

VOCATIONS FAQ's

The Role of Parents

What is the role of parents in encouraging vocations?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Vocations defined the primary role of parents as providing "authentic witness to the importance of faith, prayer, and service to others." The first step is to give children an awareness of the nature of vocation—a calling from God. After that, the role of parents is one of inviting children to ask whether God might be calling them to priesthood or other Church ministry.

What are some things parents can do to live help their children discover God's will in their lives?

Some people are called to marriage and family life. Some are called to be single lay people, helping others by the faith-filled way they approach their work and relationships. Others are called to priesthood or religious life as a sister or brother. All of these are good, holy callings.

Here are some ideas to help your children on their vocational journeys:

- Pray for children in the family to listen to their minds and hearts as they make choices about school electives, college, career, and life-style.
- Use Scripture as a starting point for family discussion around the dinner table. The following passages, for example, are applicable to vocations: Mt. 4:18-22, Lk. 5:11-26, or Jn. 1:35-51 (the call of the first disciples); Eph. 1:3-14 (fulfillment through Christ).
- As a family, select a service project to do each month. This could be volunteering at a church or social service function such as a soup kitchen, visiting a nursing home, or raking leaves for a neighbor. Be creative!
- Look up the date of Baptism of each family member (or contact the parish where family members were baptized), and mark the calendar so they dates can be celebrated. If a Baptism was at a parish other than the one your family now attends, why not look up the parish's web site and see if there's a picture of the church online?
- Take an excursion to the library or do some computer surfing at home to look up the patron saint for each person in the family. Family members can then take turns at dinner telling the others about their saints.
- Invite a priest, sister, or seminarian to your home for dinner. Each one has a unique vocation story to tell.
- As a family, write a letter to your pastor, thanking him for the ways he serves the parish. Do you like the way he stays after Mass to mingle with people? Did the homily at First Communion Mass or his words at a funeral touch your heart personally? When you see his energy, enthusiasm, or dedication, do you feel more energized yourself? If there is something you'd like to know about priesthood or the call to a Church vocation, what not ask it in the letter?

How can parents talk about Church vocations when what they know about from personal experience is married life?

The call to marriage and family life and the call to a Church vocation have similarities. Talk to your children about how you discovered God's purpose in your life. How did you know that you

were called to marriage? What about your career? Do you regard your work as a calling? For example, if you are a teacher or a physician, do you believe that you are doing God's work by serving your students or patients as best you can?

As a parent, if I talk encourage my child to consider a Church vocation and it eventually doesn't work out, wouldn't it have been better to stay out of things in the first place? Shouldn't parents let children make up their own minds?

Pointing out qualities in your children that apply to priesthood or religious life will affirm them. Tell them that you see the generosity that shines forth in situations ranging from helping a younger sibling with homework to sticking up for a classmate on the playground. Commend their leadership qualities and include Church leadership as one of the ways a natural leader can use his or her talents.

With all of the scandal surrounding priesthood, what parent would choose to encourage a child to pursue that kind of life?

As a parent, ask yourself if you are giving your children the opportunity to begin forming their opinions about priesthood based on the totality of what being a priest means. True, some priests have engaged in sexual abuse. The majority of priests, however, serve with dedication and try to model their lives after the example of Jesus.

The Role of Parishes

What is the role of parishes in encouraging vocations?

People experience Church in the parish setting, through worship, belonging to the faith community, and service. A study conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops revealed that multiple-vocation parishes differ operationally from low-vocation parishes. The survey cited four factors with notably positive impact on vocations:

- Youth group and service projects
- Marian and Eucharistic devotions
- Parish elementary school
- More than one assigned priest.

It is important that Catholic schools and religious education programs teach about vocations (priesthood, diaconate, religious life, marriage, and single life) and discernment. The Vocations Office has a *Quick Reference Vocation Guide* available to assist teachers and catechists.

What, specifically, can a parish do to encourage vocations?

Parishes and clusters should have vocations teams—people in contact with the Vocations Office who help the parish foster a “vocations culture” in which young people especially are invited to consider Church vocations among the many career and life choices open to them.

Doesn't a parish establish a vocations team so that the rest of the parish can concentrate on other areas, such as human concerns, religious education, and liturgy?

The mission of a vocations team is to help weave vocations into all aspects of parish life. Parishioners are called to use their gifts and talents to serve God through worship and action. When we talk about people being called, we are talking about vocations. For example, vocations teams encourage various committees to invite young people to serve as members and, in the process, to experience a taste of ministry.

The Role of Vocations Teams

What is the role of vocation teams in encouraging vocations?

Vocation teams and the Vocations Office share a common mission of raising vocation awareness, educating various groups about their specific roles in encouraging vocations, and inviting people to consider whether or not God is calling them to priesthood, religious life, the diaconate, or lay ministry. Vocation teams sponsor events, update “vocation corners” (racks or tables where vocation information is made available), and serve as a first-line resource for people in the parish who have an interest in finding out about vocations. Teams often collaborate directly with the Vocations Office, particularly when the vocations director targets specific districts for “vocation visits.”

What, specifically, can a vocations team do to help a parish become vocations-oriented?

- Establish a “vocations corner” so that parishioners can find relevant literature if they are interested in Church vocations.
- Organize a prayer network for the homebound, provide prayer cards or cassettes with vocations prayers. The vocations team can write prayers and get them photocopied on card stock.
- Celebrate National Vocation Awareness Week each winter. For example, sponsor a vocations essay or poster contest, hold a vocations event or workshop (the Vocations Office can suggest creative formats to generate more interest than a simple panel discussion), support a seminarian through prayer, invitations to homes of parishioners dinner, or tuition help, organize Stations of the Cross for vocations, sign up one family per week to pray for vocations every day during the week, etc.
- Serve as a visible resource for parishioners wondering about vocations.
- Keep in touch with the Vocations Office for ideas!

Vocations Today

What does *vocation* mean?

One definition is God’s call to be the holy people we were created and baptized to be. Some people live out their call to holiness in priesthood, religious life (sister/brother), marriage and family, or life as a single layperson. People may be ordained or lay ministers in the Church, or bring their Christian values into secular careers. The various ministries and ways of life enable people to extend God’s self-giving love to one another.

What has caused the decline in vocations?

Some people say that there is no decline in vocations, because God continues to call people to priesthood, religious life, and other Church ministry. The problem is that people either fail to recognize the call or choose to say “no.”

On a practical level, the decline in the actual number of active priests exists because retirement and death outstrips the number of new ordinations.

Why are people choosing career and life options other than priesthood or religious life?

- A materialistic culture, prospects of high salaries, and business perks exert considerable draw.
- Ordination encompasses a lifetime commitment, whereas opportunities for lay ministry abound—without commitment to a lifetime of obedience and celibacy.
- Whereas priests were once generally regarded with respect and even awe, they now find themselves suspect, particularly in the area of sexual misconduct.
- Decreased family size has changed the “vocations climate.” A child becoming a priest or sister decreases the potential for grandchildren in the family.
- Fewer active priests result in less direct contact between priests and parishioners. For someone who doesn’t know a priest or sister personally, media images can be the basis for forming opinions of priesthood and sisterhood in general.

Why does the Church continue to focus on encouraging vocations to priesthood when lay ministers can do so much of what was formerly done by parish priests?

Priests have a uniquely sacramental role. Ordination enables a person to act on behalf of the Church through Word, Sacrament, and leadership. Priests share in the bishop’s role of representing Christ the Shepherd. 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. Laypeople do not share the unique sacramental character of the ministry of a priest.

While the number of priests has declined steadily since the 1960’s, the number of lay ministers has shown a concomitant increase. That’s why vocations offices nationwide continue to focus on encouraging vocations to priesthood.

Thinking About Priesthood?

What does *discernment* mean?

Anyone who weighs options, gathers information, and processes factors in decision-making by using both intellect (head) and emotion (heart) engages in discernment.. In the context of Church vocations, *discernment* means the process of discovering whether or not God calls a person to priesthood, religious life, or other Church leadership. Discerning a Church vocation is not just a God-and-me process, however; the Church community must affirm that a person is called by God to serve as a priest or other Church leader.

Do I have to be sure that priesthood is for me when I apply to the seminary?

The admission process and formation at Saint Francis Seminary address academic, spiritual, and pastoral development in discerning a call to priesthood. Discernment continues throughout five to six years of seminary life. When you apply to the seminary, you should be ready to devote a year to studies and discernment.

What do the vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience mean today?

Both religious order and diocesan priests make promises of celibate (unmarried) chastity and obedience. A religious order priest also takes a vow of poverty, while a diocesan priest promises to live a simple life-style.

The vow of poverty means that members of a religious community hold all things in common. The community takes care of their needs.

The vow of celibate chastity means that a person promises not to get married or have sexual relations.

Obedience for a religious order priest means searching for and seeking to accomplish God's will in the context of Scripture, the Church, and the religious community. For a diocesan priest, the promise of obedience is to his bishop and the bishop's successors.

What if a man feels unworthy to be a priest?

He will be in good company! Simon Peter told Jesus, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Nevertheless, Jesus chose him. No one is truly "worthy." God's call to priesthood is a gift beyond what anyone can merit.

What is Ordination?

Ordination enables a person to act on behalf of the Church through Word, Sacrament, and leadership. A bishop is ordained to represent 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.

Can I become a priest if I am a recovering alcoholic?

Many dioceses or religious communities will want you to have been in recovery for several years and working on your recovery program.

Does a person have to give up friends and family to become a priest or religious brother/sister?

No. Friends and family provide important support for priests and religious sisters, and brothers. Whether you are a parish priest or a priest in a religious community, the needs of the people you serve take priority. In this sense, you "let go" of family and friends.

What is the difference between a diocesan priest and a priest who belongs to a religious community?

A diocesan priest commits himself to a specific geographical location (a diocese or archdiocese) and promises obedience to the bishop of that (arch)diocese and the bishop's successors. Most diocesan priests minister in parishes. Some diocesan priests also serve as hospital, school, fire department, or military chaplains. They may serve as seminary administrators or faculty, vocation directors, canon lawyers, community organizers, or in other special assignments within their dioceses.

A priest who belongs to a religious community commits himself to charism(s) or mission of the religious community and follows the spiritual practices of the community's founder. Examples of charisms include teaching, preaching, ministering to the poor, or missionary work. A well-known example of a religious community's spirituality is set forth in St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, which are practiced by the Jesuits (Society of Jesus). Members of religious communities take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live in community with other priests and brothers in the religious community.

Diocesan Priesthood

Is there a difference between a parish priest and a diocesan priest?

Most diocesan priests minister as parish priests. Priests who belong to religious community may also serve in parishes. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee about 10% of the diocesan priests are in "special" or non-parish assignments. Parish priests serve the Church through Word, Sacrament,

and leadership. They are ministers of the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, reconciliation, matrimony, and anointing of the sick. They work with the parish staff and volunteers, lead youth groups, help in Confirmation and RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) programs, and participate in religious education. It is their role to guide people to actively live out the call to holiness that comes in baptism.

Do diocesan priests do any kind of ministry besides being parish priests?

Yes. Diocesan priests are canon lawyers serving on the Tribunal, as chaplains in high schools and colleges, and as prison or hospital chaplains. Some are professors or teachers in high schools, colleges, and seminaries. Others are scholars in some field of Church studies, such as Scripture scholars or moral theologians. Diocesan priests may work as licensed counselors and psychologists. Usually, priests in these various ministries have some connection to parish ministry, even if only on weekends.

How much do diocesan priests earn?

In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, diocesan priests' salaries average about \$40,000 yearly. They rent their living quarters and are responsible for their own car and insurance, pension plan payments, and retirement savings. In some dioceses, a diocesan priest receives a monthly stipend which can be \$400 or more. He might also receive room and board, or have a car and car insurance paid for by the parish he serves. All diocesan priests pay taxes.

What does a parish priest do all day when he is not presiding at Mass?

One priest described prayer, morning Mass, visiting classes in the parish school, a funeral, counseling a troubled parishioner, marriage preparation for an engaged couple, project planning, writing an article, homily preparation, an evening committee meeting, more prayer, exercise, returning phone calls and e-mails, and finally some reading and relaxation as a pretty typical day, although things might slow down somewhat in the summer. If you're thinking about diocesan priesthood, flexibility is a must!

How long does it take to become a priest for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee?

Becoming a diocesan priest for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee takes five years if you have a college degree with a major or minor in philosophy and theology. Men accepted for graduate theological studies who need to meet the philosophy and theology prerequisites enroll in a one-year, pre-theology program at Saint Francis Seminary. Seminary studies are on the graduate level. Thus, to become a priest, you will need to complete an undergraduate college degree and a master's degree (Master of Divinity).

Applying to a Seminary

What qualities do seminaries look for in evaluating applicants or potential applicants for the Priestly Formation Program?

He should be a contemporary believer—one who appreciates Church tradition while remaining open to the needs of today's believers. He should be a person of prayer, worship, and ongoing education with the goal of drawing closer to God and helping others to do the same. He should be a leader who inspires teamwork. He should be physically and emotionally healthy.

What kinds of questions will I be asked when I apply to the seminary?

You will be asked about your faith and prayer life, discernment of your call, work experience, social life, ways that you have served others, education, personal/family history, health and lifestyle, financial situation, and your strengths and weaknesses.

What are the basic requirements to enter the seminary or a formation program to become a member (priest, brother, sister) of a religious community?

Each formation program has its own specific requirements, but most require that you be a practicing Catholic, have no commitments to care for other people (older parents, dependent children), be in good physical and mental health, and demonstrate the ability to get along well with people. Usually you need to show that you have been responsible in your work and/or academic life and that you have been involved in service to others. You cannot be involved in a lifetime commitment to another person.

Can I still apply to a seminary even if I have college student loans to pay off?

If you have student loans that do not come due until after you finish your education, and are thinking of going right from college into the seminary, you can be assured that as a diocesan priest in most dioceses, including the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, your salary will be such that you can pay off reasonable debts within five to ten years after ordination. Religious communities will ask about debts as part of the application process, too, because members of religious communities hold all things in common. It would not be fair to expect a religious community to assume the debts of new members.

What are the academic requirements to enter and graduate from the seminary?

In order to begin seminary studies at the graduate level (also called the theology level), you must have a bachelor's degree with at least 24 semester units of philosophy and 12 units of undergraduate Catholic theology. Someone preparing for priesthood will earn a Master of Divinity degree.

Many seminaries, including Saint Francis Seminary, offer a special pre-theology program, making it possible for candidates with a bachelor's degree in any field to begin seminary studies, even though they have not met the undergraduate philosophy and theology prerequisites. They earn the philosophy and undergraduate theology credits in the pre-theology program.

If English is your second language, a T.O.E.F.L (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score of 550 is often required. That score means you are proficient enough to study at the graduate level in English.

If you live in the Milwaukee area, do not have your college degree yet, and are thinking about entering the seminary after college graduation, you have several options. While attending any Milwaukee-area college or university, you can begin seminary formation through the Explore, Seminary Without Walls, or SS. Peter & Paul Residency programs. A high school diploma or its equivalent is required. Contact the Vocations Office at { [HYPERLINK mailto:vocations@sfs.edu](mailto:vocations@sfs.edu) } for more information.

How do I choose a seminary to attend?

Contact your local diocesan vocation director for assistance. The vocation director for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee is Father Bob Stiefvater, { [HYPERLINK mailto:vocations@sfs.edu](mailto:vocations@sfs.edu) }. Students preparing for diocesan priesthood for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee attend Saint Francis Seminary. Those in a religious community's formation program will discuss seminaries with a vocation director from the religious community.

Religious Life

What is a religious sister?

Sisters belong to religious communities. They take vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience, and serve God according to the charisms of their communities. (A charism is a mission or purpose.) 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*.

What is a religious brother?

Brothers live in religious communities. They take vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience, as do religious order priests. Religious brothers promise to use their talents to serve God wherever the community decides they are needed. Brothers do not get married and have many different jobs. They are not ordained.

What is a religious community?

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

What is the difference between an active or apostolic community and a contemplative religious community?

Both active and contemplative religious priests, brothers, and sisters participate in daily prayer. The focus of contemplative religious communities is prayer for the needs of the Church and the world. In contrast, active religious communities focus on service to others through ministries such as teaching, preaching, outreach to the poor, the homeless, or the sick. Some contemplative communities are cloistered, meaning that members have limited opportunity to leave the monastery or convent.

What is 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.

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.

How do I know which religious community will be right for me?

Every religious community has its own mission and spirituality. Because each one also has a unique formation (preparation) program, you should talk with the vocation director of any community you are considering.

Once you have gathered preliminary information about one or more religious communities whose goals appeal to you, the next step is usually to arrange a visit. You will want to find a religious community in which you will feel accepted and, at the same time, challenged to grow both personally and spiritually.

How long does it take to become a religious priest, brother, or sister?

For those thinking of becoming a religious brother or sister, or a priest in a religious community, there are temporary commitments along the way. Most applicants are in college or already established in a profession.

To become religious priest, sister, or brother takes five to ten years of formation, depending on the religious community. Often you live in a religious community as a “candidate,” “postulant,” or “aspirant” for a year or two, then enter novitiate for another year or two, depending on the religious community. At the end of your novitiate you usually make temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for three to six years. You may begin working in your professional field as a brother or sister at that time. At the end of the formation period, you may profess perpetual vows and become a full member of the community.

What are the basic requirements to enter the seminary or a formation program to become a member (priest, brother, sister) of a religious community?

Each formation program has its own specific requirements, but most require that you be a practicing Catholic, have no commitments to care for other people (older parents, dependent children), be in good physical and mental health, and demonstrate the ability to get along well with people. Usually you need to show that you have been responsible in your work and/or academic life and that you have been involved in service to others. You cannot be involved in a lifetime commitment to another person.

What do the vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience mean today?

Both religious order and diocesan priests make promises of celibate (unmarried) chastity and obedience. A religious order priest also takes a vow of poverty, while a diocesan priest promises to live a simple life-style.

The vow of poverty means that members of a religious community hold all things in common. The community takes care of their needs.

The vow of celibate chastity means that a person promises not to get married or have sexual relations.

Obedience for a religious order priest means searching for and seeking to accomplish God’s will in the context of Scripture, the Church, and the religious community. For a diocesan priest, the promise of obedience is to his bishop and the bishop’s successors.

When a member of a religious order takes vows of celibate chastity, poverty, and obedience, are these vows binding forever?

A vow is a formal promise made to God. In a religious order, the vows are public, accepted in the name of the Church. Members of secular institutes make either private vows or profess the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Both public and private vows are binding on the person making the vow unless the obligation is suspended by a person having power over the matter (such as the pope, a bishop, or a religious superior).

Do priests who belong to religious communities get paid?

Religious order priests may work in paid employment. For example, they may teach or work as hospital chaplains. They turn in their salaries to the community and follow the communities’ directives regarding the vow of poverty. A great strength of having many members contributing to the community is that the community can then send some of its members to work in areas and ministries without pay, to bring God’s care to those who otherwise couldn’t receive it.

What is the difference between a religious brother and a priest in a religious community?

A priest is ordained and, thus, can administer the sacraments. A brother is not ordained. Both priests and brothers in religious communities take vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. They live in community. Although a brother is not ordained, he does have a ministry. A brother engages in dialog with his community to determine where his talents are needed to serve God through meeting the needs of the religious community and/or the local area.

Is there still such a thing as a cloister?

Yes. Members of a cloistered religious community live within a monastery. Their ministry is contemplative (focussed on prayer and reflection), and they live by the rule of their founder (such as the Rule of St. Benedict). Their prayers for humanity serve the Church. They observe rules of silence, broken if necessary, but there are certain times during the day when conversation is freely allowed. Monks (cloistered priests and brothers) and nuns (cloistered sisters or sisters in non-cloistered, contemplative communities) do work within the monastery to help support and meet the needs of the community. This work could include farming, housework, cooking, and administration, for example. Many cloistered religious communities run cottage businesses to earn money for the community's needs that cannot be met internally. In a cloistered community, there is very little contact with people outside of the cloister. Generally, members of a cloistered religious community take a vow of stability, in which the member commits to living at a particular monastery for the rest of his or her life.

What's the difference between a monk and a friar?

A monk is a priest or brother in a cloistered religious community, in which there is strictly limited contact with people in the outside world. A friar lives in a monastery that is open to visitors from the outside world, at least during the day.

Why do some priests and brothers in religious communities dress in clerical habits while others don't?

One of the primary reasons for wearing a habit is that it is instantly recognized as a symbol of their faith and commitment. Another frequent reason for religious garb is that it is simple in style and, therefore, a way to live out the vow of poverty. A sister, brother, or priest who wears a habit may own just two or three changes of dress. Some communities also regard the habit as a sign of penitence for them.

Religious communities which have opted to wear street clothes may believe that religious dress creates an undesirable barrier between them and laity with whom they work. The original reason for the habit may have been to match the dress of the common people; wearing contemporary street clothes continues that tradition.

What is a charism?

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

Consecrated Life

What is consecrated life?

Priesthood, belonging to a secular institute or a religious community are the primary forms of consecrated life. Hermits who publicly profess or take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience before their diocesan bishop and "consecrated virgins" are also included in consecrated life. (A

diocesan bishop may consecrate a woman deemed suitable. She promises perpetual virginity in order to give herself to God and the Church. She attends daily Mass, prays the Divine Office, and spends significant time in private prayer.)

What's the difference between a religious community and a secular institute?

Single lay men and women, and also some priests, belong to secular institute. 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, which is where the term *secular* arises. Secular institutes are a relatively new phenomenon, canonically recognized in 1947. Even today, these institutes are still fledgling in the United States. The United States Conference of Secular Institutes reports only 27 Church-approved institutes in this country. Married people can become associate members of secular institutes.

A religious community is a more public vocation than membership in a secular institute. Whereas consecrated secular lay members generally take care of their own financial needs, members of religious communities hold all things in common. For example, in religious community, members give their earnings to the community, which, in turn, provides for their needs.

Celibacy and Sexuality

Is celibacy avoiding sex and not getting married?

Celibacy is a way of loving outside of the context of marriage and sexual intercourse. In order to live happily as a celibate person, you will need an awareness of your social or relational side. In other words, you should be able to tell your thoughts and feelings to another person. This means more than talking openly to a mentor, spiritual director, or counselor. You will also need to form trusting relationships with peers. This type of intimacy allows a priest to experience the give and take of relationships, instead of being only on the giving side as he reaches out to others in ministry.

A celibate person abstains from sex, but not from meaningful relationships. He or she must be able to form mutual friendships. This opens up the possibility of falling in love. If that happens, the priest will need to be able to set appropriate boundaries so that he is not controlled by his emotions.

Celibate people need to be able to have their emotional needs met. If they are lonely, they should know how to make a call and initiate a conversation or visit. A priest must also have the ability to enjoy time alone.

A final, very important skill needed to live celibately is a prayer life that includes regular and open conversation with the Lord. Celibacy has difficult moments amidst the overall joy of relationships with God and others.

Can I become a priest if I have some sexual experience?

Through God's grace, a person can decide to live in chastity (abstaining from sexual relations) and celibacy (being unmarried). Most dioceses and religious communities will require two years of celibate chastity before accepting you into formation because present behavior is a good predictor of future action.

Can a person who was married become a priest?

Someone who was married could become a priest if the spouse has died or the marriage was annulled by the Church.

What happens if a man falls in love after becoming a priest?

A priest takes a vow of celibate chastity, which means that he promises not to get married and not to have sexual intercourse. Notice that the vows do not require never falling in love. The vows, however, require that the priest channel his emotions in appropriate ways—that he maintain boundaries in friendships with both men and women. When a couple gets married, the man and woman promise fidelity to each other in their marriage vows. Does that mean they will never have to struggle to be faithful in their relationship? Prayer, a network of supportive friends and family, and a balanced life-style all play a part in giving a person strength to keep vows.

If a person admits that he is bi-sexual or homosexual, will he be rejected when he applies to a seminary or religious order?

The issue for seminaries and religious orders is self-acceptance of one's sexual orientation, and the ability to relate to others in healthy ways. Seminaries and religious orders look for men who will be able to live a celibate life-style as a gift from God. The gift of celibacy allows a priest to dedicate himself to people in ways that are different from an exclusive relationship in marriage.

Commitment and Service

I'm a teenager and wonder if I have a Church vocation. What should I do?

Prayer and service will help you discover whether or not God is calling you to priesthood, religious life, marriage, or single life as a layperson. (Those are all vocations.) Prayer and service are also the key ingredients in a life of ministry.

Prayer: Participate in Mass each week AND have some daily conversation with the Lord. Your Bible or a devotional book with daily Scripture passages and reflection questions can be helpful. Prayer will develop your friendship with the Lord and enable you to listen to his call.

Service: Give ministry a try through service to an elderly neighbor or visiting a lonely resident in a nursing home, by joining in a housing rehabilitation project, joining the service club at school, or volunteering at a summer camp for handicapped children, or helping at a soup kitchen. Look around to see where your talents can help meet others' needs.

Most dioceses and religious communities have a vocation director. The Vocations Office for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, { [HYPERLINK mailto:vocations@sfs.edu](mailto:vocations@sfs.edu) }, can put you in touch with one or more vocation directors to help you in the process of discovering what God calls you to do.

What if I'm afraid to make a permanent commitment?

Seminary programs and initial formation in a religious community give you the time and space to discover if priesthood or religious life is for you. There are steps along the way before you are ever asked to make a permanent commitment. It will be important to stay in conversation with God as you explore the possibility of priesthood or life as a religious sister or brother, because the call to a Church vocation is a gift from God.

What if I have a personal belief that goes against the institutional Church?

St. Martin de Porres, the mixed-race Peruvian ex-slave who doctored and fed the poor of Lima, was undoubtedly uncomfortable with the institutional Church's position on slavery. There are great saints who challenged the institutional Church during their lifetimes, and great contemporary Catholics who do the same. This prophetic element is an important dimension of our Catholic tradition.

The Diaconate

What is a deacon?

Deacons are ordained ministers of the Church who collaborate with the bishop in his role as representative of Christ the Servant.

Do deacons have a sacramental role?

Deacons preach and assist at liturgical celebrations (but cannot consecrate the Eucharist), baptize, witness marriages, preside at funerals and burials, distribute the Eucharist and bring viaticum to the dying, and minister in other ways. Deacons do not hear confessions or anoint the sick as part of their ministry. Justice issues and advocacy for the poor are primary in a deacon's ministry.

What's the difference between a transitional deacon and a permanent deacon?

Transitional deacons are studying for the priesthood. Permanent deacons may be married and have another occupation. A deacon must be at least 35 years of age at the time of ordination. He may be married or single. A deacon's wife also participates actively in diaconal ministry.

Lay Ministry

What is a "third order" or "secular order"?

The terms *third order* and *secular order* are interchangeable and refer to lay members of religious communities. Members of third orders may be "regulars," who live in convents or monasteries, and "seculars," who live out in the world.

Is there a term for people who are not ordained and who do not belong to a religious community?

People within the Church include those who are ordained (priests, deacons), members of religious communities, and laypeople.. This third group encompasses people in all walks of life, serving God in the context of families and careers, volunteerism and faith.

What's a lay minister?

A lay minister serves the Church in a volunteer or paid capacity in such capacities (ministries) as parish administrator, parish consultant, youth minister, youth minister, human concerns committee member, church musician, campus minister, Catholic school teacher, or missionary. Lay ministers are men and women, married or single.