

Answers to many of the most frequently asked questions (faq) relating to priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church.

What is a priest?

A priest is a Christian, a member of the Church, called by God to proclaim the “Good News” of salvation to the world and to lead God’s people in worship, especially in making present the saving sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross in the Eucharist. He is also privileged to bring Christ to people in the Sacraments: he gives the life of Christ to people in Baptism; he forgives their sins in Reconciliation; he anoints the sick; he officiates at weddings. In general, the priest brings Jesus Christ to people in their spiritual needs.

What exactly is a “vocation”?

A vocation is a call from God to do something specifically for God and for His kingdom. The primary vocation of every person is to be holy! It is the divine calling to love and serve God, to obey his commandments, and to cooperate with Christ in the work of redemption by loving and serving others. Everyone is called to live the vocation of holiness, but everyone lives it in a special and unique way according to the plan of God.

What in particular are some of the vocations that I might be called to follow?

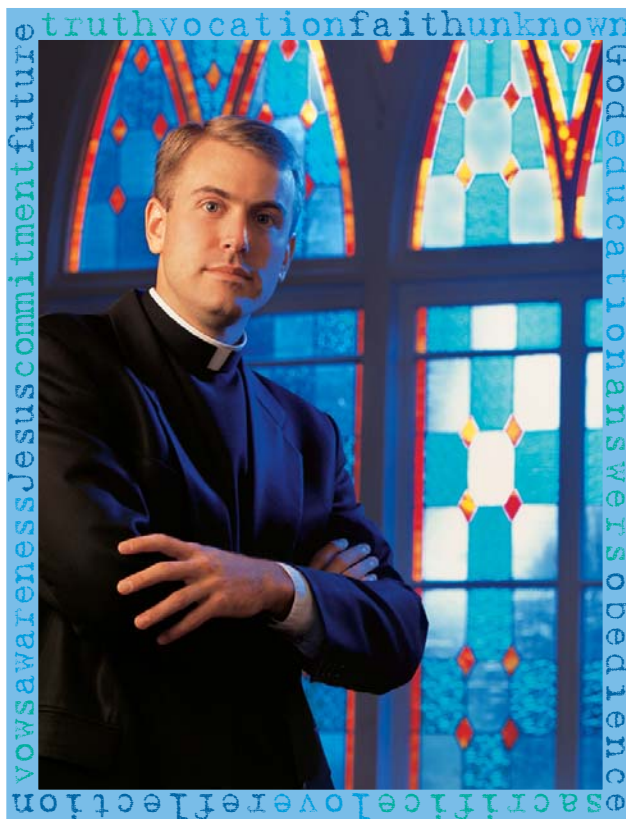
Many people are called to the vocation of marriage, while others may be called to the vocation of priesthood, to the religious life as a sister or brother, or to the diaconate. Equally Christ calls some to the commitment of single life. Remember: It is normal to desire marriage and family. Just because you have this desire does not exclude the possibility that you have a vocation to the priesthood or religious service.

How do I know what God is calling me to do?

You must pray every single day, asking God to reveal His plan for you. Do not ask yourself, “What do I want to do with my life?” This is the wrong question! Rather, you should be thinking and asking: “Jesus, what do You want me to do?” And listen for the answer! Listen with your heart, not just your head! The discernment process in the priesthood must also include the Church. The bishop is the one who will ultimately decide who is and who is not accepted as a candidate for diocesan priesthood. He is assisted in this by the vocations office and the seminary staff.

Can I be happy in my life if I don’t follow God’s plan for me?

If you do not follow the vocation for which God called you, you can still attain happiness in this world. However you may never be as happy as you might have been, had you followed your proper vocation. This is why it is so important that you discern correctly. The discernment of your vocation is likely to be the most important decision you will make in your entire life! Of course, there are trials and tribulations in every vocation. To become a priest does not take away all suffering. But there is great joy in laying down one’s life for Jesus!



Are most priests happy in their vocations in their lives and in their work for Christ?

Most priests are extremely happy in their vocations! The life of a priest is a rewarding life in this world. The media frequently give an incorrect impression of priests; that they are largely unhappy, frustrated or angry. This is simply not true.

But why can’t priests get married? That must be difficult.

Catholic priests do not get married so as to dedicate themselves completely to Jesus and to His people. The sacrifice of celibacy is a sign to the world that only Jesus can give us the happiness that we all crave. Giving up something as important as marriage and family is a powerful sign to the world that Jesus Christ is real! He is worth living for and sacrificing for. No, it is not easy, but neither is marriage. The fact is, every vocation requires great personal sacrifice. And there is great joy in sacrifice when it is done for Jesus and for others!

Will priests ever be allowed to get married?

Maybe more men would choose the priesthood, but the question is, “Would this be what is best for the Church?” As said above, celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom is a powerful sign that Jesus is real, and that He is worth living for, sacrificing for, and dying for! Besides, in the world as a whole, vocations to the priesthood and religious life have dramatically increased in the last thirty years. In Africa they increased by 394%; in S.E. Asia by 152%; in Central America by 165%; and in South America by 253%! It is only in North America and Western Europe that there has been a decline. Perhaps the issue is not celibacy, but other larger cultural issues and values.

Will I be lonely if I become a priest?

Loneliness is a part of every vocation, at one time or another. It is part of the human condition. Married people get lonely at times, even though their spouses and children surround them. Priests are always surrounded by people. This is one of the joys of being a priest. We are involved with people at the most profound moments of their lives. Loneliness can be part of the life of a priest too, but when we do experience loneliness, Jesus can fill that void, as He does for people in every vocation.

Do priests get paid?

Priests do not get paid in the sense that people in the business world are paid. Because a priest does not have a family and because he lives a simple life, he does not need a lot of money. However, diocesan priests receive a salary which enables them to buy their necessities, to buy and maintain a car, to take a vacation, and to do normal recreational activities. Also, priests are provided room and board by the church for which they work, so their expenses are minimal.

Can priests do anything they want for recreation and fun?

A priest can do anything he wants for recreation, as long as it is consistent with the Christian life. Many priests play golf, basketball, softball, and engage in other sports. Others enjoy movies, plays, and reading. Some like to watch professional ice hockey, snorkel, fish, travel and every other imaginable entertainment.

If I am attracted to the priesthood and priestly life, does that mean God is calling me to be a priest?

Possibly, but not necessarily. A man must pray a great deal, listening with both heart and soul to know what God wants him to do. If you feel some attraction at this point, just continue to pray, go to Mass, and live a Christian life. If you are living a Christian life, Jesus will let you know when the time comes. Also, go talk with your parish priest or with the vocation director. Try to come to diocesan-sponsored retreats and discernment nights. The vocation director can help you determine if in fact God is calling you to the priesthood.

I'm not all that "holy". Can I still be a priest if I'm not very holy?

Holiness (to be like Jesus) is a lifetime endeavor for every person in every vocation. Don't worry if you don't see yourself as very holy right now. God will form you slowly, day by day and week by week, so that you will be ready to be His instrument when the time comes. But for now, use the sacrament of Penance regularly. Repent of your sins, receive the sacraments, and pray every day. You will be surprised at how Christ-like you can become!

How does someone become a priest?

After being accepted as a candidate by a diocese, a man who wants to become a priest will go to the seminary. In the seminary, he will receive the preparation, both spiritual and academic for priesthood. If he enters right after graduating high school, he'll work towards an undergraduate degree in philosophy before continuing in a graduate program in theology. Seminary training and discernment ranges from six to nine years depending on one's educational background and pastoral experiences, before a man is ordained a priest. But don't let this discourage you. God always gives us the grace to do what He asks us to do.

Is all this education necessary?

It is very important for a priest both to have a well-balanced education as well as a deep grasp of theology and the spiritual life. Priests must be at least as well educated as the people they serve; otherwise, they will not be respected when they speak of spiritual matters. Every soul is precious to God and, therefore, to the priest. A priest is called to help the most educated as well as the least educated to find and follow Jesus.

What are the qualities that the Church looks for in a candidate for the Priesthood?

A good candidate is a practicing, believing Catholic. He attends Mass at least weekly, prays everyday, obeys the commandments, and tries to serve others. He must be mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy. He must be open to the will of God and willing to learn and grow. Do you have these qualities?

If I decide to go to the seminary to "give it a try" am I committed for life?

No you are not. Most vocation directors agree that the only way to really know that you have a vocation to the priesthood is to go to the seminary and discern. It will become more and more clear to you once you are in an environment where everyone is also discerning the priesthood. There is no obligation to stay in the seminary if you discover that priesthood is not for you. Some people go to the seminary and eventually become priests while others discover different ways of serving the Lord.

Is the daily life of a priest interesting?

There is never a dull moment for those in the priesthood. It is a great challenge but it is also extremely rewarding. When each day comes to a close, a priest can say, "Lord, today I spent myself for You." What a wonderful thought with which to end one's day!

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Catholic
Priesthood:
FAQ