespect our own bodies or other people's.

**Chastity** is the  
virtue which controls  
our sexual desires,  
according to one's  
particular vocation.

An important part of chastity is that all sexual relations are meant to be between a man and a woman who are married. Our faith teaches us that sexual acts outside of marriage are immoral and sinful. In the Bible, St. Paul says, “Shun immorality...Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (1 Cor 6:18-19).

Chastity frees one's heart in a special way, increasing our love for God and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Everyone is called to live the virtue of chastity, even married people by their faithfulness to their spouse. “People should cultivate chastity in the way

that is suited to their state in life – which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable manner.”<sup>6</sup>

Chastity also requires us to live the virtue of **modesty**. Modesty means respecting your own body by not exposing it inappropriately and not using it to cause others to fall into temptation. It also means respecting others by avoiding the temptation to look at or desire their bodies disrespectfully. The Church teaches us that “modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing.”<sup>7</sup> Modesty also helps us avoid unhealthy curiosity.

**Modesty** protects  
our most intimate  
selves. This means  
being decent and  
appropriate in dress,  
words, and behavior.

Why should we practice modesty? We should do so because “modesty protects the intimate center of a person.”<sup>8</sup> Your “intimate center” is your whole self, what you think and feel; it is your personhood, and what makes you who you are. When you expose your body by dressing or acting inappropriately, it causes people to disrespect who you really are. People no longer look at you as a person; they look at you as an object, a thing. This can affect the way people treat you, and the respect they have for you. By dressing and acting modestly, you express that you are a unique, intelligent person who is beautiful on the inside, as well as on the outside, and that you must be respected for who you are.



## JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE

Jesus is the prime example of a single person living in the world. Jesus combined an active ministry with private prayer showing us that we too can do our jobs, go to school, have friends and yet still lead a holy life if we turn to God regularly for our guidance and direction. He showed us that this is the best way to find fulfillment on earth and in Heaven.

*Long live Christ the King!*

## SAINTS WHO WERE SINGLE



**St. Maria Gorretti** (b.1890) was born in Italy and was murdered by a young man in 1902 when she bravely resisted his forced sexual advances. On her deathbed, she forgave him. Her murderer experienced a conversion because of her example, and when he was released from prison, he testified on her behalf at her beatification. Maria was declared a saint in 1950, and is the Patron Saint of Teenagers.



**St. Kateri Tekawitha** (b. 1656) was born to a Christian mother in the Mohawk tribe. Kateri was orphaned at age four and raised by her uncle who did not like Christianity. Her family tried to force her to marry but she felt called to remain single in service to God. At age nineteen, she asked a priest to baptize her and escaped to Canada where she dedicated the rest of her life to God.



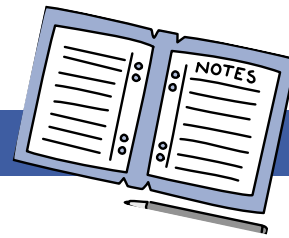
**José Luis Sanchez del Rio** (b. 1915) lived in Mexico at a time when the government was persecuting Catholics. He joined the Cristeros, a group of Mexican Catholics who fought against the religious persecution. At the age of 14, he was captured by the federal army and put in prison. The soldiers told José Luis that if he did not give up his faith in Christ they would execute him, but he was not afraid and he kept his faith in Jesus Christ. The soldiers cut the skin from his feet and forced him to walk through the town. They would stop along the way and tell him that if he would cry out “Death to Christ the King” they would spare his life. Every time he answered, “Long live Christ the King!” Finally, they arrived at the cemetery and they asked him one last time to deny his faith. He refused and cried out “Long live Christ the King!” He was then shot and killed for bearing witness to his faith in Jesus Christ. José Luis has been declared a martyr and was beatified in November 2005 on the feast of Christ the King.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. What are some ways that you, as a single person, can avoid selfishness? Based on your talents and the needs of your community, how could you be the most helpful? What are the benefits of being unselfish?
2. What are some ways that single people live the virtue of chastity? How can you be modest in the way you dress and act?
3. It is natural to be attracted to other people. What is the respectful way to think about and treat someone who we are attracted to? How does the way that we look at other people affect our ability to live modestly?

### VOCABULARY

Single life  
Lay people  
Chastity  
Modesty



## Write about it!

### Journal options:

- Chastity is a great Christian teaching that the world does not always understand. Do you ever see movies, television shows, or magazines that show lifestyles that are not chaste or modest? How does this affect the way people look at and think about other people? What would the world be like if nobody respected each other or if everyone treated each other as objects instead of human persons?
- Many young single people volunteer for a year in various church-related organizations around the world. Would you ever consider spending a year or two doing volunteer service? Describe what type of service you would be interested in doing.



## Becoming a Good Spouse

If you plan on being married in the future, what qualities would you look for in a husband or wife? Honesty? Kindness? Trustworthiness? If you want these things in a spouse then they will probably want them from you. So if you plan on being married in the future, start becoming a good spouse now.

# The Vocation of Marriage



## GOD HAS A PLAN FOR MARRIED PEOPLE

Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin were both good Catholics. They loved God so much that they wanted to dedicate their whole lives to serving God. Louis wanted to be a monk, and Zélie wanted to be a nun. However, both discovered that God had different plans for them. God was calling them to the vocation of **marriage**. They eventually met each other, fell in love, married, and raised five children.

All five daughters became nuns, the most famous being St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who is called the Little Flower. The reason we have this famous saint today is because her parents realized that the most important thing in life was to follow their vocation to marriage.

Married people are called by God to: become saints, help their spouses to become holy, teach their children to love God, and be witnesses of their Christian faith in the world.

## WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE?

The vocation of marriage is a special gift that God chooses to give many people. In marriage, a man and a woman promise before God to love and honor each other for the rest of their lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus compares His love for the Church to the love of a groom for His bride. This is why a good Christian marriage reminds us of the true love that Christ has for the Church and helps us to understand it better. Christ gave up everything, leaving his home and his mother and eventually giving up his whole life for us, the Church. In the same way, the Bible tells us that “a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This holds true for both husbands and wives. Just as Christ gave himself completely for his Church, a man and a woman give themselves to each other. This gift of self is pure, sincere, beautiful, and complete for as long as they live.

Marriage is more than just a promise of love. In the Catholic Church, marriage is a sacrament. It is a **sacred bond** of love and responsibility between a man, a woman, and God. In the sacrament of matrimony, the man and woman make special promises to God called **vows** to live faithfully as husband and wife for the rest of their lives. God unites them in a sacred bond and fills their souls with the graces they need to love each other and form a family. When a man and a woman are married in the sacrament of matrimony, they invite God to be the center of their family and they offer their love for each other as a gift to Him.







## THE SPECIAL MISSION

Married people are called to help each other to get to Heaven. God created Eve as a “helper” for Adam because He knew that two people who were united in love could help each other to get to Heaven (Gen 2:18-25). A husband and wife are also called to teach others to love God, especially their children and the people around them. A married couple is like a team that together bears witness to God’s love in the world by the way they live out their faith at home, at work, and in the Church. Like single people, married couples can also serve God in church-related careers or as volunteer workers.

The vocation to marriage also includes the children that may be raised by a married couple.

One of the greatest miracles is the ability to bring children into the world and to cooperate with God in forming them as Christian disciples. If the man and woman truly love each other, their love will extend to any children that God sends them, and their hearts will be open to the gift of every new life. Louis and Zelig Martin did not know that their youngest child would be a great saint. They simply welcomed the new baby that God gave them and taught her to love God.

Parents are, by word and example, the first ones to teach their children about God. The Church teaches that the family is like a small household church, which is called the “**domestic church.**” Each family is a domestic church where its members learn how to be good Christians: to love, to forgive, and to help others. God entrusts little children to married couples so that they will love them and teach them the Christian Faith. Parents provide for the material and emotional needs of each child. Most importantly they should care for the eternal life of each soul by helping them fulfill the vocation that they are called to, especially nourishing any religious vocations their children might have.

It is the task of each family to form Christian disciples and it is the task of every Christian disciple to build a better world. Therefore, if every Christian family lived as God intended, the world would be a much better place.

*The Lord  
God said:  
“It is not  
good for the  
man to be  
alone.”*

*Genesis 2:18*



## HOW DO I KNOW WHOM TO MARRY?



Marriage is not only a matter of marrying someone who is attractive and fun, but finding someone who will truly help you to love God. If a couple agrees to be disciples of Jesus Christ, it will help them to stay together for the rest of their lives. So it is very important to find the right person to marry, who shares the same Christian faith that you do.

Those who know that they are called to marriage may ask themselves, “How do I know who is the right spouse for me?” If marriage is a God-given vocation, God will be the guide to help us

fulfill it. You must ask Him for help in choosing a spouse. Christ tells us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7). Jesus assures us that if we trust in Him, He will help guide us in finding a good person to marry.

**Vow:**  
a special  
promise made  
to God

### WHAT IS A DEACON?

Being a **deacon** is a special vocation that is open to both married and single men. Deacons serve the church by assisting the bishop and priests. Deacons may read the Gospel and preach during the Mass. They may also perform baptisms, witness marriages and lead wake and funeral services. They cannot celebrate the Mass, hear confessions, or anoint the sick.

Like any vocation, a man must determine whether God is calling him to be a deacon. Before a man can become a deacon there is a preparation period in which they learn about the faith and about service in the Church. A man is ordained a deacon through the sacrament of **Holy Orders**. This is the same sacrament that priests and bishops receive but in a different degree. A deacon is ordained for life, but only to the ministry of the diaconate, which is different from the priesthood.



### EXAMPLES OF MARRIED SAINTS



**Venerable Pierre Toussaint** (d.1853) was a black slave who moved to New York with his Catholic slave owners, the Berards. When the Berards became poor, Pierre supported them through his income as a hairdresser. Granted his freedom, he married and became well-known for his charitable acts. He is buried with honor in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral.

**St. Thomas More** (d.1535) was married with four children when he was Lord Chancellor of England under King Henry VIII. The King refused to recognize the Pope as head of the Church and wanted to create his own church by declaring himself the head of the Church of England. Thomas wanted to remain faithful to the Catholic Church, so he resigned his position in the government. King Henry viewed this as an act of treason and had Thomas arrested, put in prison, and finally sentenced him to death. Before he was beheaded, Thomas More declared that he was "the King's good servant but God's first."<sup>9</sup>





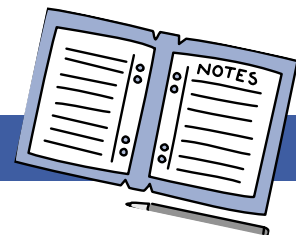
**St. Gianna Molla** (d.1962) was a married doctor, born in Italy, who gave special attention to mothers, their babies, the poor, and the elderly. When pregnant with her fourth child, she was advised to abort the baby to save her own life. She refused to kill her baby even though she knew it would mean giving up her own life. She died seven days after giving birth to a healthy baby girl. Her daughter read this prayer at her beatification: “Thank you mother, for having given me life two times: in conception and when you permitted me to be born, deciding for my life. Intercede and help always all mothers and all families that come to you with confidence.”<sup>10</sup>

### LET’S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. How can a married person help their spouse to go to Heaven? How can they help their children become holy?
2. What are some ways we can help our parents be good mothers and fathers? How can we help them be good husbands and wives?
3. What are some characteristics that would make someone a good spouse? What are some things married people can do to build a strong family?

#### VOCABULARY

Marriage  
Vow  
Sacred bond  
Domestic church  
Deacon  
Holy Orders



### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- If God called you to marriage, describe what your ideal family would be like. What are some challenges involved in raising a Christian family? How can these challenges be overcome?
- In the Bible, St. Paul writes “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (Eph 5:25-26). What does this tell us about the love of Christ for the Church? What does it tell us about the love between a husband and wife?

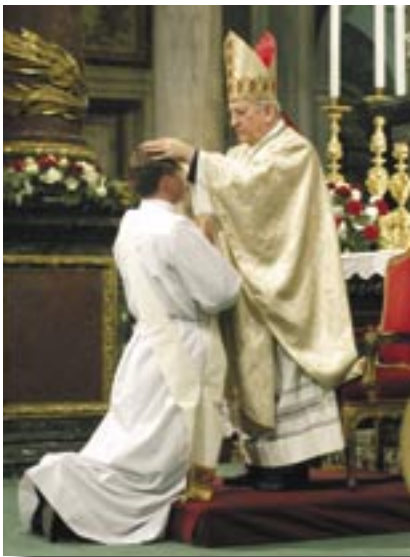
# Priesthood: What is a Priest?

## THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Jesus Christ knew that it would be difficult to live the Christian life here on earth, so He gave us the Church and the sacraments to help us along the way. He also chose a special group of men from among his disciples to guide the Church and celebrate the sacraments. These men were the first priests. Today, he continues to call certain men to the priesthood so that they can fulfill these special duties. All people are called to be disciples of Christ, but those who God chooses for the priesthood imitate him in a particular way. They live like Jesus did here on earth by completely dedicating themselves to serving the Church.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.*

*John 15:16*



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## THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

The priesthood is so important to the life of the Church that becoming a priest is one of the seven sacraments. This sacrament is known as Holy Orders. When a man receives this sacrament, we say he is ordained, and the ceremony is known as an **ordination**. In the sacrament of Holy Orders, a priest is ordained by a bishop to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ in a special way. "A priest is a man chosen and called by Christ from among God's faithful people to serve them in the person of Christ, the head of the Church, by forming, leading, teaching and sanctifying them as a community."<sup>11</sup>

## PRIESTLY PROMISES

In order to fully dedicate himself to his mission, a priest promises to live in a way that will help him be more Christ-like.

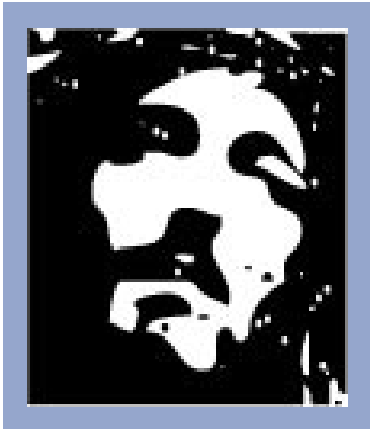
Before he is ordained a priest, a man makes three special promises: he promises to pray certain priestly prayers everyday, he promises **obedience** to his bishop, and he promises to remain celibate his whole life.

The promise of daily prayer is an important part of a priest's life. Prayer helps a priest to remain close to God and connected in prayer to the people he serves. Every single day priests say a special set of prayers called the Liturgy of the Hours. We will more learn about this in the next lesson.

Another priestly promise is obedience to the bishop. Just as a priest guides the people he serves, he looks to his bishop and the pope for guidance because God has called them to lead the Church. A priest promises to remain loyal to his bishop and to follow the teachings of the Church. Obedience does not mean blindly following orders; it means paying



Thy  
Be I



attention to God's will and for a priest, part of doing God's will is obeying his bishop.

Priests promise to live a celibate lifestyle as part of their commitment to God. **Celibacy** means not being married. Just as married people promise to give their whole self, body and soul, to their spouses, celibate priests promise to give themselves completely to God.

God gives priests special help to live this calling, despite any limitations or shortcomings they might have. God knows that they are not perfect. God calls whomever He wants, and promises to help them live their promises no matter what their strengths or weaknesses. A priest is only able to live his priestly promises with Jesus' help. Even if a priest had lots of personality, intelligence, and skill, without Jesus' help, he would be unable to fulfill his mission as a priest.

## THE PRIESTLY MISSION

By definition, the priest is called to be, like Jesus, a priest, prophet and king: a priest to offer the sacrifice of the Mass, a prophet to preach the faith, and a king to lead his people to Heaven like a shepherd guides his flock. Jesus Christ is the one acting in and through the priest when he celebrates the Mass or any of the sacraments. Whenever a priest administers the sacraments, he acts *in persona Christi*, which is a Latin phrase meaning "in the person of Christ." The main responsibility of a priest is to allow the Lord's presence and grace to work through him for the salvation of all people and for God's glory.

A priest brings Christ to us when he:

- Celebrates the Mass, transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.
- Preaches and teaches about Jesus
- Anoints the sick and the dying
- Forgives sins through the sacrament of Reconciliation
- Baptizes new Christians
- Celebrates marriages
- Consoles the grieving, sad and depressed
- Performs wake and funeral services
- Receives new Catholics into the Church
- Prays with and for his parish
- Cares for the poor and homebound



*The "arch" before the words diocese or bishop denote the importance and large number of people in a diocese, governed by the bishop.*

## DIOCESAN PRIESTS IN SERVICE TO THE CHURCH

There are two basic types of priests: diocesan priests and religious priests. A diocesan priest serves within a geographical area called a diocese (or archdiocese) usually as a pastor or an associate pastor of a parish.

Diocesan priests live their vocation focused on the needs of the people in their parish and diocese. A diocesan priest promises obedience to the bishop of the diocese. Most diocesan priests live and minister in parishes, although some serve in hospitals or universities, some teach in schools, some work in the diocese's offices, and some serve in other special assignments such as chaplains for police or fire departments.

As a pastor, a diocesan priest is called to be a shepherd for God's people. A pastor plays an important part in the lives of the people in his parish. He shares in their times of joy, such as baptisms and weddings, as well as in difficult times, during sickness and death. The pastor helps to run the parish and its programs. The diocesan priest is called to live in and among God's people everyday as their shepherd.

## PRIESTHOOD WITHIN A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION

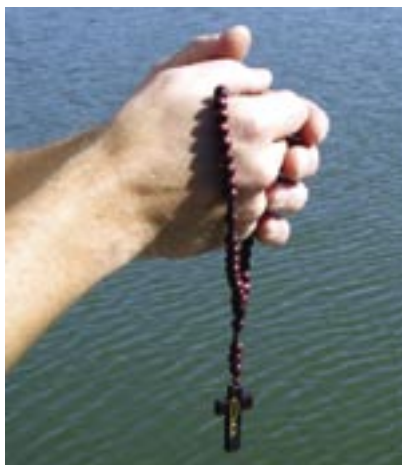
A religious priest is a priest that belongs to a religious community. A religious community (also called a religious order or congregation) is a group of individuals who make **vows** to live their Christian faith together in a particular way. They focus their service to the Church by fulfilling a specific mission.

A religious priest is ordained as part of a **religious community** and makes special promises called vows that are different than a diocesan priest's promises. Religious priests take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vow of poverty means that they do not own material possessions for themselves. Instead they share things in common with their community, such as houses or cars. They also use some basic things, such as clothes, shoes, or watches that will help them in their service to the Church. The vow of obedience that a religious priest makes is to follow the head of the religious community, known as the **religious superior**. The vow of chastity is similar to the promise that diocesan priests makes to remain celibate, meaning he does not get married.

Rather than serve a specific diocese, religious priests work with their religious community in their common mission spread over a wide area, perhaps even worldwide. A religious priest administers the sacraments. He works with other priests and religious brothers in a variety of ministries. Their work may include parish ministry, missionary work, work with the poor, counseling, vocational guidance, teaching, or hospital chaplaincy. Religious priests and communities are the focus of the next unit.



Priestly vows:  
*Prayer*  
*Celibacy*  
*Obedience*

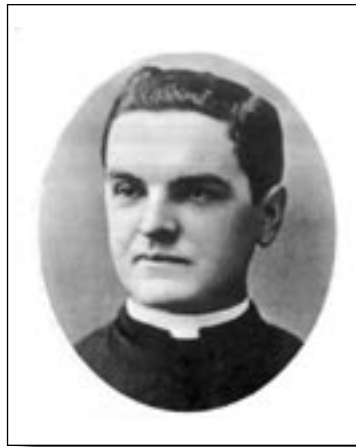


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*Remember that you are chosen from among God's people and appointed to act for them in relation to God. Do your part in the work of Christ the Priest with genuine joy and love, and attend to the concerns of Christ before your own.*

– Rite of Ordination<sup>12</sup>

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## SAINTLY PRIESTS

**Fr. Michael McGivney** (d.1890) saw the need for a worldwide organization of men who could help the Church support widows, orphans and other needy individuals. To accomplish this work, he founded the Knights of Columbus, the largest organization of its kind in the world with over 12,000 councils. Fr. McGivney was born and raised in Connecticut and he played an important role in the history of American Catholicism. The process for declaring his sainthood has begun.



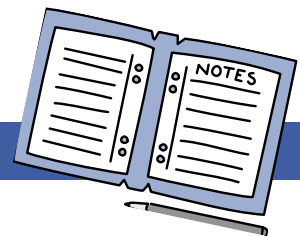
**Fr. Nelson Baker** (d.1936) lived in an era when many families were too poor to care for all of their children and were sometimes forced to abandon them. To provide these children with a loving home, Fr. Baker established an orphanage. His orphanage became so well known that children sometimes arrived by train with a note pinned to their coat which read, "Fr. Baker's, Lackawanna" (New York). During the Great Depression he served over a million free meals a year to those suffering from hunger. He has been declared a Servant of God, the first step on the road to being declared a saint.

### VOCABULARY

Ordination  
Obedience  
Celibacy  
Vows  
In persona Christi  
Religious community  
Religious superior

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. How did the priests mentioned above contribute to the Church? How were their lives important?
2. In what way has your parish priest, or any priest, affected your life?
3. What would happen to the Church, the People of God, if there were no priests?
4. What are some ways that priests follow the example of Christ?



### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- What are some reasons to be thankful to God for the priesthood?
- Write a "Thank You" letter to God, or directly to your favorite priest for all the things that the priestly vocation does for us.

# The Spirituality of Diocesan Priesthood

## PRIESTHOOD: A CHALLENGE OF LOVE

“To sail when the wind is favorable is no great thing, but when the wind is unfavorable, it becomes a real challenge. In a society that pursues success, a career, [excessive pleasure], financial standing, the young man who responds to the priestly call tries to orient his life another way, seeking not what is [passing] but enduring values. And this is the challenge that young men love: to go against the current.”<sup>13</sup> Priests face many joys and challenges in living out their vocation to bring Christ to the world. A priest receives his strength from his spiritual life and his relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“Do not be afraid.”*

## A LIFE OF PRAYER AND SERVICE

A priest's life is essentially one of prayer and service. These two parts make up a priest's **spirituality**. He prays so that he can serve with the strength and inspiration he needs. He serves so that God may work through him to assist His people. The spirituality of a diocesan priest is centered on his personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the call to bring Him to the members of the local faith community, his parish. The diocesan priest is called to be in and among the people of his parish, for his own fulfillment and the benefit and **sanctification** of his parishioners. His life is marked by the characteristics of love, generosity and self-sacrifice.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A priest must be a spiritual man, whose trust and hope are solely in the Lord. They give a witness of how we should trust in God above all things. A priest must be a man whose faith rests firmly in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His joy in the risen Lord comes from his experience of Jesus working in his own life. This allows him to stand firm and strong as he leads the Christians under his care.

A priest receives great joy from serving others, but he must remember that at the root of his vocation is his relationship with God. To nourish it and keep it strong he has to pray every day. Here are some of the many ways a priest prays each day:

**Features of a priest's life:**  
*Love*  
*Generosity*  
*Self-sacrifice*



### **Celebrating the Eucharist.**

During the Mass, a priest offers up his prayers and our own prayers to God through His Son Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist.

**Praying the Liturgy of the Hours.** Priests pray the **Liturgy of the Hours**. This is a series of prayers made up of psalms, scripture passages, and intercessions that help a priest to lift his eyes towards God at certain times throughout the day.

**Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.** Adoration is a way to spend time with Jesus, who is present in the Eucharist, listening and praying without the distractions of everyday life. Every day of the sixty years of his priesthood, Archbishop Fulton Sheen prayed for one hour in front of a tabernacle.



**Praying the Rosary.** The rosary is a **meditation** on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The rosary is also a way to ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray for our needs and for the Church.

In addition to daily prayer, a priest reads religious or spiritual books. He goes on an annual spiritual retreat to renew himself and his ministry. A priest should also have a spiritual director with whom he can talk about his faith and about spiritual matters. Priests also go to confession on a regular basis.

## AT THE SERVICE OF OTHERS

A diocesan priest must be a man at the service of others, “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). As Jesus taught us, the greatest gift we can give is to lay down our life for a friend. Priests lay down their lives for their people every day. In little ways, they give their time, energy, and lives to those who need help, thus being like Christ here on earth.

Diocesan priests live their unique spirituality in and among the people they serve. All people are called to a relationship with Jesus Christ, to a life of prayer and service, and so the priest is an example and a guide for others to follow. A priest is with his parishioners in all the moments of joy and sadness that come throughout their lives. He is there, in the role of a shepherd, like Jesus, to lead and accompany God’s people on their journey of faith. The priest strives to increase the holiness of the people of God so they may in turn sanctify the world. In growing in his own spiritual life, he becomes more like Christ, and is a visible sign to other people of happiness in this life and of our final goal: eternal life.

**Meditation:** *A way of prayer in which we focus our minds on a religious image, idea or scripture passage.*

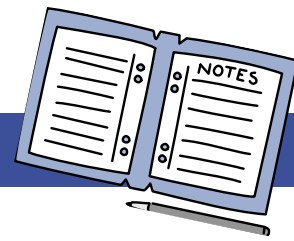
### LET’S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. Why is it important for every Christian disciple to pray daily? Why is it especially important for a priest to pray daily?
2. What benefits does the priest get out of prayer? What would happen if a priest stopped praying?
3. How does a priest’s prayer life affect his ability to serve? What are some ways that your parish priest serves your community?

### VOCABULARY

Spirituality  
Sanctification  
Consecration  
Liturgy of the Hours  
Meditation

## Write about it!



### Journal options:

- Write this bible passage in your journal and memorize it:  
“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (Jn 15:13).  
What are some small ways that you can give your life to serve others everyday?
- Write how this bible passage applies to the priesthood. How does it apply to the vocation of marriage? What about the single life?

## Can You Solve This?

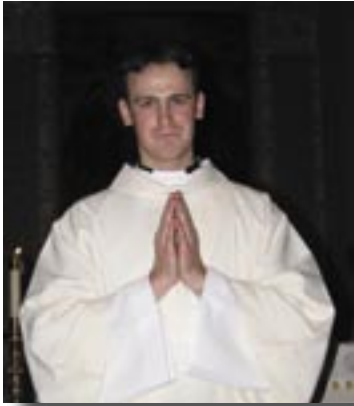
If Archbishop Fulton Sheen prayed in front of a tabernacle for one hour every day of his priesthood, and his priesthood was 60 years, how many hours did he spend adoring Jesus Christ in the Eucharist? (Hint: there are 365 days in every year. Also, there is no need to calculate for leap years unless you want to.)



# Witness of a Priest

## INTRODUCTION

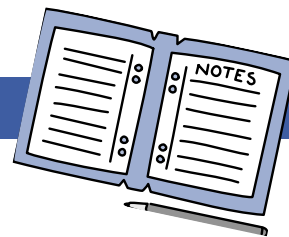
We have learned a lot about the mission and spirituality of a priest. Today, we welcome a diocesan priest who will tell us what it is like to live his vocation, and how he discovered what God wanted him to do in his life. At the end of the discussion, there will be an opportunity to ask Father any questions that you may have about the priesthood.



## SUMMARY

Priests are chosen by God to serve God's people in the Church. A priest is like every other disciple trying to follow the Lord as best he can by living the command to love God and love his neighbor as himself. Ultimately, a priest is trying like everyone else to be holy and become a saint. The importance of prayer and regular reception of the sacraments are as important for a priest as they are for all disciples who desire to grow closer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Write about it!



#### Journal options:

- What did you learn about priests today?
- How did the talk help you understand the life of a priest?
- What was one thing that you could relate to in what he said?

# How Does a Man Become a Priest?

## COME AND SEE

John and Andrew were two friends from a small town. One day, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, they were standing near the road when Jesus walked past them. Something about Him caught their attention, though they did not quite know what it was, so they began to follow him. As they began to follow Him, Jesus turned and asked them, "What do you seek?" They wanted to find out who He was and where He came from; they wanted to learn all about Him, so they responded "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Jesus wanted them to experience being Christian disciples for themselves so He invited them to follow Him saying, "Come and see!" From that day forward they became disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus makes the same invitation to any young man who is interested in following Jesus more closely in the priesthood, or even just learning more about it. Jesus invites them to come and see what it is like, try it out, and discover if it is their vocation.



Come  
and See!

Read John 1:35-39

## STEPS TO BECOME A PRIEST, SISTER, OR BROTHER

**Step 1:** Find out! Learn about the different kinds of priests, sisters, and brothers to see if you might be interested in a vocation to priesthood or religious life.

**Step 2:** Act! Contact a **Vocation Director** and take part in vocation activities in order to learn more about the diocesan priesthood or religious communities.

**Step 3:** Join! Join your diocese or a religious order to begin training to be a priest, sister or brother. During this time of preparation you can discover whether or not it is your vocation. This is a rewarding experience, even if you discover that it is not your vocation.



## THE SEMINARY

Men who are preparing to be ordained as priests attend a special school called a **seminary**. These men are called **seminarians**. Historically, there have been three types of seminaries. The first kind is a high school seminary for boys considering the priesthood. The second is called a minor seminary or college seminary and it is for college-aged men who are interested in the priesthood. The high school and college seminaries are not required but highly recommended for boys and young men interested in being priests. This early preparation is a way for them to explore their vocation with other people who are also **discerning** the priesthood.

The third is a major seminary for seminarians who have

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finished college. A major seminary is the final preparation for seminarians before becoming priests. These seminarians take classes to learn about our Catholic faith, as well as classes to practice celebrating mass and hearing confessions.

Many dioceses do not have their own seminaries, so they send their seminarians to minor or major seminaries located elsewhere.

In addition to classes, seminarians learn how to pray and are trained in spiritual practices. They begin serving at parishes or as chaplains in various places including hospitals, jails, nursing homes, and juvenile detention centers. They also enjoy sports and other school activities just like everyone else.

Being a seminarian does not automatically make someone a priest. Studying at a seminary simply means that a man is open to being called to the

priesthood and wants to try it out to see if it fits. By attending a seminary, a man opens his heart to accept a possible vocation and gives to God a greater opportunity to call him. Seminaries are environments in which men can openly consider and discern a possible calling to the priesthood while receiving the support they need to do it.

During this time, some seminarians may determine that God is not calling them to be priests. They are free to go and find whatever vocation God wants for them. These men are usually glad that they were in the seminary because it allowed them to deepen their faith, receive a good education and develop life-long friendships. They know that they have been open and generous with God and they are confident that He will continue to guide them.

A seminarian who does seek the diocesan priesthood is ordained by a bishop after he completes his training at the major seminary. His ordination to the priesthood includes the promise of a life-long commitment to serve the people of God as a priest of Jesus Christ in the local diocese. At his ordination, he joyfully reaches the goal of his preparation, but his adventure is just beginning!

*To **discern** means to try to discover with God's help something that takes time to sense or understand.*

***Discernment** is the process of discovering your vocation.*



### The Seminaries of the Archdiocese of Chicago:

**Mundelein Seminary**  
[www.usml.edu](http://www.usml.edu)

**St. Joseph College Seminary**  
[www.stjoseph.luc.edu](http://www.stjoseph.luc.edu)

**Archbishop Quigley Preparatory Seminary High School**  
[www.quigley.org](http://www.quigley.org)

**Archdiocese of Chicago vocation website:**  
[www.chicagopriest.org](http://www.chicagopriest.org)



# Giving God the first chance.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

### Activity A: Find out!

Imagine yourself in the future, beginning to think that God is calling you to a religious vocation. Even if you never thought about it before, it is possible that it could happen! Listed below are some ways to find out more information about what a vocation really means and how to pursue it.

**Instructions:** Choose three options that you would pursue in order to find out more information about a religious vocation.

- Ask my Religious Education teacher
- Ask my school principal
- Call a Vocation Director
- Search the Internet for vocation websites
- Write a letter to a Vocation Director
- Check ads in Catholic magazines or newspapers
- Ask my parish priest
- Ask a religious sister
- Email a Vocation Director
- Read a book or magazine about vocations
- Ask my Mom or Dad
- Ask my friends or classmates

### Activity B: Just do it!

If you think you may have a religious vocation, even if it is just a feeling or a hunch, it is important that you do something about it and take steps to pursue it. Below are some ways that will help you learn more about the lives of priests, sisters, and brothers.

**Instructions:** Which of these would you find interesting to do right now or in the future?

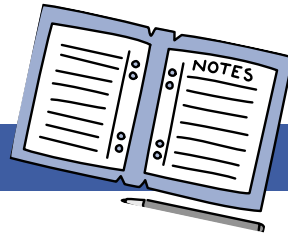
- Volunteer alongside sisters, brothers, or priests at your parish or elsewhere to learn more about what they do.
- Have a conversation with a religious sister, brother or priest. Find out what they do and how they live.
- Go on a retreat weekend for people who want to learn more about being sisters, brothers or priests.
- Join a service program and work alongside sisters, brothers and priests as a full-time volunteer for a year.
- Visit a seminary or convent where people prepare for the priesthood or religious life. Take a tour and see what it is like to live there.
- Find out about the prayer life of priests, sisters and brothers. Pray with them or get a copy of their prayers and pray them to see if their spiritual way of life fits you.
- Read about the lives of sisters, brothers and priests in books, magazines, or on the internet to learn about how they lived.

#### VOCABULARY

Vocation Director  
Discern  
Seminary  
Seminarians



## Write about it!



### Journal options:

- In preparation to meet the seminarian who will speak tomorrow, each student should prepare at least one question to ask the seminarian.

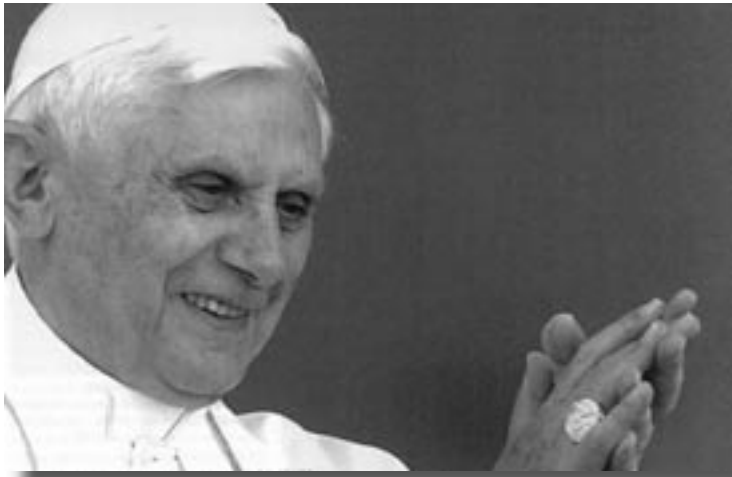


Photo courtesy of Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus

*If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.*

– Pope Benedict XVI<sup>14</sup>

# Witness of a Seminarian

## Adopt a Seminarian

### INTRODUCTION

We have learned about seminarians, and how they prepare to be priests. Today we welcome a seminarian, who will tell us what led him to the seminary and what his life is like. If you have already prepared questions for the seminarian, then you may ask them at the conclusion of his presentation.



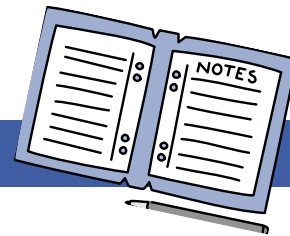
**LET'S PRAY ABOUT IT!**  
Adopt a Seminarian Prayer



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### SUMMARY

Seminarians are men whom God has called to actively prepare for the priesthood. Some of them are 100% sure that this is the vocation God has blessed them with, while other seminarians are still trying to listen to the voice of the Lord and to determine what God is calling them to do. Seminarians need our prayers and support as much as we need theirs.



### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- What is one thing you found interesting about the speaker's presentation and why?
- What was one thing that you could relate to in what he said?
- What do you most admire about the seminarian?
- Why is it important to pray for him?



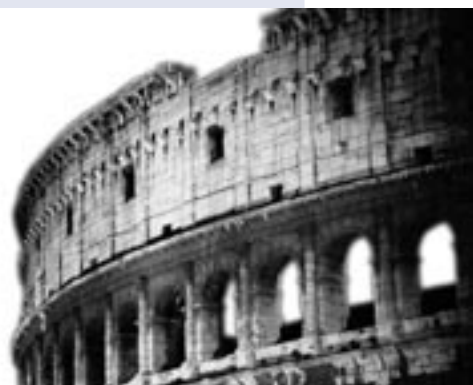
# The Vocation to the Religious Life

## WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY?

Religious sisters, brothers, and priests are individuals who live out their Christian faith as members of a larger group known as a **religious community** (also called a **religious order** or **religious congregation**). They make special promises to love and serve God for the rest of their lives, dedicated to a life of prayer and service.

There are many different kinds of religious communities in the Church. Each community lives according to a particular set of guidelines which inspires and identifies them and gives a focus to their prayer and work.

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE CHURCH



*The early martyrdom had ended. A new kind of martyrdom had begun. People give their lives for Christ every day.*

Read Matthew 19:16-21

During the early centuries of the Church, about 1,700 years ago, there were Christians who were inspired by the gospel to sell all that they had, leave their homes, and dedicate their lives completely to God in a special way. They left behind everything so that they could follow Jesus without distractions.

Eventually, as more people chose to live in this way, they began to form communities and live together in places called **monasteries**. As a community, they could help each other provide for their daily needs and work together to support the life of the whole community. Some religious

communities were made up of all men, and others were formed by women. In each community, the members lived a life of prayer and pursued a spiritual union with God. Ever since that time, religious communities have been an important part of the Church and religious life continues to be a very attractive vocation for many people.

## PRAYER AND ACTION

Today, there are two main types of religious communities. Some religious communities serve God through meditation, prayer and solitude. These are known as **contemplative orders**. The men and women in these communities live in monasteries. Women's monasteries are also called convents. They live away from the distractions of the world so that they may devote their lives to praying for the needs of the Church. In contemplative communities of women, the members are known as **nuns**. In contemplative communities of men, the members are known as **monks**. The members of

the community also work to support their communities by farming or making and selling goods such as music cd's, communion hosts for mass, and works of art.



Read Luke 8:1-3



## Contemplative – Prayer Apostolic – Active

The second type of religious community is active in the world, serving others in a variety of activities. These communities are known as **active** or **apostolic orders**. In these orders, women are called sisters, and men are usually called brothers unless they are ordained priests. These communities work both in the Church and in the world. They usually have a particular focus such as teaching in schools, caring for the sick, helping

the poor, doing missionary work in far off countries, or working in the media. These communities also spend time in prayer. Their community prayer and common mission unite them.

### CONSECRATED TO GOD

The men and women who join religious communities **consecrate** their lives to God as a way of seeking holiness. To consecrate something means to set it aside or devote it to a holy purpose. To consecrate one's life to Jesus Christ means to devote it entirely to Him.

When a man or woman decides to accept Christ's invitation to leave everything and follow Him in a more radical way, they make vows to live like Jesus in poverty, chastity, and obedience. They participate in a ceremony where they make this commitment, much like a married couple exchanges their vows on their wedding day. They promise Christ that they will live the rest of their lives dedicated exclusively to Him.

The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience help religious men or women to be free from earthly attachments and distractions. These vows help them to live simply, to be more open with God, and to depend more on Him.

**Poverty** as a vow does not mean being poor. It means sharing possessions in common with the community. Religious men and women who live this vow only have things that can help them in their mission.

**Obedience** is listening to and following God's will in one's life. This is done with the guidance of the religious superior. The vow of obedience also requires going wherever one is needed and giving oneself completely in service to God's people.

**Chastity** for a religious sister, brother, or priest means that they give their body and soul only to Jesus. They enter into a loving and

*The priest, deacon, catechist and religious must...proclaim, be witnesses. But naturally, for this they must listen...on the one hand, with their soul open to Christ, interiorly listening to his Word so that it is... transformed and forms [their] being; and on the other, listening to today's humanity, our neighbours, those of [their] parish, those for whom [they] have been given a certain responsibility.*

– Pope Benedict XVI<sup>15</sup>



Photo courtesy of Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus

**Consecrate:**  
to set aside,  
devote to a certain  
purpose, make  
sacred.



**Jesus teaches that obedience is the key to a successful mission, even when obeying means accepting the cross.**

*“The world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me.”*

- John 14:31

exclusive relationship with Him. Jesus Christ, in turn, gives them special graces and the intense and intimate love of His own heart. Just as married people remain faithful to their spouses, religious men and women remain faithful to Jesus and do not marry or date other people. They avoid becoming intimately attached to people in a way that would distract them from their relationship with the Lord. By doing this, they remain free to love and serve God and neighbor with an undivided heart. Religious men and women may have family and friends with whom they spend time and form loving, friendly relationships.

## RELIGIOUS PRIESTS

A religious priest and a diocesan priest are different. A diocesan priest serves the people of a single diocese under the authority of his bishop. A priest in a religious order ministers to people according to the mission of his community. For example, if the religious order runs schools, then the priest might teach. If a religious priest is part of a missionary order, he might live in a foreign country. If he works in a monastery, he might do farm work in addition to his priestly duties. Like a diocesan priest, a religious priest celebrates the sacraments, and may work in a parish setting supported by his community of religious brothers and priests.

Religious brothers are not priests. They make vows and have responsibilities within their religious community but they are not ordained and do not celebrate the sacraments. A man may choose to be a brother rather than a priest because he wants to fully devote himself



to contemplation or to a particular kind of work such as teaching. Their vocation and ministry is similar to that of religious sisters.

## WHERE DO RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES LIVE?

Religious orders may live together in a community house. Each house may include a chapel, private rooms for sleeping, a kitchen, a dining room, and community rooms for socializing. Some houses have guest rooms for visitors.

A religious sister, brother or priest is not geographically bound by the parameters of the diocese. They live and work wherever the mission of the religious community and the needs of the world call them.

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

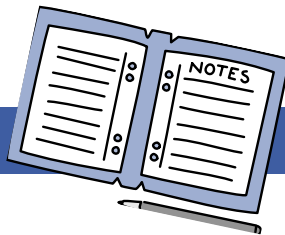
1. Do you have religious sisters, brothers, or priests in your parish? Do you know other religious sisters, brothers, or priests?
2. What are some forms of service that religious communities do that you think would be fun or interesting to do? Why does the Church need some religious orders to be active in the world?
3. St. Therese of Lisieux was a religious nun in a contemplative order called the Carmelites. She prayed very much for the Church's missionaries. Though she never worked in a foreign mission during her lifetime, she played an important role in helping the Church's missions. Why were her prayers important? Why do we need contemplative religious communities that are dedicated to prayer?



### VOCABULARY

Religious community  
Religious order  
Religious congregation  
Monasteries  
Contemplative order  
Nun  
Monk  
Apostolic order  
Active order  
Sister  
Brother  
Consecrate

## Write about it!



### Journal options:

- Read about the life of a founder of a religious community or a well-known religious sister, brother, or priest. Answer the following questions about them:
  1. What do you admire about the religious sister, brother, or priest that you read about?
  2. What about their lives inspires you?
  3. What would our world be like with more people like them?

*If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*

(Mt 19:21)

# A Charism for Every Need of the Church

There are thousands of people who dedicate their lives to God through the vocation to the religious life. They appear in many forms, ways, and clothing. There are many different religious orders. Each one has a unique identity, mission, spirituality, and set of guidelines for living. Part of being open to a vocation to the religious life is considering which religious order God may be calling you to join.

## WHAT IS A CHARISM?

A **charism** is the identifying trait of a religious community. Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit given to an individual or group for the good of the whole Church. Every religious order has a special charism which forms their identity and mission. The charism is the motivating spirit that is the heart of a religious community.

Religious orders are known for the outward expression of their charism. For example, Dominicans are known for the charism of preaching, and Franciscans for simplicity of lifestyle and serving the poor. Paulists and the Daughters of St. Paul are known for using communication technology to spread the Gospel. The Blessed Sacrament Fathers have a great devotion to the Eucharist because their founder felt called to pray to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament serve the poor because their foundress, St. Katherine Drexel, used her vast fortune to minister to Native Americans and African Americans.

## WORK AND APOSTOLATE

Due to the variety of charisms, there is a variety of ways that religious people serve the Church. All religious orders work to fulfill their specific mission. Contemplative orders work within the confines of a monastery. This allows them to focus on their primary mission: to pray for the needs of the Church. Active or apostolic congregations work in the world. They preach the Gospel, teach in schools, operate hospitals, manage publishing companies, or run retreat centers. Some apostolic orders send members as missionaries throughout the world to preach the Gospel to people who do not know Jesus.

The needs of people in the world are many. Likewise, there are many different religious congregations to serve them. Religious men and women have a mission to serve God's people.

## LIVE IN PERFECT CHARITY

Even more important than their work, God calls religious men and women to truly live their consecration to God in charity and community with others. Pope John Paul II asked all consecrated persons: "Live to the full your dedication to God, so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence." The call to the religious vocation is not only to serve others or to pursue one's own holiness, but to be a light of God in the world.

In a world where many people do not know God, it is a great witness to see people living a religious vocation that demonstrates their belief in, and love for God. In a world where there is hatred and violence, it is inspiring to see communities of people of different cultures and classes coming together to live in joy and charity. They inspire us to live our own faith in the same way.



Photo courtesy of Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus

*“Live to the full your dedication to God, so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty to lighten the path of human existence.”*

Pope John Paul II<sup>16</sup>

Religious men and women generally wear some visible sign of their commitment to Jesus to give a witness wherever they go that they belong to God. This is something that is closely united to their charism and mission. Some religious men and women wear a religious medal or a crucifix on a chain with normal clothes, while others wear special robes, sandals, or head coverings. The special

clothes worn by members of some religious communities is called a **habit**. They may dress differently, but the important thing is that they all give witness to the presence of God in the world.

In order to live their vocation, their prayer life is essential. In prayer, they deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. All religious orders have some kind of formal prayer life that they follow together, such as adoration, meditation, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or saying the Rosary. Contemplative Orders, like the Poor Clares, spend a lot of their prayer time in adoration before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Just as the sacraments are vitally important to all Christian disciples, frequent reception of the sacraments is central to religious life. Religious women and men try to go to Mass every day as well as to go frequently to Confession.



*A mission to bring Christ to the world to live in perfect charity.*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “in the consecrated life, Christ’s faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly to give themselves to God who is loved above all” (CCC 916).

## EXAMPLES OF SAINTLY SISTERS, BROTHERS, AND PRIESTS

**Blessed Andre Bessette** (d. 1937). When Andre became a brother of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, he could not read and was in poor health. He was appointed as doorkeeper of their college in Montreal where he dedicated himself to humble service. Soon, miracles began to occur because of this holy man. Many people who came to him to ask for his prayers were miraculously healed. Brother Andrew always gave credit for the miracles to God through the prayers of St. Joseph. To thank St. Joseph for his prayers, his religious order built the largest church dedicated to him. Brother Andrew was beatified in 1982.



**St. Frances Xavier Cabrini** (d. 1917) was born in Italy and later immigrated to the United States. She established numerous hospitals, orphanages and schools in the U.S. and South America. Toward the end of her life, she miraculously healed several people. She died in Columbus Hospital in Chicago. The room where she lived, along with her clothes and simple possessions, can be seen just as it was during her lifetime.



**Blessed Damien of Molokai** (d. 1889) joined the Redemptorists, an order founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori. He left his homeland of Belgium to be a missionary in the Hawaiian Islands. He felt compassion for the lepers suffering on the isolated island of Molokai who had no priest to minister to them. He volunteered to live among them and to minister and help care for them. Eventually, he got leprosy himself and died of the disease. He once said, “I wish to sacrifice myself for the poor lepers.”<sup>17</sup>



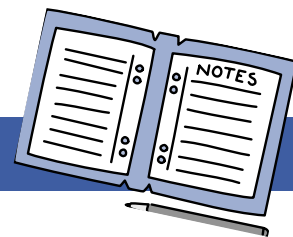
**Henriette Delille** (d. 1862) was a Catholic African-American woman from New Orleans. She was born a free woman when slavery still existed in the United States. Henriette founded a religious order, the Sisters of the Holy Family, to educate and care for young black girls. She established orphanages for the girls and founded homes for the poor and elderly as well. She was described as a woman “who for love of Jesus Christ had made herself the humble servant of slaves.”<sup>18</sup>

### LET’S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. Why do we need so many different religious communities?
2. What are some good things you think about when you see a religious sister, brother, or priest in real life or in a movie?
3. What is the difference between a job and being called to a religious charism?

### VOCABULARY

Charism  
Habit  
Missionary



### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- Using one of the above examples of saintly religious sisters, brothers and priests, answer the following questions: What are some ways that this person showed the world they were dedicated to God? How were prayer and the sacraments important for this person?
- How do you feel that God is calling you to express your faith? To what kind of service might God be calling you? As you pursue your own vocation, how important are prayer and the sacraments to you?
- How do you pray? Is God someone close to you, who you can talk to about anything? In what ways can you pray better?

# Becoming a Religious Sister, Brother, or Priest



## WHAT IF

Let's say you believe God is calling you to a religious vocation. Maybe you read a story or meet a religious person that sparks your interest. There is a little voice inside of you asking, "Could Jesus Christ be inviting me to follow Him in this way?" You would want to find out for certain whether Jesus was calling you, as well as what steps were necessary to become a religious sister, brother, or priest. There are many different religious communities, and each one has a process for joining.

## FINDING THE ORDER THAT FITS YOU

There are many ways to find information on different religious communities. You can ask someone who knows about the religious life: maybe a friend, family member, religious education teacher, priest or a religious sister or brother in your parish. You can look for more information on the internet or in magazines such as *Vision* or *Religious Ministries*. Religious communities also have "open house" days or weekend retreats where people can visit and learn more about the vocation firsthand. Opportunities for visiting religious communities or participating in retreats are often advertised in parish bulletins, the local diocesan newspaper, or on posters and fliers found in your Church. Most religious communities have websites which describe the community, provide information about upcoming events, and list the Vocation Director's name, phone number and e-mail address. Each religious order and diocese has a **Vocation Director**. Vocation Directors help women and men to determine if God is calling them to the religious life and if a particular order is the right fit for them.

## TRY IT OUT!

When God calls a person to a certain religious order or community, He will find a way to guide them to the place where they belong. When a person feels drawn to a certain religious community, they contact the Vocation Director to learn more

How do you  
know what fits  
you if you don't  
try it out?

about it. Together they can arrange a visit to get to know the community. The community can get to know them too. In this way, the religious community determines if the person is a right "fit" for them. If both agree there is a fit, then the person may move into the community for a short trial period. It is hard to know if you are meant for that kind of





## **Vision Magazine:**

www.visionguide.info

## **Religious Ministries:**

www.religiousministries.com

life unless you try it out for a short time. While living in the community, visitors experience a balanced lifestyle dedicated to God with time for prayer, community life, recreation, and apostolic work. It is a joyful, happy lifestyle for those who are called to be in a religious community, but the only way to find out if you might be called to this lifestyle is to try it out.

## FORMATION

There is a special process for those who want to become religious sisters and brothers which is called **formation**. Each religious community has their own formation program to train the women and men to be sisters and brothers. At the beginning of the program, there is a period of time during which a person visits the community to discover if they are called to join. During this time, a woman is called a postulant and a man is called a candidate.

If they decide to continue in the formation program, there follows the **novitiate** which lasts between one and two years, in which a man or woman becomes a **novice**. At this point, they are given the title of “sister” or “brother.” During the novitiate, a novice learns more about the charism of the community by participating in community life and apostolic service.

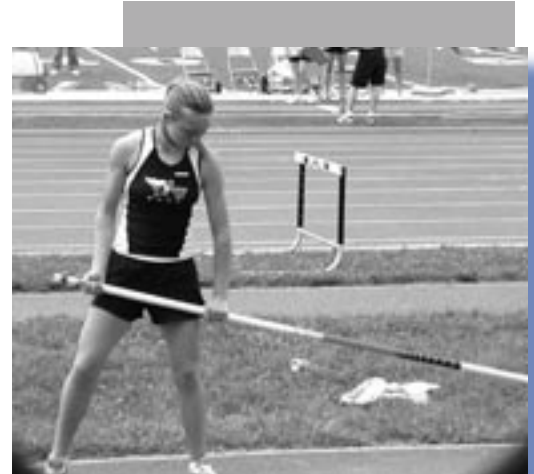
After the novitiate, if the novice decides to stay, they make **temporary vows** of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows are called “temporary” because they last only one year while the person continues training. At the end of each year, if they choose to remain part of the community, they renew their temporary vows. During this time they continue living and working as part of the community. They do this for several years until they are sure that they are definitely called to this vocation.

### **Formation**

is the process of training and spiritual development that takes place during the early months or years of joining a religious order.

After having determined over the years that a religious community is the right fit for them, a sister or brother professes their **final vows** of poverty, chastity and obedience, which they promise to keep for the rest of their lives. Their years of preparation and discernment allow them to be absolutely sure that this is truly the vocation God is calling them to.

Likewise, during this period, the religious community discerns whether God is calling a person to join their community. If so, they extend an invitation for a sister or brother to make their final vows, and the person becomes a permanent member of the community.



*St. Paul describes every Christian's life as a challenge that requires training in order to live it well: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"*

(2 Timothy 4:7).

## PRIESTS IN A RELIGIOUS ORDER

Men who want to be religious priests begin seminary training during the first years living in the community. They take temporary vows, then final vows. Once they are permanent members of the religious community, they can then be ordained priests. A religious priest is a member of his community just like the brothers. They all live and work in community sharing the same charism, but only the religious priest celebrates the sacraments.

*There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world.*

– Pope Benedict XVI<sup>19</sup>



### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. What are some ways that God can show a person that they are called to be a religious sister, brother, or priest?
2. How could someone who is called to religious life discover which religious community is the right fit for them?
- 3 Religious men and women make temporary vows for several years before making their final vows. Do you think this helps them to make a lifelong commitment to a religious community? What motivates people to make a lifelong commitment?

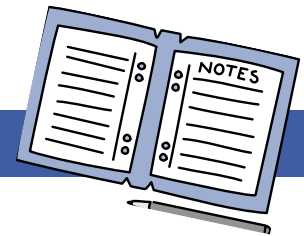
### VOCABULARY

Vocation Director  
Formation  
Novitiate  
Novice  
Temporary Vows  
Final Vows

### Write about it!

#### Journal options:

- Prepare one question that you want to ask the religious sister who will be speaking to your class.
- Imagine that you feel drawn to join a religious community. Use a *Vision* magazine ([www.visionguide.org](http://www.visionguide.org)), or other vocation publication, to find three religious communities that seem interesting. Write a paragraph for each one explaining the reason why you think that the religious order might be a “good fit” for you. (For example: “This religious order teaches in schools and I want to be a teacher.” “This religious order works overseas and I love to travel.” “They are missionaries and I am excited by my faith and want to share it with others.”)



# Witness of a Religious Sister/Adopt a Sister

## INTRODUCTION

We have learned that there are different ways of living a vocation to the religious life. Today we welcome a sister who is dedicated to God in this way, who will tell us how she discovered her call, and what her life is like now. You may have already prepared questions for the end of the talk, but if you think of others you may ask them as well.

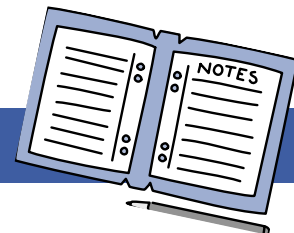


**LET'S PRAY ABOUT IT!**

**Adopt a Sister Prayer**

## SUMMARY

Hearing the story of this sister shows us that religious sisters were once students too, who did the same things you do. One day, she decided to say "Yes" to Christ's invitation and to dedicate her life to Him. Think of the good things she has done since the day that she decided to follow her vocation. Let us remember to pray for her, and all those who share her vocation. Let us also pray that God will show each of us our own vocation and give us the ability to say "Yes" like she did.



*Write about it!*

### Journal options:

- What is one thing you found interesting about the speaker's presentation and why? What was one thing that you could relate to in her talk?
- After meeting this sister, would you be more likely to encourage a friend who wanted to become a sister? What are the good points you can tell her about this vocation?
- Try to imagine what the world would have been like if this sister decided not to follow her vocation. What good things would never have happened?

# Conclusion: Jesus Christ is Calling You

## LISTEN

Jesus Christ is calling you. Even now you can hear Him in your heart if you will listen. He is inviting you to discover your vocation. This vocation is yours and no one else's. It is unique. It is the adventure of your life that will lead you to true happiness and to Heaven. All you have to do is say "Yes" to Jesus. Tell Him that you want to listen to His voice, that you want to know the mystery of your vocation, and that you accept the challenge of whatever vocation He is asking of you.

You have learned much about what a vocation is, how God reveals a vocation, as well as what the main types of vocations are. Now it is time to review what you have learned so that you can take this knowledge and apply it in your own life. By now, you have already begun considering what path God might be inviting you to. You must continue to discover the path God is guiding you to and take action to follow that path.

## VOCATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

God created you. He knows everything about you. He knows your future and your past, and He knows that you have the ability to be great. God created you to do great things, to find happiness with Him and to become a saint.

All Catholic Christians, from the moment they are baptized, are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Being a Christian disciple means forming a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by getting to know Him, imitating Him in everything we do, and sharing our Faith with others. Getting to know Jesus means speaking to Him in daily prayer, participating in the worship of God at Mass, and receiving the sacraments often, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

In addition to this calling that all Christians share to be disciples of Jesus, each individual person has a specific vocation. Your vocation is the path that God is inviting you to follow that will lead to your happiness on earth and your salvation in Heaven. The vocation you are called to best fits how God made you. It is a special mission God sets apart just for you.

God respects your freedom and He created you to be free to follow your vocation. The main types of vocations are: single life, marriage, priesthood, or religious life (as a religious sister, brother, or priest).

Different people discover their vocations in different ways, some when they are very young. We must prepare ourselves to hear God's call by spending time listening to God. God speaks to us in prayer, whispering to us in our hearts during moments of silent conversation with Him. God speaks to us through the Church, through priests and religious sisters and brothers, through the sacraments and the Mass, and through the Bible. God also speaks to us in everyday life, through people we know, and through our experiences.

*True freedom is not doing what we want to do, but doing what we ought to do.*

– John Paul II



Photo courtesy of Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus

## Single Life

All people are single for some part of their lives. Some single people will later be married. Some will become priests or religious. God calls some people to remain single in order to serve others and the church. Single people have a special freedom that they can use to help others in a variety of ways. They must be ready for whatever God asks of them. They should live the virtues of chastity and modesty and look to Jesus as their example of how to live a good single life.



## Marriage

Married people are called by God to find true happiness and become saints by helping their spouses to become holy, by teaching their children to love God as Christian disciples, and to sanctify the world around them in their everyday life. Marriage is a sign of the love that God has for us. Just as Christ gave Himself completely for his Church, a man and a woman give themselves to each other. When a man and a woman are married in the sacrament of Matrimony, they invite God to be the center of their family and they offer their love for each other as a gift to Him.



Parents are the first ones to teach children about God and every family should be a domestic church. All of society benefits from strong, loving families.

It is very important to find the right person to marry – the person who will help you to get to Heaven.

Deacons serve the Church by assisting the bishop and priests. Deacons may read the Gospel and preach during the Mass. They may also perform baptisms, witness marriages and lead wake and funeral services. They cannot celebrate the Mass, hear confessions, or anoint the sick. This is a special vocation that is open to both married and single men.

## Priesthood

Jesus chose a special group of men from among his disciples to guide the Church and celebrate the sacraments. Becoming a priest is one of the seven sacraments known as Holy Orders. Whenever a priest offers the Mass or administers the sacraments, he acts *in persona Christi* which means “in the person of Christ.” Before he is ordained a priest, a man makes three special promises: he promises to pray on behalf of his people, he promises obedience to his bishop, and he promises to remain celibate (not to marry).

Diocesan priests live their vocation focused on the needs of the people in their parish and diocese. A diocesan priest is called to be a shepherd for God’s people and he plays an important part in the lives of the people in his parish.

A religious priest is a priest that belongs to a religious community. Religious priests take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Rather than serve a specific geographical area, such as a diocese, religious priests work with their religious community in their common mission wherever they are needed.

Men who are studying to become priests attend a special school called a seminary. The classes help a man prepare to become a priest. Seminarians are open to the vocation of priesthood, discerning their call while preparing for ordination.



## Religious Life: Sisters, Brothers, and Priests

Religious sisters, brothers, and priests are individuals who live out their Christian faith as a member of a group that is known as a religious community (also called a religious order or religious congregation). The men and women who join religious communities consecrate their lives to God. They love and serve God in a life of prayer and service. When a man or woman decides to accept Christ's invitation to leave everything and follow Him, they make vows to live like Jesus in poverty, chastity, and obedience.

There are many different kinds of religious communities in the Church, and each community lives according to a particular set of guidelines which inspires and identifies their community and gives a focus to their prayer and work. A charism is the identifying characteristic of a religious community. Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit given to an individual or group for the good of the whole Church.



There are two main types of religious communities. Contemplative orders focus on prayer. Active or apostolic orders are devoted to the service of others.

When God calls a person to a certain religious order or community, He will find a way to guide them to the place where they belong. If someone feels that they are called to the religious life, they can find information about religious orders by talking to people they know, looking on the internet, or contacting a vocation director. Once they decide to try out a religious order, there is a period of formation where they can learn about the lifestyle, spirituality and charism of the community. When a person is sure God is calling them to join a particular religious order, they take final vows that will last the rest of their lives.

## IT IS UP TO YOU

Continue building your relationship with Jesus Christ as a true Christian disciple. Part of being a Christian disciple is to pray. Speak to Jesus every day and listen to what He wants to tell you. Tell Him that you want to follow the vocation that He has designed for you to become a saint. Ask Him to help you discover it. Learn to know Jesus in the Eucharist and go to confession regularly.

There are many ways to learn more about vocations. You can speak to people you know or find information that is available about different vocations. The more you know about vocations, the better you will be able to speak to others about vocations and help them to find God's plan for their lives.

When you feel God calling you to a vocation, you must act. Take the steps that are necessary to follow the path that God is calling you to. The world needs you. The Church needs you. Jesus Christ is calling you. He will help you to follow the path He has prepared for you if you trust in Him and hear His voice.

*May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Colossians 1:11-12

# Glossary

**Apostles** – the twelve men chosen by Jesus to lead the Church in a special way. The twelve Apostles were the first to spread Jesus' message throughout the world. *(Unit I: Lesson 1)*

**Apostolic order, Active order** – a **religious community** that is active in the world, serving others in a variety of activities *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Brother** – a member of religious community of men who is not a priest *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Candidacy** – (also called **postulancy**) the first step in the formation of a religious brother, sister, or priest. This is a stage when a man or woman who is interested in learning about a religious community visits them for a determined period of time to see if they are a good fit for the community. During this time, a woman is called a postulant and a man is called a candidate. *(Unit III: Lesson 3)*

**Celibacy** – not being married. Priests, religious sisters and brothers choose not to be married in imitation of Jesus. *(Unit II: Lesson 1)*

**Charism** – the identifying trait of a **religious community**. Charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit given to an individual or group for the good of the whole Church. Every religious order has a special charism which forms their identity and mission. The charism is the motivating spirit that is the heart of a religious community. *(Unit III: Lesson 2)*

**Chastity** 1) the virtue that guides the way we express love with our bodies and controls our sexual desires according to our particular **vocation**. *(Unit I: Lesson 4)*; 2) For single people, chastity means avoiding sexual relations outside of marriage, and respecting the dignity of those around us. *(Unit I: Lesson 4)*; 3) For married people, chastity includes giving themselves body and soul only to their wife or husband for as long as they both live. *(Unit I: Lesson 4)*; 4) For a religious sister, brother, or priest, chastity is the vow with which they promise their body and soul only to Jesus. They enter into a loving and exclusive relationship with Him and He, in turn, gives them special graces and the intense and intimate love of His own heart. *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*.

**College seminary** – (also called **minor seminary**) a special college for men who are interested in the priesthood. The college seminary offers classes that help seminarians learn about God and the Church. The seminary also provides many ways for the seminarians to grow spiritually. *(Unit II: Lesson 4)*

**Consecrate** – To consecrate something means to set it aside or devote it to a holy purpose. To consecrate one's life to Jesus Christ means to devote it entirely to Him. *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Contemplative order** – **religious communities** that serve God through meditation, prayer and solitude *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Deacon** – men, either married or single, who are called to a special vocation called the diaconate. Deacons serve the Church by assisting the bishop and priests. *(Unit I: Lesson 5)*

**Diocese** – a geographical area in the Church which is assigned to a bishop *(Unit II: Lesson 1)*

**Discern** – to try to discover something God is calling us to. This process takes time to sense and understand *(Unit II: Lesson 4)*

**Disciple** – A Christian disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ by trying to be like Him in everything they do. *(Unit I: Lesson 1)*

**Discipleship** – Christian discipleship means living as a Christian **disciple**. *(Unit I: Lesson 1)*

**Domestic church** – The Church teaches that the family is like a small household church, which is called the domestic church. *(Unit I: Lesson 5)*

**Eucharist** – another name for Holy Communion *(Unit I: Lesson 1)*

**Final Vows** – after a long period of preparation, a religious sister, brother, or priest makes permanent vows of **poverty, chastity, and obedience** that they promise to keep for the rest of their lives. These are known as final vows. *(Unit III: Lesson 3)*

**Formation** – the special process of preparation to become religious sisters and brothers and priests. Each religious community has their own formation program. *(Unit III: Lesson 3)*

**Habit** – the special clothes worn by members of some religious communities. These clothes usually have a special meaning or purpose for those who wear them. *(Unit III: Lesson 2)*

**High school seminary** – a special school for high-school boys considering the priesthood *(Unit II: Lesson 4)*

**Holy Orders** – the sacrament by which a man becomes a deacon, priest, or bishop *(Unit I: Lesson 5)*

**In persona Christi** – whenever a priest administers the sacraments, he acts *in persona Christi*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “in the person of Christ.” *(Unit II: Lesson 1)*

**Lay people** – anyone who is not a deacon, priest, or bishop is a lay person. *(Unit I: Lesson 4)*

**Liturgy of the Hours** – a series of prayers made up of psalms, scripture passages, and intercessions that are prayed at certain times throughout the day. Priests make a promise to pray these prayers everyday. Religious sisters and brothers also pray the Liturgy of the Hours. *(Unit II: Lesson 2)*

**Major seminary** – a special school for seminarians who have finished college. A major seminary prepares seminarians to become priests. *(Unit II: Lesson 4)*

**Marriage** – in the vocation of marriage, a man and a woman promise before God to love and honor each other for the rest of their lives. Married people are called by God to: become saints, help their spouses to become holy, teach their children to love God, and be witnesses of their Christian faith in the world. *(Unit I: Lesson 5)*

**Meditation** – a type of prayer in which we focus our minds on a religious image, idea, or scripture passage *(Unit II: Lesson 2)*

**Minor seminary** – see **College seminary**.

**Missionary** – any person, but especially a member of a religious community, who is sent to preach the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus, usually in a foreign country. *(Unit III: Lesson 2)*

**Modesty** – being decent and appropriate in dress, words, and behavior. This means respecting our bodies and the bodies of others. The Church teaches us that modesty protects our most intimate selves. *(Unit I: Lesson 4)*

**Monasteries** – places where members of a religious order live together. There are separate monasteries for communities of men and for communities of women. In monasteries, members of a religious order can live a life of prayer and pursue a spiritual union with God. *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Monastery** – a place where members of a contemplative religious order live together. There are separate monasteries for communities of men and for communities of women. In a monastery, members of a religious order can live a life of prayer and pursue a spiritual union with God. *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Monk** – a man who is a member of a contemplative religious community *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Novice** – a man or woman who is in the novitiate period of their formation. This means that they have completed the **candidacy** or **postulancy** period but have not yet taken **temporary vows**. *(Unit III: Lesson 3)*

**Novitiate** – part of the formation program of religious communities. It lasts between one and two years, during which a person learns about the **charism** of the community by participating in community life and **discerns** whether they are called to be a part of the community. During this time a man or woman is called a **novice**. *(Unit III: Lesson 3)*

**Nun** – a member of a contemplative religious community of women. *(Unit III: Lesson 1)*

**Obedience** – 1) one of the promises made by diocesan priests before they are **ordained** is obedience to the bishop. Obedience does not mean blindly following orders; it means faithfully doing God’s will. For a diocesan priest, doing God’s will includes following the guidance of his



bishop in serving the needs of the diocese.  
(Unit II: Lesson 1)

2) one of the **vows** taken by members of a religious community is obedience to their **religious superior**. For a religious brother or sister, this means listening to and following God's will for their life. This is done with the guidance of their religious superior. Obedience includes going wherever one is needed and giving oneself completely in service to God's people. (Unit III: Lesson 1)

**Ordination** – the ceremony in which a man receives the sacrament of **Holy Orders**. Through this sacrament, a man becomes a deacon, a priest, or a bishop. When a man receives this sacrament, we say he is ordained. (Unit II: Lesson 1)

**Priest** – a man chosen by Christ from among His disciples and called to guide the Church and celebrate the sacraments. Those who God calls to the priesthood imitate Christ in a particular way by completely dedicating themselves to the Church. (Unit II: Lesson 1)

**Postulancy** – see **Candidacy**.

**Poverty** – one of the vows taken by members of a religious community. Poverty as a vow does not mean being poor; it means sharing possessions in common with the community. Religious men and women who live this vow only have things that can help them in their mission. (Unit III: Lesson 1)

**Reconciliation** – another name for the sacrament of confession. (Unit I: Lesson 1)

**Religious community, Religious order, Religious congregation** – a group of individuals who make vows to live their Christian faith together in a particular way as members of a community. (Unit II Lesson 1, Unit III: Lesson 1)

**Religious superior** – the head of a **religious community** (Unit II: Lesson 1)

**Sacred bond** – the bond of love and responsibility between a man, a woman, and God that becomes a reality in the sacrament of **marriage**, when the man and woman vow before God to live faithfully as husband and wife for the rest of their lives. (Unit I: Lesson 5)

**Sanctification** – to sanctify means to make holy, or to bring closer to union with God (Unit II: Lesson 2)

**Seminarians** – men who are preparing to be ordained as priests (Unit II: Lesson 4)

**Seminary** – a special school for men who are preparing to be ordained as priests (Unit II: Lesson 4)

**Single life** – living in the world without being married, ordained, or joining a religious community; it can be either a stage of life that a person will live until God calls them to another vocation, or a permanent vocation for those who remain single their whole lives. Single people enjoy a special freedom to serve God and others with their whole hearts. (Unit I: Lesson 4)

**Sister** – a member of an active or apostolic community of women (Unit III: Lesson 1)

**Spirituality** – a particular way of living one's faith in God. Prayer and service are two important parts of every Christian disciple's spirituality. (Unit II: Lesson 2)

**Temporary Vows** – vows that a religious brother or sister make during their formation before making their **final vows**. These vows last only one year while the person continues training. At the end of the each year, if they choose to remain part of the community, they renew their temporary vows until they are ready to make their final vows. (Unit III: Lesson 3)

**Vocation** – a plan or way of life that God invites us to live. (Unit I: Lesson 2)

**Vocation Director** – a person whose job it is to help others discern if God is calling them to the vocation of the priesthood or religious life. (Unit III: Lesson 3)

**Vow** – a special promise made to God to live in a particular way (Unit I: Lesson 5, Unit II: Lesson 1, Unit III: Lesson 1)

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