

# Quick Reference Vocation Guide



## Teacher's Guide for Supporting and Encouraging Religious Vocations

*Teachers are called amidst already busy schedules to be more than knowledge transmitters. Students send out signals as they tackle 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 Quick Reference Guide is to suggest ways that you can encourage vocations to priesthood, religious life, and other Church leadership without sacrificing 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**



**DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN**  
The Catholic Church in  
Brooklyn and Queens

# 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. They do not get married and have many different jobs. They are not ordained.

**Charism:** Each religious community has a charism — a purpose or mission, and a spirit defined by the community's founder. For example, a religious order might exist to serve the poor (purpose) in a *spirit* of humility. Some communities have an apostolic charism, meaning an active ministry in the world. Other religious orders are contemplative, focusing mainly on a community life of prayer.

**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*.

**Lay Minister:** Lay ministers may serve in many volunteer or paid capacities, such as parish administrator, youth minister, human concerns committee member, church musician, campus minister, Catholic school teacher, or missionary. They are men and women, married or single.

**Ministry:** Church service and ministry mean the same thing. In the Catholic Church, there are both ordained and lay ministries, or ways of serving God and His people.

**Novice:** A man or woman in the first formal state of joining a religious community is called a *novice*. This state is the *novitiate* and 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.

**Ordained:** Ordination enables a man to act on behalf of the Church through Word, Sacrament, and leadership. A bishop is ordained to present Christ. Priests share in the bishop's role of representing Christ the Shepherd. Deacons collaborate with the bishop in his role as representative of Christ the Servant.

**Priest:** A man ordained to priesthood is called to serve the Church through Word, Sacrament, and leadership. An individual and the Church both *discern* (discover) whether or not a man is called to become a priest. Diocesan priests work mostly in parishes. Religious order priests belong to communities with particular charisms. All priests celebrate Mass and the Sacraments.

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

**Religious Order:** A community with a particular charism, as expressed by its founder, is called a *religious order*. There are religious orders of priests and brothers, and religious orders of sisters. Religious communities may also have lay associates. Some religious orders are dedicated primarily to prayer, while others focus on apostolic (active) ministries.

**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. They take vows and serve God according to the charisms of their communities. Sisters are not married and work in many different jobs, according to the needs of the religious community and/or the needs of the local area. A sister in a cloistered religious community is a *nun*.

**Spouse:** A man or a woman who live in a holy state of life called marriage. They take vows to love and serve God through each other for the whole of their lives. They live and work together in many different places and ways, and their life together is marked by a permanent fidelity and by an openness to children.

**Vocation:** One definition of vocation is God's call to be the holy people we were created and baptized to be. Some people live out their call in priesthood, religious life (sister/brother), family or single life. They may be ordained or lay ministers. The various ministries and ways of life enable people to extend God's self-giving love to one another.

**Vows:** Formal, public promises of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience made by members of religious orders are called vows. The vow of poverty means that members hold all things in common. The community takes care of their needs. The vow of celibate chastity means that a person promises to love all people without getting married or having sexual relations. Obedience means searching for and seeking to accomplish God's will in the context of Scripture, the Church, and the community. (Diocesan priests promise celibate chastity and obedience to their bishop.)

## 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 *discernment*. In some ways, vocation 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, you can help your students develop openness to the possibility of priesthood, religious or consecrated life, or other Church leadership. Their discernment process might begin with you!

## How-To's of Promoting Vocations

Although how you promote vocations is as individual as each teacher and student, 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 in a special way for those students who have qualities of potential Church leaders.

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

**Reach out.** Even amidst the time constraints of curriculum requirements and your schedule outside the classroom, be open to conversation about vocations. If you notice a student with gifts applicable to ministry, ask if the student has ever thought about priesthood or 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 ministry. Make vocations a part of “career day” in your school or classroom by inviting one or more speakers to talk about ministry. Have vocations resources 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.

## Eye-Openers

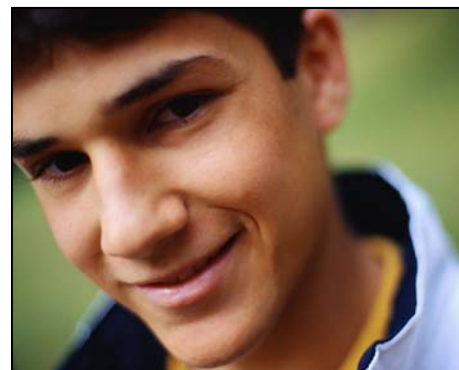
Research reported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has identified three stages of occupational decision-making. Young children choose what they might like to be when they grow up based on adult role models or idols. Around age 11, children begin to associate occupational choices with their developing interests, talents, and values. By the time they become juniors or seniors in high school, young people engage in more realistic exploration of career and life choices.

Teachers are often role models. Reflect upon your own call to holiness and your mission as a Catholic educator.

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

## Nurture Your Own Vocation

God invites each of us to take a lifelong journey. He gives everyone a unique personality and repertoire of talents to use in service to God and each other. To be called and gifted as a teacher makes the journey one of unpredictable experiences alongside young people. The knowledge



### Qualities for middle school students. . .

- ✚ leadership
- ✚ openness to new ideas
- ✚ interest in serving others
- ✚ compassion
- ✚ ability to forgive
- ✚ generosity
- ✚ spirituality
- ✚ willingness to take a stand
- ✚ enjoyment of challenge

### Qualities for high school students. . .

- ✚ liking people and relating well with them
- ✚ critical thinking
- ✚ adaptability to change
- ✚ energy/stamina
- ✚ comfort in relationship with God
- ✚ care for others as well as self
- ✚ cooperativeness in teamwork
- ✚ happiness and sense of humor
- ✚ trustworthiness

that you share with students is only part of the picture.

You do not have to be a priest or sister to give students personal input on vocations. The following questions may help you find comfortable ways to help your students discover and respond to God's will in their lives:

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# Nurture Your Own Vocation

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**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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

- Did God call you to marriage or single life? Everyone is called to a lifestyle in which he or she has the potential for the greatest possible fulfillment.
  - How did you make the connection between your talents and serving God as a teacher? Perhaps you tried other careers first, or maybe you always saw yourself as a natural-born teacher.
  - Who influenced or inspired you along the way? You may have wanted to emulate an influential teacher from your school days.
  - When you decided on a major, were you 100% sure? A person does not have to be positive when picking a major, enrolling in a seminary program to prepare for Church ministry, or beginning the formation program within a religious order.
- Discernment of a religious vocation is a process involving academic, pastoral, and spiritual growth.
- Have there been times of doubt in your teaching career? Think about what leads to doubt and what dissipates it for you.
  - Do you see teaching as your vocation? Did you always see it that way? Your students may not make the connection between their gifts and Church ministry without help.
  - Is the call to serve as a teacher a one-time thing or ongoing? The discovery of a vocation usually comes about gradually and includes times of excitement, doubt, renewal, and exchange of ideas with others.

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## Resources

### Vocation Office, Diocese of Brooklyn.

The Vocation Office is available to arrange speakers, talk one-to-one, and serve as an information source. Contact the Diocesan Vocation Office.

**A Future Full of Hope** (1997). This vocation resource manual includes a video, lesson plans, and catechetical resources for parish leadership, families, elementary through high school students, and young adults. Available from the National Coalition for Church Vocations, telephone: 1-8000-671-NCCV.

**I Can Find My Way** (1991). This teacher-friendly resource contains 70 laminated lesson plan cards for primary, intermediate, and junior high school students; teachers' handbook; and video with three short presentations (one for each age group). Developed by the Ohio Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors. Available from the National Coalition for Church Vocations, telephone: 1-800-671-NCCV.

### Vision: The Annual Religious Vocation Discernment Guide.

In a magazine format, this annual publication contains personal stories, information about religious orders, and other guidance in the process of discerning and accepting God's call to priesthood or religious life. Available from the National Religious Vocation Conference, 5420 South Cornell Ave., #105, Chicago, Illinois 60615, telephone: 1-800-328-6515 or on-line at [www.visionguide.info](http://www.visionguide.info).

### Conversion, Discernment, Mission: Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America

(2003). A reflection and practical action guide for everybody for whom vocations make a difference. Available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

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