

# Vocations Reference Guide



*If Jesus calls you,  
do not be afraid to  
respond to him  
with generosity....  
Do not be afraid;  
trust in him and  
you will not be  
disappointed.*



Pope Benedict XVI

**Archdiocese of Detroit**



**Vocations Office**

*A quick reference guide to  
assist religious educators,  
campus and youth ministers  
and volunteers on how to pray,  
witness, teach, mentor and  
invite others to consider God's  
call in their lives.*

## Discernment is a process

It is a loving God who desires to share His life with us now and for eternity. From conception God has a plan for each one of us. The plan, initiated at our baptism, calls us to lead a life of holiness, to serve Christ in one another and to build up the Body of Christ, His Church.

The *specific* plan to which we are called by God is known as our vocation. For some the call may lead to marriage, for others to consecrated religious life, for some men it may lead to the priesthood or the Permanent Diaconate. Others may feel called to the single life. All are called to a life of service. *Learning* what it is that God specifically desires for us is called discernment.

Discerning what a person's vocation is requires a process that is different from choosing a career. In a career, an individual looks at their life and finds something of interest, sets goals, then begins the work of acquiring specific skills that will help them achieve their goal towards that chosen career.

Since it is God who calls each one of us to our vocation, the process for discernment begins with prayer. In addition to prayer, discernment is a process that requires meditation, reflection, honesty and direction. Through frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, Christ draws us more deeply into His life and reveals His will for us.

A person may choose several different career paths during their life but when they find their true vocation that becomes a life long commitment.

When God's plan is followed, only then will each person find true happiness and fulfillment. They will never be disappointed since it is God's will that is being served.

## Ten Steps for Proper Discernment

1. *Pray for guidance from God.* God has a plan for everyone and following God's plan will lead to true happiness.
2. *Pay attention to the gifts and talents given by God.* They may be an indicator of how we are called to serve.
3. *Seek advice from people who are wise and who use good judgment.* Don't be afraid to place thoughts and plans before the critical eyes of friends, family, or a spiritual director (i.e. priest, religious or trained lay person). Examine alternatives by testing them against experience.
4. *Listen to what the mind, heart and intuition are saying.* Make sure all three of these "voices" from the soul are part of a final discernment.
5. *Do not make a decision when in the middle of a crisis.* Decisions made under stress may lack clarity.
6. *Find a passion in life that motivates.* Know personal limits but follow the gifts and talents given.
7. *Be willing to let go of missed opportunities and possibilities ignored.* Life is a journey and not every path shown will be chosen. Learn to accept choices made in life up until now. Be willing to move forward from there.
8. *Develop an appropriate sense of timing.* Do not act in haste, but do not drag out decisions either. Break down the decision-making process into steps that can be managed on a realistic timetable.
9. *Once you have to make a decision, choose!!!* Accept the risks of a choice and let go. Ambivalence (inability to decide) will lead to an unfruitful life. "Not to decide is to decide" and sometimes others will decide for you.
10. *Look to Jesus as the model for all decision making.* "Father...not my will but yours be done." Luke 22:42. By seeking God's perfect will, life to the fullest will be experienced.

## Suggested Discernment Activities

### Grade School Activities

- ◆ Learn about God's love and how this is reflected by family, friends, religious, priests and deacons.
- ◆ Learn about the unique gifts each one has been given by God.
- ◆ Study the lives of the Saints.
- ◆ Study God's Word to see how Jesus calls His disciples.
- ◆ Through the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation and Eucharist, learn how God gives us signs to help us on our journey.

### Junior High Activities

- ◆ Learn the many ways in which we can pray.
- ◆ Participate in service projects at both the parish and in the neighborhood.
- ◆ Invite the Vocation Director, priests, deacons and religious men and women to give witness about their vocation.
- ◆ Model our lives after the Saints, Apostles, Blessed Mother Mary.
- ◆ Have those who minister in the parish give witness about their ministries.
- ◆ Through the sacrament of Confirmation learn the gifts of the Holy Spirit, evangelization and discipleship.

### High School to Young Adult Activities

- ◆ Spend time in daily prayer; reading Scripture and good spiritual books..
- ◆ Partake in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation more frequently.
- ◆ Become involved in a ministry at home or college parish.
- ◆ Explore opportunities for retreats, workshops or other spiritual activities.
- ◆ Get involved with High School or College Campus Ministry
- ◆ Seek spiritual direction.

### If specifically called to the Priesthood or Consecrated Life

- ◆ Make a list of reasons why you feel God is calling you.
- ◆ Attend a *Come and See* or *Discernment Weekend*.
- ◆ Discuss your thoughts and feelings with a priest or religious sister or brother.

**Brothers:** Single men, not ordained, living in a religious community of men who live out their Christian commitment in prayer and service to God and those around them. They take three vows: poverty, chastity and obedience.

**Candidate:** A person who is in the initial stages of becoming an ordained minister or entering a religious order; in religious orders sometimes called a postulant.

**Celibacy:** The state of life, remaining single, one assumes as a priest or religious sister, or brother, in which he/she promises to refrain from marriage and sexual relations in order to be consecrated to the service of God and the Church.

**Charism:** A gift of the Holy Spirit given to an individual for the public benefit, directly or indirectly, of others to build up the Church. Every religious order and congregation claims a special charism. This gift is what forms the identity and mission of the order or congregation; e.g. Dominicans are known for the charism of preaching, Franciscans for the simplicity of lifestyle.

**Chastity:** One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the moral virtue referring to the adoption of ethical and moral norms that moderate and regulate the exercise of human sexuality. All Christians are called to be chaste, caring, and responsible in their love for each other. Married persons are called to live lives of fidelity to their marriage vows and to one another. Priests, religious sisters and brothers are called to live chaste lives within a celibate lifestyle.

**Cloister:** A physical enclosure or place of restricted access, such as a monastery or convent, which normally encompasses the living quarters of priests and religious. It is especially important for contemplative communities, where separation from the world is an essential element of their vocation.

**Consecrated Life:** Consecrated life is a vocation to conform one's life more closely to Jesus Christ through living as He did in poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience. This includes religious priests, brothers and sisters, members of secular institutes, hermits and consecrated virgins.

**Contemplative:** Usually describes a religious order of women or men whose members live in a cloister and whose mission is realized through members' prayers.

**Deacon:** A married or single man who is ordained in the sacrament of Holy Orders to serve in the ministries of Sacrament, Word, and service. Deacons may preach the Word, baptize, witness marriages, preside over funerals outside of Mass, teach, and participate in a variety of other ministries. A deacon married at the time he is ordained whose spouse subsequently dies is ordinarily not allowed to remarry. A Transitional Deacon is a man who is moving toward ordination to the priesthood.

**Discernment:** A decision-making process that is rooted in one's relationship with God. It is a way of listening to God in our experiences, in Scripture, and in the Church. Discernment is a means of sorting through the movements in our hearts and making the best choices among alternatives.

**Formation:** Formation is the process by which baptized persons grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ. It begins with baptism and continues through the whole of life. For those joining a religious or secular institute, formation is the process of education and spiritual development that takes place during the early months or years of joining. Those seeking to be ordained as a priest are involved in formation during their seminary years. Formation embraces the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development of the person.

**Habit:** The garb or clothing worn by some religious men and women. The habit may be different for each community.

**Laity:** All baptized Catholics who form the faith community of the Church but have not received Orders (i.e. deacon, priest or bishop).

**Lay Ecclesial Minister:** A fully initiated lay member of the Christian faithful, responding to a call to a particular ministry, with the needed formation and education, whose role is conferred by ecclesiastical authority, who is either paid or a volunteer.

**Ministry:** Also called pastoral ministry, it refers to Christian service to the faithful. Ministries are also offices in the Church, that include *Reader* (which allows one to read the Sacred Scriptures in the liturgical assemblies), and *Acolyte* (which allows one to act officially as a server at Mass).

**Missionary/Missioner:** The whole Church is responsible for spreading the faith to those who do not know Christ. All Christians are called to undertake missionary work. A missionary, who can be a priest, deacon, religious or secular institute member, single or married lay person, is one who is sent by the Church to be a minister of the Gospel to the poor and oppressed.

**Novice:** The term for a man or woman in the first formal stage of joining a religious community. It includes the study of Canon Law. Usually lasts one to two years.

**Nun:** A nun is a woman who is a member of a contemplative and often cloistered community. (Different from a *Sister*, see definition next column for distinction)

**Obedience:** From the Latin word "to listen". Men and women religious and members of secular institutes profess a vow of obedience to those in whom authority of the institute is vested.

Diocesan priests promise respect and obedience to their bishop and his successors.

**Ordination:** Confers the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Through ordination a man becomes a deacon, priest or bishop.

**Poverty:** Those living a consecrated life make a vow or sacred promise of poverty as a commitment to hold their possessions in common and to live a simple lifestyle.

**Priest:** A man is ordained to the priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The priest is ordained to proclaim the Word of God, to lead the Church community in worship, and to preside over the celebration of the sacramental life. Through his care and guidance of the Church community and its ministries, the priest makes present and visible the leadership Christ gives to the Church.

**Religious Community:** Religious congregations and orders strive to create community around their charism and basic spirituality derived from their founder. Members of these communities take vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience.

**Secular Institutes:** Are a form of consecrated life in which members live a life of celibate chastity, poverty and obedience. Generally, members live alone or with their families, but not in a community as do religious members. Lay men and women and diocesan priests may be members. Their goal is to be a transforming presence in society.

**Sisters:** Women who belong to religious communities. They take vows of celibate chastity, obedience and poverty. They serve God according to the charism of their communities. Sisters are not married and work in many different ministries according to the needs of the Church, the religious community and society.

**Vocation:** From the Latin word *vocare*, meaning "to call". Through Baptism and Confirmation all Christians are called to follow Jesus Christ to be holy people who dedicate their lives to the service of God and one another. The call to follow Jesus leads to one of four paths in life: single life, married life, the consecrated life, or ordination to the diaconate or priesthood.

**Vow:** A vow is a free and deliberate promise that is made to God in the Church. Members of religious communities make formal promises of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience. Married couples make a promise on their wedding day to be faithful and that their love will be a sign and sacrament of God's love.

# The Important role of educators, catechists and ministers in nurturing vocations

*Your role in the promotion of vocations as an educator, catechist, youth or campus minister is extremely important! The family is the seedbed of vocations, but without encouragement from those faithful working in the Church, the seeds planted may have difficulty taking root. Within the parish, classroom, or campus setting, you become an essential “vocation director” to those to whom you minister and instruct. You are in a unique position to see the potential in someone who may have a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life or who may be considering service in lay ministry. You may be the one to help this individual, so loved by God, discern and decide wisely and prudently the path they should follow in life.*

*What concrete steps can you take to accomplish this responsibility?*

- ◆ *Be clear about your own personal commitment to holiness; when others see Christ in you, they are drawn to a deeper relationship with the Lord.*
- ◆ *Recognize that this is God’s work and that you are cooperating with God in assisting others to follow His will.*
- ◆ *Look for ways to discuss what a vocation is with your students, youth or young adults in a practical and realistic way.*
- ◆ *If your parish, school or campus is lacking in vocation materials don’t hesitate to contact the Vocations Office for information to assist your efforts.*
- ◆ *Develop a five point plan for helping those within your ministry discern their vocation through:*
  - **Prayer** – develop a personal prayer life and one with your classroom or ministry; pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, consecrated life and lay ministry.
  - **Evangelization** – affirm and encourage Gospel principles in leadership, community, respect for life, and excellence in personal growth toward holiness.
  - **Experience** – ensure that activities promoted under your guidance reflect virtues and values that promote a Christian community of love, service and respect.
  - **Mentoring** – witness to others your vocation and how you came to follow God’s will in your life. Be a role model for others.
  - **Invitation** – If you recognize in an individual the qualities and virtues that may indicate a vocation to the priesthood or religious life or to serve as a lay minister, do not hesitate to say: “Have you ever thought about being a priest, or ...?” Invite students and youth to consider options for service and ministry in the parish or community.

*Your role is important! May God continue to bless your service to the Church.*

## QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR WHEN DISCERNING VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND CONSECRATED LIFE

- **Personal relationship with God evidenced by prayer**
- **Responsiveness, capacity to serve a variety of people**
- **Leadership ability**
- **Collaborative working style**
- **Love for the Catholic Church and its teachings**
- **Generally, good health**
- **Adequate intellectual ability**
- **Healthy relationships, including good friends**
- **Sense of humor**
- **Relationship with God, faith and a sense of integrity**
- **Ability to live simply, share a common life, and compromise for the common good**
- **Ability to make a positive choice for celibacy**
- **Courage to take risks**
- **Respect for others**
- **Healthy self-image and sexuality**
- **Evidence of dependability, concern for others**
- **Well rounded individual**
- **Character and virtue demonstrated in honesty, reliability, sound moral values**
- **Flexibility**
- **Ability to collaborate with both women and men**
- **Openness to the realities of a multicultural church**
- **Participates in the celebration of the Eucharist – actively and regularly**
- **Ability to show dedication**

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