

VOCATIONS, VOCATIONS, VOCATIONS, VOCATIONS

The Church has faced difficulties in the fall off in vocations but we seemed to have turned the corner on this problem. Our numbers of seminarians and those being ordained has continued to grow and is substantial each year. None-the-less, we all need to continue to work on this problem and to not lose heart. God will not abandon us and it seems that His Grace is allowing more and more to respond to His call each year. We all have a responsibility to help in His work. Here are some ways that all Catholics can help to ensure that our faith continues to have strong leaders in our faith. God has a role for each of us to meet the needs of the faithful.

1. **Invite! Invite! Invite!** The number one reason why people don't consider religious life and priesthood is that no one ever asked them to do so. Therefore, it is critical that people raise the question, "Have you ever considered being a brother, priest or sister?" Even if the person responds with a sense of shock or laughter, the seed has been planted. Time and again, I hear people say "I probably *would* have considered priesthood or religious life if someone had asked me to think about it."
2. **Reflect on your own life.** As you read this, don't assume it is intended only for someone else. Ask yourself whether *you* have the skills needed to serve as an effective sister, priest or brother. Don't be afraid to think about this possibility and to open yourself to God's deepest call within you. It's the call of God's love! Search out an understanding person with whom you can discuss vocational possibilities. It just might be a good idea--for you and for the people of God.
3. **Get to know some good priests and religious.** Because there are fewer priests and religious, it becomes necessary at times to seek them out. When people invite priests, brothers and sisters into their homes and into their lives, they get to know them as real people. They discover that such a life can be happy, committed and fulfilling.
4. **Be supportive.** Those considering religious life and priesthood need a word of encouragement. They also need the witness of adults who say with their words and their lives that commitment is possible. At times, candidates for the priesthood and religious life may even be in need of financial assistance or need help because of previously accrued education debts.
5. **Focus on the positive.** There is much negative press and critical publicity about religious life and priesthood today. These issues demand sensitive and effective attention. Yet we also need--in the news as well as day-to-day conversation--a focus on the positive aspects of priesthood and religious life. Priests and religious, like everyone else, appreciate a word of thanks and encouragement.
6. **Pray for vocations.** Prayer is a vital element in parishes and families--not just prayer for more vocations, but prayer which honestly seeks the response to which the Spirit is inviting us today.
7. **Be aware of programs that work.** One current program growing in popularity is Called by Name. This program has the strong support of the U.S. bishops and other Church leaders. The process includes education about ministry and praying for vocations as a parish community. A key feature of Called by Name is that it encourages parishioners to surface names of women and men who seem to have the skills needed to be sisters, brothers, priests. Those who have been named are invited to explore further possible Church.

What the Words Mean

Vocation. Through the sacrament of Baptism, each person receives “a call” or vocation. All are called to holiness and to serve. This call can be lived out in a variety of ways--as a married or single person, or priest, brother or sister.

Laity and clergy. Within the Church there are two groups of people: Those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders and are called clerics, and all others, who are called lay people. Sisters and brothers are lay people.

Religious. Since all the baptized share a common relationship with God, all are called to be “religious” or holy in the broad sense of the word. Some men and women, however, choose to live a particular life-style called religious life. These people join a community of people that follow a specific tradition of spirituality patterned after the life and teaching of the founder of that community. Many religious profess vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience.

Sister. A sister is a woman who is a member of a particular religious community, lives the vows and is involved in serving others.

Brother. A brother is a male member of a religious community. He, too, professes vows and is involved in a variety of ministries, though he does not administer sacraments as an ordained minister.

Priest. A diocesan priest lives and ministers in a particular geographic area called a diocese, which is governed by a bishop. He does not belong to a religious community or order. He lives celibately and promises obedience to the bishop. Through ordained ministry, a priest claims God’s word and celebrates the sacraments.

A religious priest (such as a Dominican, Franciscan or Jesuit) is one who is a member of a religious community in the same way that brothers and sisters belong to a particular religious community. Unlike the brother and sister, he can administer sacraments as an ordained minister. He is not, as such, a minister of a particular diocese but can be involved in a variety of ministries in many different places.

Novice. The word novice means “new.” This is the first stage for someone who is joining a religious community. Novitiate is the name given to the process as well as the place where novices live.

Seminarian. A seminarian is someone who is training to be a priest. The seminary is a place where seminarians live and study.

(Above copy from the U.S. Catholic Bishops Website)