



Teacher's Guide for Supporting and Encouraging Religious Vocations

Teachers are called amidst their already busy schedules to be more than knowledge transmitters. They can pick up on the signs of a vocation in their students. Students send out these signals as they tackle tough academic and life issues. As a teacher, you have been gifted with the opportunity to respond to your students and to touch their lives by example, by listening, and by providing meaningful feedback.

The purpose of this guide is to suggest ways you can encourage vocations to priesthood and religious life without sacrificing the time needed to complete your curriculum.

**“For I know well the plans I have for you,
says the Lord, plans for your welfare not for woe. Plans to give
you a future full of hope.”**

-Jeremiah 29:11



Discernment:

To say yes to God means answering a call, rather than initiating it. The process leading to that answer and later affirmation by the Church is called *discernment*. In some ways, vocational discernment is similar to career planning. Both involve recognizing talents and personality traits suited to work tasks. However, a vocation is more than a career.

As a teacher or school administrator or staff, you can help your students develop openness to the possibility of priesthood, religious or consecrated life. Their discernment process might begin with *you!*

How-To's of Promoting Vocations:

How to promote vocations is as individual as each teacher and student. However, there are some common steps for all teachers.

The **SPARKS** acronym and a list of personal characteristics applicable to ministry may provide a starting point for developing your own action plan.

Spot the signals, using the characteristics listed in this guide.

Pray for the ability to see your students as God sees them. Pray specifically for students who have qualities of potential Church leaders.

Accent discovery. Encourage students to explore opportunities to help others at school, at home, in the Church, or in the community, either individually or through involvement in service projects such as working in a meal program, a pro-life activity, or holding a clothing drive.

11 and 11: Research reported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops identifies three stages of occupational decision making. Young children choose what they might like to be when they grow up based on adult role models or idols. Around age 11, children begin to associate occupational choices with their developing interests, talents, and values. By the 11th grade, young people engage in more realistic explorations of career and life choices.

Teachers, school administrators and staff are often role models to their students. It would be helpful to take some time to reflect upon your own call to holiness and your important mission as a Catholic educator and mentor.

As an educator, be on the lookout for emerging qualities that apply to vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Point out these qualities to students, and encourage your students to consider themselves as potential future leaders in the Church.

Reach out. Even amidst the time constraints of curriculum requirements and your schedule outside the classroom, be open to conversations about vocations. If you notice a student with gifts applicable to ministry, ask if the student has ever thought about religious life. With a student's permission, talk to his or her parents about your observations.

Keep communicating. Develop a list of people who are willing to answer your students questions about the priesthood or religious life. Make vocations a part of "career day" in your school or classroom by inviting one or more vocations speakers (ordained, religious, seminarians, etc.). Have up-to-date vocations resources visible in your classroom and handouts or brochures readily available.

Support the process. Foster a classroom environment in which the call to ministry is respected-where it is okay to consider a religious vocation. Integrate vocations into your other lesson plans. For example, use priests or sisters in math story problems. In language arts, use vocation questions as journal topics.

Qualities for Middle School students...

- Interacting and relating well with others
- Openness and interest in serving others
- Compassion
- Ability to forgive
- Generosity
- Prayerfulness
- Willingness to take a stand for the truth
- Keen interest in Religion class

Additional Qualities for High School students...

- Leadership
- Critical thinking
- Energy and stamina
- Comfort in relationship with Christ and His Church
- Care for others as well as self
- Cooperativeness in teamwork
- Humility, and a healthy sense of humor
- Trustworthiness
- Respect and esteem of classmates

Vocation Definitions

Apostolate: The type of work or mission of the order through which their particular charism is lived out.

Brother: Brothers live in religious communities. They take vows and promise to use their talents to serve God wherever the community decides they are needed. Brothers are not ordained

Charism: Each religious community has a *charism* - a unique way of returning God's love to Him and His people which manifests a particular attribute of God's being.

Consecrated Life: A permanent state of life recognized by the Church, entered freely in response to the call of Christ to perfection, and characterized by the making of public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Deacon (Permanent): A third degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, after bishop and priest. The permanent deacon is ordained for ministry and service, but not to the priesthood. He assists and preaches at Mass, baptizes and presides at weddings and funerals. They have jobs outside the Church to make a living. Men at least 35 years of age, married or single, may be ordained permanent deacons.

Deacon (Transitional): Men who are called to the priesthood who are in the final stage of formation before being ordained as priests. They receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders and usually serve as deacons for one year before ordination to the priesthood. During their year as a deacon they continue their studies and serve in parish assignments.

Discernment: When talking about discovering your vocation, discernment means the process of that discovery through prayer, reflection and discussion as to how God calls each person to love Him, whether as a priest, a consecrated religious man or woman, a married person or a consecrated single person.

Holy Orders: The Sacrament by which the mission entrusted by Christ to His Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church through the laying on of hands. By receiving Holy Orders men become members of the ordained clergy deacons, priests and bishops. All three confer a permanent, sacramental character to the man ordained.

Laity: People within the Church including religious brothers and sisters as well as all other single and married person who are not ordained as bishop, priests or deacons are known as the *laity* or the *lay faithful*.

Novice: A man or woman in the second formal stage of becoming a consecrated religious is called a *novice*. This stage of the *novitiate* usually takes one to two years.

Nun: Nuns are sisters and brides of Christ who are called by Him to pray and serve the needs of the Church in a more hidden way. They live in cloistered communities and do not leave their convents for any outside apostolates.

Priest: A man is ordained to priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Together each man and the Church discern (discover) whether or not he is called to become a priest. Diocesan priests are called to serve the people of a particular diocese. Men called to be priests in religious orders belong to communities and in addition to receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders they also take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (*the three evangelical counsels*)

Religious Community: The founder of a religious community brings together a group of men or women who share the same charism and are dedicated to the same mission in the Church. These are religious communities of priests and brothers and communities of sisters. The apostolates of the communities vary according to their mission. Those dedicated primarily to prayer are *contemplative* communities; those who combine prayer with apostolic

ministries are called *active* communities.

Religious Life: Priests, brothers or sisters in communities that embrace the spirituality, charism and teachings of the community's founder call their way of life *religious life*. Members of these communities follow Jesus through taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Secular Institute: Single lay men and women, and also some priests, belong to secular institutes. They make a commitment to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Members do not necessarily live together as a community. Their goal is to be a transforming presence in society.

Sister: Sisters belong to religious communities and are brides of Christ who are chosen by Him to love Him and serve His Church like His Mother Mary as virgins and spiritual mothers. They serve the Church according to the charisms of their community and their God-given talents and inclinations.

Vocation: Vocation means a call. It is God's invitation -His call- to each person to love and serve Him and His Church in a particular state or way of life.

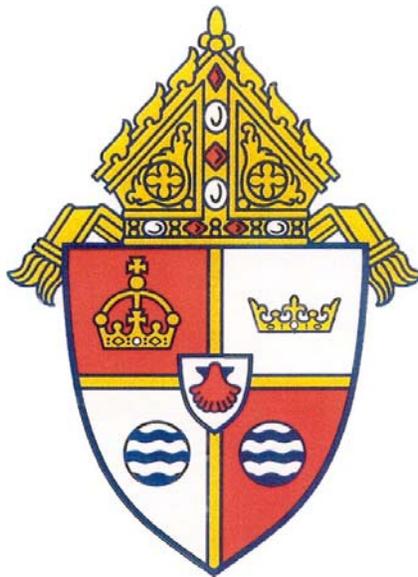
Vows: Formal commitments made to God to follow Jesus in His poverty, chastity and obedience as members of religious communities. The vow of poverty means that members hold all things in common. The community takes care of each other's needs through the providence of God and their charity. The vow of chastity means that the member gives up the goods of marriage and marital relations for the sake of God's kingdom. The vow of obedience allows the member of the community to imitate and share in Jesus' obedience to His Father in order to accomplish His will. (Diocesan priests promise to live in celibate chastity, obedience to their bishop and a simple life).

Prayer for Vocations:

Loving God, you sent your Spirit on the apostles to continue the mission of your Son, Jesus. We pray that you will now send your Spirit on our bishops, priests, deacons, sisters and brothers, filling them with zeal to evangelize your people.

We pray for all that are presently discerning your call, those in vocational formation and those preparing them. We pray that you bless our diocese with more priests and deacons, and religious congregations with new members.

Mary our Mother intercede for us that our pastoral needs be fulfilled through Him who is Lord for ever and ever. Amen.



Vocation Office
Diocese of Brooklyn
341 Highland Boulevard
Brooklyn, NY 11207
(718) 827-2454

www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/vocations