

God is calling your children.



Are you prepared to help them answer?

Vocations 101

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God (the Father, Son & Holy Spirit) is a Trinitarian communion of love. Making us in His own image and likeness, He inscribed in our nature the call to self-giving love & communion.

Each person, as a unique creation made new in the waters of Baptism, has also been given a unique path to holiness by which to live this call to love & communion. This path to holiness is what is known as a vocation.

The Catholic Church recognizes certain states in life as vocations

in which the unique path to holiness is found.

Married life is the most common, through which spouses make a complete self-gift of love to the other. Holiness is attained through the daily duties of being a spouse and parent.

For some, however, there is a higher calling—to embrace celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom



of God. This calling is found in the vocations to Priesthood and Consecrated Life.

This newsletter will focus on the Priesthood and the Consecrated Life of a Religious Sister/Brother. This is not to diminish the importance of vocations to marriage, but to familiarize you with vocations that are often misunderstood. The goal is that you as a Christian parent will feel empowered to aid your child's vocational discernment.

Fostering Your Child's Vocation

The Lord has entrusted you with a noble task! When you presented your child for Baptism in the Catholic Church, you agreed to "the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith." The Catholic Church believes that it is the role of parents to foster the vocations of their children.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God". (CCC 2226)

Pope Paul VI proclaimed in *Lumen Gentium* that "parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them,

fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state."



Right now you're probably saying to yourself, "Okay, I get it, but *how* do we encourage our child's vocation, if we *don't know* what it is?" You'll want to check out the article about vocational discernment on **page 4**, but in short, the answer lies in showing an openness to all vocations.

Be an authentic witness of marriage as a vocation. Speak of it as such. If you can't be this witness,

praise the holy marriages of others in front of your children. Speak highly of priests and religious. Invite them into your home. If you recognize specific gifts for ministry in your children, communicate that to them. Most importantly, pray for the Lord's will to be made known to your children, and encourage them to pray about their vocations.

Be Not Afraid. Don't let fear of uncertainty inhibit your task as Christian parents. Pope John Paul II, who inspired a wave of young people to answer the Lord's call, offered this prayer for you: "I pray that you, Christian families, united with the Lord through prayer and the sacramental life, will create homes where vocations are welcomed." Venerable Pope John Paul II, *pray for us!*

Vocations for Men: Sacrament of Holy Orders



“It’s not natural to be a priest. It’s SUPERNATURAL!”

Who’s going to give the sacraments for the next generation?

How beautiful are the hands that give us Jesus in the Eucharist!

Priestly Vocation

“From Christ, bishops & priests receive the mission and faculty (“the sacred power”) to act *in persona Christi*” - in the person of Christ.

The vocation to the priesthood is a supernatural call to lay down one’s life so that other’s may have life. He brings the mysteries of God—the Sacraments—to God’s people.

The man called to the priesthood vows celibacy, but he does not cast off his manhood. The priesthood is truly an exercise of real manhood. The priesthood is tough. Priests have to be fathers and heroes constantly bringing life into and out of this world, and leading them on the journey inbetween.

No matter how holy of a man he is, a man can never be worthy of the priestly calling. Nonetheless, a vocation to the priesthood is a gift. For those who have the call, answering it brings their greatest fulfillment and happiness.



Archbishop Timothy Dolan speaks of the priesthood as Christ’s grace lifting up the nature of the priest., saying “You will have the very character of Christ, the High Priest, the Good Shepherd, branded

on your hearts as your very identity.” The culture is right when they say that it is not natural for a man to be a priest. The priestly calling is supernatural. What a gift!

Vocation to the Diaconate

Some men are called to the vocation of the diaconate, which can be lived in celibacy or in marriage.

Deacons are ordained to be the image of Christ who came to serve, but not be served. They are servants of the mysteries of Christ, as well as the People of God. Deacons receive the strength for this service

through the Sacrament of Holy Orders and minister under a Bishop and Priest. Deacons only have a partial share in the “sacred power” of the Sacrament of Holy orders.

For Parents Struggling to Accept A Child’s Vocation

Do you find it painful to give up the dreams you had for your child

as he or she was growing up? Is it hard to give up the idea of grandchildren? If so, you’re fear is probably well intentioned because you are concerned for your child’s happiness and ability to live a normal, fulfilled life. Such fears, however, are misplaced. Rest assured that if your child is called to priesthood or religious life, it is the path of life that will bring him or her the most fulfillment and happiness!



Also, it is helpful for parents to remember that your children are not your own, but belong to the Lord. He has gifted them to you that you might care for them and raise them in love, but He ultimately knows the plans that are best for them.

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Consecrated Life

If your son or daughter is called to Religious Life, the Church has these words of encouragement for you: “Parents, give thanks to the Lord if he has called one of your children to the consecrated life. It is to be considered a great honor – as it always has been – that the Lord should look upon a family and choose to invite one of its members to set out on the path of the evangelical counsels! Cherish the desire to give the Lord one of your children so that God’s love can spread in the

world. What fruit of conjugal love could be more beautiful than this?” (Vita Consecrata)

Priesthood

It is also a great honor and blessing upon a marriage for a son to be called to the priesthood. There is a beautiful tradition in the history of the Church that honors the sacrifice made by parents of a priest. According to this tradition, the Lord asks of the mother at her judgment, “What have you done for me and given for my Church?” The mother can offer him the purificator from his first mass, which is the linen with the blood of Christ on it, and say “I have given You a priest, my Lord.” I am sure the same honor is offered for the fathers of priests, as well! The Lord can never be outdone in generosity.

Vocation to the Consecrated Life

In the consecrated life, a man or woman makes a total gift of self to the Lord by making a profession of three vows known as the evangelical counsils—poverty, chastity, and obedience.



This way of life calls for total conformity of oneself to Jesus Christ, who was perfectly poor, chaste and obedient. In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life, Pope John Paul II taught, “By the profession of the evangelical counsels, *the characteristic features of Jesus – the chaste, poor and obedient one – are made constantly “visible” in the midst of the world.*”

The consecrated life is most often lived in community, although some experience the radical call to solitude. These religious communities each have different charisms or spiritual focuses. Some are cloistered and

serve the Church through prayer and contemplation. Others live an active missionary life through a specific work or apostolate, and return at the end of the day to pray and live together in community.

Though there is a myriad of religious communities, they fall (for the most part) into five main categories of Religious Orders: Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Jesuits. For more information on the differences between Religious Orders, visit:

http://www.religious-vocation.com/differences_religious_orders.html

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Clothes of the Consecrated — Is it a dress? Burqa? Jedi Garb?

While consecrated religious priests, brothers, and sisters are constantly striving for Christian perfection and are putting off bad habits, they put on the religious “habit.” Habit, of course, is used with a different sense of the word. The religious habit is what they wear! The religious habit is not a dress. It is a visible sign of the interior vows they have

professed. During a time of confusion, some religious communities traded in their habits for secular clothing. Pope John Paul II spoke of the necessity of the religious habit, “Since the habit is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership in a particular Religious family, I join the Fathers of the Synod in strongly recommending to men and women religious that they

wear their proper habit, suitably adapted to the conditions of time and place. Where valid reasons of their apostolate call for it, Religious, in conformity with the norms of their Institute, may also dress in a simple and modest manner, with an appropriate symbol, in such a way that their consecration is recognizable.”



Consecrated Priests and Religious Brothers

Consecrated Priests Not all priests minister in a parish setting under the Bishop. Some men who have a vocation to the priesthood, may also be called to profess the evangelical counsels and live in a religious community. According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, “The Sacrament of Holy Orders finds a particular fruitfulness in this consecration, inasmuch as it requires and fosters a closer union with the Lord. The priest who professes the evangelical counsels is especially favoured in that he reproduces in his life the fullness of the mystery of Christ, thanks also to the specific spirituality of his Institute and the apostolic dimension of its

proper charism. In the priest, in fact, the vocation to the priesthood and the vocation to the consecrated life converge in a profound and dynamic unity”

Religious Brothers Not all men called to the consecrated life have the call to become priests. These men profess the evangelical counsels and are called Religious Brothers or Lay Brothers. The Church teaches in *Vita Consecrata*, that “these Religious are called to be brothers of Christ, deeply united with him, the firstborn among many brothers’ (Rom 8:29); brothers to one another, in mutual love and working together in the Church in the same service of what is good;

brothers to everyone, in their witness to Christ’s love for all, especially the lowliest, the neediest; brothers form a greater brotherhood in the Church. By living in a special way this aspect of Christian and consecrated life, Religious Brothers are an effective reminder to Religious Priests themselves of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ, to be lived among themselves and with every man and woman, and they proclaim to all the Lord’s words: ‘And you are all brothers’ (Mt 23:8).”

The Consecrated Life of a Religious Sister



The Religious Sister who has consecrated her life to the Lord according to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience is often called the Bride of Christ. Her consecrated life is a sign to the world of the world to come—when all marriages will cease and we will be united in intimate union with Christ the Bridegroom. Therefore, the Religious Sister does not forsake marriage to pursue her vocation,

but finds that the consecrated life is the ultimate fulfillment of her natural desire for marriage. The Church's teaching on the consecrated life is reflected beautifully in this quote from Religious-Vocation.com, "Instead of marrying a fallible man, religious in a mystical sense marry Our Lord Himself, wed to the Church. Instead of raising children, religious adopt every soul as their spiritual child. Instead of

devoting one's life towards the salvation of immediate family, religious devote their lives to the salvation of the world. In this way, the consecrated life is everything that marriage is, but elevated to a higher dignity and perfection. It redirects man's natural desire for marriage towards a higher and more perfect end; towards the mystical marriage between Christ and His Church."

"The Religious Sister finds that the consecrated life is the ultimate fulfillment of her natural desire for marriage."

Brief History of the Consecrated Life & Its Contributions

The Church teaches in *Vita Consecrata* that "Jesus himself, by calling some men and women to abandon everything in order to follow him, established this type of life which, under the guidance of the Spirit, would gradually develop down the centuries into the various forms of the consecrated life." The Church Fathers mention Christian virgins living in the first centuries according to the vows of chastity and poverty, but the first historical development of religious communities isn't seen until after the legalization of Christianity under the Emperor Constantine in the third century.

3rd Century—St. Anthony of the Desert goes off to live as a hermit. Others follow. First monastic villages—later living under one roof. They live according to poverty, chastity & obedience. This way of life spreads throughout the East and West.

427 AD—St. Augustine institutes monasteries of nuns.

529 AD—St. Benedict composes the Rule of St. Benedict, with orderly, communal life becoming the norm for Western Monasticism. His sister St. Scholastica creates a female branch of the Benedictine Order. The Benedictines were responsible for the rise of the university system through the middle ages.

1208/1209 AD—St. Francis of Assisi brings a renewal to the Consecrated Life. He and his followers become the first Mendicant Religious Order—living an active life of extreme poverty and penance. Their life was still communal, but not monastic. Under St. Francis, St. Clare established a female branch of the Franciscans.

1215 AD—St. Dominic was simultaneously establishing another Mendicant order that would come to be known as the Order of Preachers, or the Dominicans. St. Dominic also established a female branch of nuns and sisters.

1534 AD—St. Ignatius of Loyola forms the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. They are characterized by their missionary spirit, and have been instrumental in evangelization as new areas of the world were discovered. The Jesuits were instrumental in the evangelization of Native Americans in the New World. The Jesuits are the only Religious Order that does not have a female branch.

1535 AD—St. Angela Merici renews the consecrated life for women, establishing the first religious community for women with an apostolate of teaching. Prior to this, women did not have any apostolate other than prayer and penance. These sisters were still cloistered, and the girls to be educated would come into the cloister to be taught.

1633—St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal establish the Daughters of Charity—first community to live a truly active life with an apostolate. This opened the door for an explosion of uncloistered communities. They were instrumental in nursing and education.

(continued on next page)



19th century—As Catholic immigrants came to the United States, Religious Sisters came with them to minister to the people here. There was an explosion of active religious life at that time. The Religious Sisters from all kinds of European communities, and newly established American communities, were responsible for the development and operation of the Catholic school system as well as the hospital system in the United States.

1960s—The Second Vatican Council called for an authentic renewal of religious life, because practices were still medieval in many respects. Though the call for renewal was good and necessary, much confusion was generated about what renewal meant. Religious Life throughout the world suffered from this time of confusion, and the United States is no exception. Eventually, some communities were able to make their way to an authentic renewal in line with what was asked by the Council, and this renewal is bearing positive fruits. It is sad that much damage had to be done to the state of the religious life in the United States in the process, and sadly some communities are still suffering. Those communities that have renewed themselves in the authentic spirit of Vatican II, are seeing a flourishing of vocations from young women. If you're daughter has a call to the religious life and you would like to explore these communities further, many of them can be found at www.cmswr.org.

Encourage Silence, Encourage Discernment

Mother Theresa once said, "We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence..." What wisdom! Everything grows in silence. Even human babies in the womb grow in silence. It's the same with vocations. Vocations grow in silence. God only speaks in the silence. Vocations have been steadily decreasing since



the 1960s, but God has not suddenly stopped calling. Young people have stopped listening. Our culture is noisy and full of constant distraction. Encourage your children to unplug. Teach your children the value and necessity for silence. Teach your children that prayer is a conversation with God, and like any conversation it is a two way street in which He must be allowed to speak. Prayer must include silence to listen to his voice!

"God has not suddenly stopped calling. Young people have stopped listening."

Resources

General Vocations:

- * <http://www.catholicmom.com/vocations.htm>
- * <http://www.vocation.com>
- * Wee Believers Vocation Dolls—<http://weebelievers.com/products>

Priesthood:

- * <http://www.nypriest.com> - information on the priesthood and an inspirational video
- * United States Conference of Catholic Bishops — inspirational video— <http://www.usccb.org/vocations/fishersofmen.shtml>

Consecrated Life

- * Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious - (texts from Vatican documents on religious life, information on women's religious communities, and vocational discernment) - <http://www.cmswr.org>
- * <http://www.religious-vocation.com> (information on religious life and discerning a vocation)



Prayer for Parents

Gracious and loving God, you have blessed us with the privilege of becoming parents. We ask that you provide us with all that we need in accepting this awesome responsibility.

We pray that we will be open to your spirit who is our source of strength as we witness to our children your love for each of them and your desire for them to be happy and to live a full life.

We ask your help so we may guide and encourage our children to believe that they each have a special calling and to use their gifts and talents for others.

We pray, Heavenly Father, that our children will discover and respond enthusiastically to your desire for them whether it be to the vocation of single, married, ordained or consecrated life.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.