

# Sketches in Discernment

## The Call to Holiness and Priesthood

Workshop NCDVD 2011  
Preaching and Teaching Images for Vocations  
Rev. Joseph W. Hirsch

### Introduction

We invite you to walk with us through these *Sketches in Discernment*. These are images, analogies, and outlines which we have used in our Diocese of La Crosse for a number of years to help guide young people to come to a deeper awareness of God's call in their lives and to help inspire them to seek and to follow that call. We have also included many videos to help communicate the message of the stories.

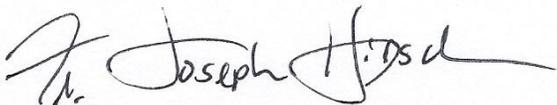
Part I focuses on the universal call to holiness. While the focus in this website is going to be for priesthood, the application is much wider and these examples can be used in the classrooms in our Catholic schools, religious education classes, retreats, as well as to help those young people who visit this website help in their discernment. In a special way we would like to offer to teachers and those in charge of speaking about vocations ideas of how to invite young people to consider God's call and mission for them.

Part II will focus more specifically on the call to and the importance of priesthood. Again the application can be extended to a wider audience, and it is important for other young men to hear the stories, because as we know, there are many who still don't know that the Lord is calling them. Our prayer is that by hearing and listening to the stories and ideas expressed, there can awaken in them graces which the Lord wants to offer them as they open up their hearts to discernment.

We have invited other vocation directors to give ideas for this project and their contributions have been included. This is a work in process, and so we invite you to share with us your ideas, analogies, and stories, so that we can continue to share these and many more stories with others.

Thank you for taking the time to read and listen.

In Christ,



Rev. Joseph W. Hirsch  
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To see online version please go to:  
[Godscall.org](http://Godscall.org) and click on *Vocation Themes and Ideas for Catechists*.

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# Part I

## First Vocation: The Universal Call to Holiness

1. **The Watch and the Designer:** Many of our young people especially in Middle and High School struggle with a belief in God and so many have questions. This is a very simple example based on design, but helps the young person to see the need for a Creator even when we cannot see who He is.

Suppose you and I are walking down the beach and find an expensive watch. You ask, “How did this get here?” I answer that it probably came from lightning striking an aluminum soda can and bonded with some silicone from the sand and here we have it. You would answer that this is silly. I counter that things happen by chance. You answer, “Simple things happen by chance, complicated things have a designer.” I show you the watch and ask you to show me the designer. No one can see the designer, therefore there isn’t one. You come back with, “I don’t have to see a designer. All I have to see is the complicated design and I deduct there must be a designer.” All of us would agree that the watch has a designer. The saying the young people memorize is: “The more complicated the design, the more necessary a designer.” I put the watch up to the young person’s head and ask, “Which is more complicated, this watch or your brain?” Answer: the brain. Therefore, if the watch has to have a designer, and the brain is more complicated than the watch, then doesn’t it stand to reason that there must be a designer who made your brain? As the young person realizes this truth, there is a natural desire to come to know more about who the one is we call the designer.

This example can be used for grade schoolers. For high school and college go to [www.magisreasonfaith.org](http://www.magisreasonfaith.org) for a more sophisticated discussion. One of the many books which deals with the problem of atheism today and a Christian response is *Dismantling the Dawkins Delusion* by Scott Hahn and Ben Wiker.

For Discernment: There are so many young people who struggle with belief in God, and who cannot begin the road to discernment unless the obstacles to belief are removed. When we walk with them through these questions and share with them the foundation for why we believe in God as the source of all creation, then the young people can take the next step to respond in wonder and gratitude. This leads them to ask deeper questions and to seek to know the Creator and to respond to Him. Thus, begins the journey of discernment.

### Scripture:

Genesis 1:26 Man and woman are created in the image of God.

Psalms 139: “Truly you formed my inmost being...”

2. **Get in Touch with the Source:** St. John Bosco used tricks and acrobatics to bring young people to Christ. Learn a trick either with string, rope, cards or whatever, and then when you do that trick with young people, they are engaged by the mystery of what they just saw. Inevitably they ask to know the secret. (You might show them a trick later in the retreat, but not yet. For now they need to wrestle with the mystery of not knowing.)

Take this opportunity to teach the lesson behind the magic trick. For example, you can say, “If you want to learn the trick, you need to get in touch with the source, which in this case is me. Don’t ask your friend, because he or she simply doesn’t know and can only guess, but think about this, what is harder, this trick or life?” They will answer that life is harder. “Right, you can learn this trick in an hour or a couple of days, but life will take you a lifetime.”

Therefore, if you want to discover who you are and what God's call for you for you might be, this can only be done if you get in touch with the Source who is God. That is why we pray, learn about our faith, make retreats. This is why Catholic schools are so important."

For Discernment: In a world where young people often don't reflect on mystery, a simple trick engages their thinking and imagination to want to understand the unknown. As we help direct their search to the God who is the Source, we help them to seek to discover the mysterious designs and Call that God has for us.

Scripture: Psalm 94.8-10: "Shall he who shaped the ear not hear?..."

[Video Sketch: Get in Touch with the Source](#)

3. **Give Thanks for Your Billion Dollar Life:** If you found out that someone gave you one billion dollars, what would you do? Just go on with your life? Or try to find the person and thank that person for this overwhelming gift? When I ask this question to young people they all say that they would definitely want to find the person who gave them this gift and not just thank them, but to really get to know the person. What is your life worth? Would you trade it for one billion dollars? Of course not. Without your life, money is worthless. Ever think that your life is worth more than one billion dollars? What will you do with your billion dollar life? Who gave it to you? Do you think it would be important to get to know that person? Can you just live your life as if this gift belongs only to you? Do you have a responsibility to live your life, which is a total gift, for the giver and for others?

For Discernment: When we realize we did not create ourselves and that our life is a total gift from God, then the natural response is to want to know, love, and serve this great and loving Giver. Every saint, every holy person who gives their life away in service to God and to others is aware of this gift and that we are not masters of our life but only stewards.

Scripture:

I Cor. 6.19-20: "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within—the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price! So glorify God in your body."

4. **What Are the Questions You Ask?** Listen to the questions people ask. Leaders ask different questions than followers. Saints ask different questions than those who are caught up in lives of selfishness. The questions you ask determine the direction of your life.

When in a classroom or giving a homily on the questions to ask, I will either use the question card found in [Appendix 1](#) or will reduce the best questions to five as I use hand gestures to describe them: "Where do I come from? Where am I going? How will I get there? Whom will I serve? How much of me will I give?"

For Discernment: Every person who discerns a vocation to any depth must ask the deeper questions. Ask superficial questions, they will take you through many detours and include many delays. Some never find their way. Ask the right questions and you will find out who you are in relation to the God who made you and the purpose and mission He has for you. What are the questions which determine the direction of your life?

Scripture: Matt. 7.7-11: "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you."

### [Video Sketch: Which Questions Direct Your Life?](#)

5. **The Chalice and the Pepsi Can:** I walk into a classroom with a Pepsi can and a Chalice. I pretend to be ready to pour Pepsi into the Chalice. I stop short of doing it and ask the students if this would be good or bad? They answer it would be bad and disrespectful, because the Chalice is sacred and the Pepsi is only ordinary. I teach them the saying, “Treat ordinary things in an ordinary way. Treat sacred things in a sacred way.” Then I ask them, “Which is more sacred, the chalice or you?” Seventh grade and under usually answer that the Chalice is more sacred, because it is blessed. I ask if they are blessed. They answer that they were blessed at Baptism. I tell them that the Chalice with its blessing cannot attain Heaven. “Can you?” They answer that with their blessing of Baptism, their destiny is Heaven. Then I ask them again which blessing they would rather have. They say Baptism. “Which is more sacred, you or the Chalice?” They will answer back, “But the Chalice holds the Blood of Christ.” I answer, “And what do you hold when you receive Holy Communion?—You hold the Body and Blood of Christ... Which is more holy?” They answer now that they are holier than the Chalice. See [Appendix 2](#) for other topics to cover.

For Discernment: The main point is that if we are going to discern our vocation in Christ, we must have the starting point that we are sacred. We are called as sons and daughters of a loving Father. Only when I see myself as sacred can I truly begin to discern my Call and Mission.

#### Scripture:

I Cor. 6.19-20: “You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within—the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price! So glorify God in your body.”

Col 3.10: “Put on a new man, one who grows in the knowledge as he is formed anew in the image of his Creator.”

### [Video Sketch: The Chalice and the Pepsi Can](#)

6. **The Ticket to Heaven:** There is a paper trick which we use in the classroom and on retreats. There is a good person and a bad person and they both arrive at the Gate of Heaven. St. Peter is collecting the tickets. The bad person, realizing that people with no tickets go through the door on the left (Hell), lies to the good person and tells him that he really does have a ticket but lost it while praying on the edge of the cloud—thus it dropped over the edge and was lost. He, the bad person tricks the good person to share some of his ticket and he ends up ripping off two pieces. The bad person then sneaks to the head of the line and tries to get into Heaven. St. Peter tells him that his ticket looks troublesome and the bad person says, “Look St. Peter—this is my ticket. I earned it and I deserve it.” St. Peter tells him that Jesus desires the salvation of all people, but we have to cooperate with God’s grace. Therefore, according to our cooperation with the Lord or lack thereof, we write our own ticket. St. Peter opens the ticket, and it spells the word HELL. St. Peter reminds him that Jesus is sad, because He had a place for the bad person, but it is we who choose our destiny by the kind of life we choose to lead. The good person comes later in line and with tears hands in his broken ticket. St. Peter has him say the same, “This is my ticket. I earned it and I deserve it.” St. Peter tells him that if he was trying to follow Jesus, the Lord would read his heart. St. Peter opens the ticket and it is a Cross. The good person enters Heaven.

For Discernment: The lesson is that we have only one ticket—only one life. Don’t waste your life thinking that you can live a wayward life now and “someday” turn around. Don’t gamble with the one life you have. The way we cooperate or not with God’s grace, will lead us to our destiny. You only have one life—How will you choose to give yours?

#### Scripture:

Galatians 5.16-26: Live in accord with the Spirit in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 7.12-23: “None of those who cry out ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven.”

[Video Sketch: The Ticket to Heaven.](#) At the end of the video there are directions on how to fold the paper.

7. **Seeing the Big Picture:** One of the Vocation Directors suggested this example to give the students an idea of how short our life actually is in comparison to the whole of life and eternity.

Take a long rope and get two volunteers to stretch it end to end in the classroom. The one end of the rope where the first person holds the rope marks the point in time that you were conceived in your mother’s womb. The other person is on the other end of the room holding on to his or her end of the rope. Where the second person holds the rope signifies your life in Heaven 100 million years from now. Ask for a volunteer to show you where on this rope would be your death and thus the end of your time on Earth? As you guide the discussion it will be shown that the first person holding the beginning of the rope and the volunteer signifying the end of your time on earth will be so close together that their fingers will be touching each other. There is no perceptible difference on the rope between the moment you were born and the moment of your death compared to 100 million years into eternity.

For Discernment: We have only one life, and then there is eternity. How big is the Big Picture in your life? Are you living only for what is going on now in your life or do you live with this Big Picture of eternity in mind? The Gift of the Holy Spirit of Wisdom in Confirmation is the gift of grace which helps us remember the ultimate goal and purpose of life, so we don’t get bogged down in the middle chapters of the Book of Life. All of life is understood in relationship to its ultimate purpose which is union with God and with one another in Heaven. When we come to know our relationship to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then we realize our identity as sons and daughters, and our mission will be to live in this relationship and to lead others to God as well.

Scripture:

I Peter 1.3-9: You may have to suffer for a time, but through hope you will achieve the goal of faith which is your salvation.

Philippians 3.14: “My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me—life on high in Christ Jesus.”

8. **Stone-cutter or Cathedral Builder?** How do you see life? Is it just a boring routine or do you see the divine purpose? To discern our vocation, we need to move beyond the routine to discover the divine. The saints are not sad, boring people. They have a passion and enthusiasm for life and can see the Divine in all they do. See the story in [Appendix 3.](#)

For Discernment: If you are going to discern a vocation in Christ, then there needs to be a presence of joy, gratitude, hope, and so many other qualities that give your life passion, purpose, and meaning. Who are the holiest people in your life? How do you see the Cathedral builder in each of them?

Scripture: Ephesians 2:19-22: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”

9. **Can You See the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dimension?** In my office I have a large framed picture of a crucifix in a magic-eye 3-D format, (Books with this kind of art are available in your bookstore). Most people

can only see the dots and squares and various colors. Only with some practice can you see the actual image of Jesus on the Cross. Many who look into the picture see nothing. Those who see Jesus on the cross actually see Him. Who is right? Both of them. Those who don't see, don't see. Those who see, do see. The mistake is made when those who don't see, say that because they don't see anything, therefore nothing is there.

Mother Teresa was able to see the image of Jesus crucified as she lived among the poorest of the poor. She spent her life serving the crucified Christ living in the slums of Calcutta and wherever her sisters serve. In her convents beside the tabernacle and crucifix are found the words, "I Thirst." When asked about the meaning of the phrase for them, the sisters say that they come to Jesus in the Eucharist so that He might fill them with His grace and strength, so that they in turn are able to enter into the places of greatest poverty in order to bring Christ and to serve Christ in the distressing disguise of suffering poor.

Mother Teresa often said, "We are not social workers. We are called to serve Christ in those we serve."

For Discernment: Do we see Jesus Christ in the poor and in those we are called to serve? This deeper awareness of God's presence in our lives brings us to want to give our lives away. If we are going to discern God's call and mission for our life, we need to look deeply into the picture of life and see beyond the suffering and pain, so that we might see the Creator and the One who calls us to a life of love and service.

Scripture: Matthew 25.35-40 "For I was hungry and you gave me food..."

10. **How Old Are You Spiritually?** Our bodies grow according to the chronological years of our life, but not necessarily so with our spiritual life. When you are 15 you will have 15 year-old spiritual problems and will need to have 15 year-old spiritual solutions. If you quit praying and learning about your faith, you will find yourself 18 years old and will have 18 year-old spiritual problems but will only have 15 year-old spiritual solutions. By the time you are 30, your 15 year-old spiritual solutions will no longer be able to give you a foundation to be able to face your life spiritually. It is at this point that many either remain mediocre in their spiritual lives or they leave the Church blaming it on other things but missing a big part of the real cause which is their spiritual immaturity. How old are you spiritually?

For Discernment: If a person is to discern a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, then one of the foundations necessary for this to take place is to have a spiritual maturity which corresponds to their chronological age. If you seek to grow in discernment, take the time to learn your Catholic faith. We cannot love the God we do not know. As we learn about God's plan of salvation, we come to fall in love with Him.

Scripture: I Cor. 13.11: "When I was a child I used to talk like a child..."

11. **Love the Giver More than the Gift:** If a man gives a ring to his beloved and asks her to marry him, and she then takes the ring and walks away rejecting the man's love, you would say she loves the ring more than the man. She loves the giver more than the gift. In our spiritual lives we are called to recognize the Lord as the Giver of all that we are and to love Him more than all other relationships or things in our life. All things are to be seen in relationship to God as the Giver.

Story Example: Once while teaching high school I used this example about loving God first. We talked about loving God more than parents. That was easy. Then I said that if we are to take this seriously, then we have to love God more than our girlfriend or boyfriend. One of the girls blurted out that it is impossible to expect this. I answered, "I understand that you are a sophomore and I don't expect you do everything a senior who is about to graduate is able to do, but that is the road

you are on. You need to be working toward that goal and you won't graduate until you do. Similarly, I understand that to love God above all people and things is no easy task and that you might not be able to do this at this point in your life, but this is the road we are on as disciples. You cannot enter Heaven unless you love God the Giver above all gifts—more than yourself, all people and all possessions.”

For Discernment: Only with this perspective of loving God first will someone truly know themselves and then be willing to give up their life completely for God and in service to others in this life, whether it be as married, dedicated single life, priesthood or consecrated religious. One can only discern a vocation to the degree that he or she is willing to commit fully to loving God more than all things and all relationships and especially one's own self.

Quote: “Perhaps it is not after all so difficult for a man to part with his possessions, but it is certainly most difficult for him to part with himself. To renounce what one has is a minor thing; but to renounce what one is, that is asking a lot.” (Pope St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospel.*)

Scripture: Luke 10.27: “Love God with all your heart...”

12. **Who Is Your Guide?** If someone came to you and said he was going to climb Mount Everest without a guide, you would think him crazy and in a month would find him dead. Why is it that we can easily see how illogical it is to climb the highest mountain without a guide, but not see the irrationality of trying to get to Heaven without a guide? Heaven is infinitely beyond the Sun and yet there are times that each of us will be tempted to say, “I will find my own way to Heaven.” We call this sin. Jesus knew well that it is impossible for us to attain Heaven without Him when He said “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Jesus referred to Himself as the Bridegroom and the Church as His bride. In Baptism we are given the Church as our mother and guide.

For Discernment: What is your relationship to Christ in the Church? If you stay close to the bride, you will be close to the Bridegroom. How is the Lord calling you to grow deeper in this relationship to the Church? It is within the Church and the Sacraments that we encounter not only the Lord, but also our Vocation and Mission.

Scripture:

John 14.6: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through me.”  
I Tim 3.15: “God's household, the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth.”

Quote: “You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your mother... God is one and Christ is one, and his Church is one; one is the faith, and one is the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body...” (St. Cyprian, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*)

13. **Who Are You Practicing to Become? Practicing Virtue Leads to Virtue:** One way to make this point is to take a guitar and play it the regular way. Then reverse the guitar and try to play the same song. You cannot. Why? Because you haven't practiced. If you live your life in a selfish manner, don't be surprised when you finally reach a point in which you want to be stronger and better and a good leader, and you cannot, because you haven't practiced. If you want to become a basketball player you have to practice. If you want to be a surgeon, you must study medicine. If you want to be a saint, you must practice holiness through a relationship with Jesus Christ and in the Church.

For Discernment: If you want to find your Vocation and Call, you need to practice seeking God's will in the smaller choices of life. As you develop habits of living for the Lord—virtues, you will

come to a threshold in which the Lord will ask not just for virtuous choices and habits, but for your entire life. If you can't give the Lord a part of your life, how will you ever give Him all of it?

Scripture: Ephesians 4.17-24: "...Lay aside your former way of life...and acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking..."

Quote: "Sow a thought, reap a desire. Sow a desire, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny."

Video Sketch: [Practicing Virtue](#)

14. **Who Are you Practicing to Become? The Eagle and the Wolf:** Another way to make this point is to use the image of the eagle and the wolf. "There is a great battle going on in my soul between the eagle and the wolf. Inside I want to be like the eagle and soar the heights of virtue and goodness. At the same time there is a ravenous wolf within me who wants to have his way, to devour or destroy any one in its way. Who will win the battle between the eagle and the wolf...? Answer: THE ONE I FEED! If I feed the wolf, I will become a wolf. If I feed the eagle, I will become an eagle. Virtue will never be easy; it will always involve challenge and sacrifice.

Story Example: Suppose a guy chooses to be a wolf, because he is only young once. He will slowly become a wolf. As a wolf he may find someday the woman who would make a wonderful wife. She is an eagle. He will ask her out to date, but she will soon see that he is a wolf and will distance herself from him. It is at this point that he will pay the ultimate price for his "fun." If you play with being a wolf, you may lose the best blessings in life, because you are not ready for them.

For Discernment: If you seek to discover God's Call and Vocation for your life, this will require practice and commitment. What are you doing to feed the eagle in your life? As you become stronger in the Lord through a life of virtue, He will call you to the next stage.

Scripture:

Romans 1: "They claimed to be wise but turned into fools instead."

Romans 7.13-25: St. Paul speaks of the battle going on inside his own self between the flesh and the spirit.

Quote: "Saints don't happen by chance, they happen by choice."

15. **Who Are You Practicing to Become? J.V. vs. Varsity:** If you train at the J.V. level, you will only be able to play at the J.V. level. If you want to play at the Varsity level, then you have to train at the Varsity level. I played J.V. basketball, and we lost every game. So I took up other sports and hobbies. Now when I play basketball, I can never get beyond a J.V. level or worse. Life doesn't give us options. Life will sooner or later come at us with Varsity force. Those who train at the J.V. level in their moral and discerning lives, will only be able to face life when it comes full force with a J.V. level response. Why do so many people get overwhelmed with life? Why do so many fall into addictive habits of drinking, drugs, and sex? Why do so many simply give up? It doesn't have to be this way. Pope John Paul taught throughout his years as Pope that we don't have to be afraid of life. When you watch someone who trains at the Varsity level play a Varsity game, they might lose a game, but not the season. They actually enter into the competition with an enthusiasm and passion. How do you face life? How do you want to face life? Do you ask God for an easier life or do you ask God for the grace to match the mission He has for you. See [Appendix 4](#) for more.

For Discernment: True discernment means willing to act out of strength and not out of weakness. It

means being willing to choose the difficult. It means seeking the best and not just that which is acceptable or good or better. Ask God for the courage to train at the Varsity level, and allow Him to lead you into the Varsity competition of life with Him at your side. You may lose some games, but you won't lose the season.

Scripture: I Corinthians 9.24-27: "Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a crown of leaves that withers, but we a crown that is imperishable."

Quotes:

Mother Teresa: "Lord, I don't ask for an easy life. If you need something done which is difficult, then give me the grace to give my life totally for you and for others." and "Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I shall follow You wherever You shall go in search of souls at any cost to myself and out of pure love for You."

"There is no age so difficult or corrupt that saints can't thrive."

Video Sketch: [JV vs. Varsity](#)

16. **Take Out All the Rocks from Your Backpack:** I think all of us play a game with the Sacrament of Reconciliation at some time or other in our lives in which we go to Confession but only confess the easier sins without addressing the real areas of our woundedness, either because of embarrassment or fear. At retreats we will use the example of carrying a backpack. I pretend to put in three rocks and then remove two. In between confessions I add three rocks (sins) and then when I go to confession I take out only two. After about ten confessions the backpack is painfully heavy. If we come to confession and only address our sins superficially with Jesus in the Sacrament, then there remains a weight of shame and guilt which builds up. Jesus wants us to experience a freedom, healing, and intimacy which can only come through a radical surrender of our weakness and vulnerability before a merciful and loving Father.

For Discernment: The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an integral part of every person seeking to discover the Vocation that the Lord has for that person, especially priesthood and religious life. As we experience God's mercy in our own life, we are called to be instruments of that same mercy for others.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5.11-21: "This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us. We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God!..."

17. **Show Jesus the Basement of Your Heart:** At retreats we do a skit in which a young man named John invites Jesus to his newly remodeled home. As they enter, John is excited to show Jesus the new computer room, but Jesus stops and asks where a certain door leads. John answers that it goes to the basement, but he would prefer that Jesus not go down there, because there are many painful memories kept there and no one is allowed to go there. Jesus looks John in the eye and asks him, "How can you call me Savior if you have areas in your life that you will not let me see nor heal? If you truly trust me, then let me into your basement of memories, so that I can truly bring you deep healing and peace." The skit continues where John finally allows Jesus to enter into the basement of his heart, and it is here that Jesus sees all of John's most hidden sins. Jesus asks John to surrender each one and then Jesus sends them away forever. Finally John and Jesus are all alone in the basement. John experiences a deep peace, because all he thought could be done was to cover the sins from sight. It is only after John allowed Jesus to the basement of his heart that he could truly call Jesus Savior.

For Discernment: We can only have intimacy with Jesus to the degree that we share with Him our vulnerability. Only when we allow Jesus into the deepest parts of our souls and into our pain, memories, hurts, and wounds can He truly heal us at our deepest depths. What is the role of the

Sacrament of Reconciliation in your life and in your discernment? We all have painful areas in our life and baggage from the past. Have you made a good general confession(s) in your life? If the Lord is calling you to a vocation to priesthood, this intimacy through healing is absolutely essential and moreover, you will only be able to lead others to deep healing in Jesus to the degree that you have allowed Jesus to heal you.

Scripture: I Timothy 1.12-17: “Christ came into the world to save sinners. Of these I myself am the worst...”

18. **Growing in Stages/Laying the Foundation:** Before you put on the roof of a house, you build the foundation, then the walls. A house grows in stages. The same goes for discerning a person’s vocation. If we start with the question, “Would you be a priest?” don’t be surprised if the young person says “No.” There are stages of development which need to be formed before this question can make sense for many. Only with a firm foundation can discernment truly take place. We must foster a deep spiritual life first. Only then can discernment lead a young person to move beyond giving only a part of themselves to God, to the point of giving their whole lives in service to God and others.

For Discernment: When we speak to young people about discernment and vocations we need to find out where they are on the spectrum of faith and formation so that we reach them where they are at and lead them forward. See [Appendix 5](#) for the foundations needed to create a culture of vocations.

Scripture: Luke 6.45-49: Jesus speaks about laying a foundation which storms cannot destroy. If we are going to discover and live our vocation in Christ, it will need to be built on a sturdy foundation.

19. **Why Does God Make Me Wait?** Many young people go on a retreat and feel an awakening to God’s presence in their life, but then comes a desert and times of long waiting. At this point, many give up the quest. They wonder why God doesn’t answer their prayers or continue to give them consolations.

A priest once told this story of Three Hunters. The first hunter paced the woods impatiently and made too much noise. He never was able to see a deer, because he made too much noise. The second hunter found a comfortable spot in the woods and went to sleep. Every couple of hours he would look up and check, but then would go back to sleep. He didn’t shoot a deer, because he wasn’t paying attention. The third hunter found a spot where he saw some tracks and then spent the day paying total attention to his surroundings. In spite of the cold and rain he stayed in his position. Late in the afternoon he sighted a buck in the distance. He waited another hour for the creature to approach within range. He fired a shot and bagged the buck. What makes a good hunter? Well, he has to be a good shot, but more than that, he has to have perseverance and commitment and patience. What do you call the hunter who gets his buck in the first minute of the season?—a lucky hunter. Which hunter has more character, a lucky hunter or a good hunter? The answer will always be the good hunter.

For Discernment: Do you want to be a good pray-er (person who prays) or a lucky pray-er? If you want to be a good pray-er who will be able to lead others, then the only way for God to deal with you is to teach you patience and perseverance. Every person on the road of discernment will go through long times of waiting and even dryness. This way the Lord will teach you not just to love His consolations, but to love God for Himself. If you enter into these times with prayer and trust, the Lord will teach you first to be a good pray-er, and then He will reveal to you your mission. It cannot be otherwise.

Scripture:

Hebrews 12.5-13: “Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord.”

James 1.2-4: “Realize that when your faith is tested this makes for endurance.”

II Corinthians 4.1-18: St. Paul tells how he is beaten down but never crushed. He grows in his hope in God.

[Video Sketch: The Three Hunters](#)

20. **Why Doesn't God Tell Me Now What His Plan Is for Me?** How many times have you heard a married person say, “If I had known all that I would have had to face in this marriage, and it is a good one, I don't know if I would have had the courage to say ‘yes’ to God.” The same can be said for those who enter priesthood or any other state in life. You don't tell the first grader all the things he or she will do as an adult, because you will overwhelm the young child. Similarly, God doesn't reveal to us the challenges which will come in our vocational call until we are ready to receive them in trust. A good book which shows how God slowly reveals to us the challenges of the spiritual life is Hannah Hurnard's, Hind's Feet in High Places. In the book, Much Afraid needed to learn to trust and to become stronger in the valleys and foothills before she could face the trials and challenges of the high mountains.

For Discernment: Do not try to race ahead of the Holy Spirit, but learn to walk within His Will and find your peace within that journey. He will reveal to you what you need to know, as you need to know it. Work on trusting the Shepherd and you will follow with a growing strength. Don't expect God to only give what you think you can handle. He will always take us beyond our native talents and capabilities, but with His Call and Grace, we will be made sufficient for the task. There is a saying which is so important for young people to embrace, “*God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called.*”

Scripture: Habakkuk 3.19: “The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like Hind's Feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine High Places.”

21. **Before You Attempt the Extraordinary, Master the Ordinary:** Often a young person will complete a retreat and want to conquer the whole world and to be a martyr right away. They begin ascetical practices which are beyond their spiritual capability to handle. God has not called them to these spiritual heights just yet. So as they push themselves upward, it is with their energy and not through the strength of the Holy Spirit. They eventually become overwhelmed and full of anxieties, feel doomed to failure and become spiritually paralyzed. Discernment becomes compromised or even stops. St. Therese, the Little Flower, in her Story of a Soul, found the secret is to love God with great love in the little ways and He will lead you to the places He desires you to be and to the people He desires you to serve, and to the heights He desires you to climb. This is why it is good to have a mentor or spiritual director who can help guide you to grow according to movements of the graces the Lord gives.

For Discernment: It is natural when we first come to fall in love with the Lord that we want to give everything and thus we want to run toward the Lord, but life is a marathon and not a race. If we try to run before our legs are strong and ready, then we will wear out and it is at this point that many give up and return to their former way of life or if we continue on we can become so exhausted that we no longer witness life but a slow death in our vocation where we can easily become bitter or cynical. The Lord will inevitably guide you through joys and trials. Ask God for the grace to live the present moment. As you learn to trust and follow the Holy Spirit's lead as he wills, then you will be able to run your mission—your spiritual marathon with joy and you will inspire others to come to the Lord as well, especially if the Lord is calling you to the priesthood or consecrated life.

Story Example: One day while teaching high school I asked the senior boys about becoming a priest and why they would see this as a good thing. One of them blurted out that he would never want to be a priest, because all priests do is work, work, work, and they are tired all the time and they get crabby. I was taken aback and thought about his words and wondered to what extent I was overdoing the work side of my life as a priest and could I actually be witnessing that spirit of exhaustion instead of joy? Joy comes from a life of balance. Balance recognizes that we are only human beings and that our mission can only be successful if lived in communion with the Lord leading us. Priesthood is very challenging in today's world and if you are called to this, it is absolutely essential for your holiness and for your ability to lead others, that you live this life of balance by learning to walk before you run.

Scripture: James 1.2-4: "My brothers, count it pure joy when you are involved in every sort of trial. Realize that when your faith is tested this makes for endurance. Let endurance come to its perfection so that you may be fully mature and lacking in nothing."

22. **Don't Stop Short of the Call God Has for You:** Think about the story of the Wise Men who went in search of the Messiah. What would have happened if they would have only thought about the Messiah and not actually set out on the journey because they weren't willing to invest their time or money or their own plans? What would have happened if they would have returned after a couple days of searching? What would have happened if they would have been talked out of making the long journey because they didn't want to look crazy in other people's eyes or disappoint others? What if they would have stopped half way? Three-quarters of the way? In Jerusalem? There are many people who will consider God's Call. They will think about it, but not act. Others will search for a time, but when the difficulties come, they lose their steadfastness and fervor and they quit searching. Instead of seeking the best, they settle for second best or third best or even much less. God has a treasure he wants to share with you. You have one life. Will you persevere in the quest to discover it? Will you settle for something easier? Will you seek that which is good, better, or will you spend your life on what is best?

For Discernment: Discernment means that we place ourselves into the hands of God and we allow Him to guide us through the search until we discover the Call He has for us. Only this will bring the deepest peace. Don't stop until the Lord brings you to Bethlehem. Most people missed the greatest birth in history. Only a few found him because they discerned, acted on their discernment, and never stopped searching until they found the treasure. It is true today as well that "Wise men still seek him."

Scripture: Matthew 2.1-12: The story of the Three Magi

23. **God's Spiritual Boot Camp:** Why does God allow so many tests in my life? Every soldier will have to go through boot camp, or else he won't be ready nor prepared when he arrives at the front line. If he is not ready he will be one of the first to die, and those he is responsible to protect will also be in grave danger of death because of his lack of readiness and training. God wants to entrust souls to each of us in our lives. We so often ask the Lord to spare us from sacrifice and suffering. But if the Lord doesn't put us through a spiritual boot camp, we will not be ready when our time comes to care for and protect those entrusted to our care.

For Discernment: Every time a man asks to enter into the seminary we speak to him about the training the Lord will bring to him in his life of formation. Seminary training is not just a time to experience God's consolation, it is also a kind of training, a spiritual boot camp. Each man will follow a different path, but each will be tested beyond his capability and as he surrenders to the training, he will become a soldier who is ready for the spiritual battles which lie ahead and he will be ready to protect those souls entrusted to his fatherhood.

Scripture: Hebrews 12.5-13: “Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord.”

24. **Don't Stay in the Barracks. Get on the Front Line:** If we choose to stay back and not enter into the battle of life, then we will never know the taste of victory. A true father doesn't run from the fire if his child is in the building. He will enter into the danger in order to save his child. Likewise, a true soldier doesn't play it safe and stay in the barracks when it is time for battle. He will willingly go to the front line and even ask the commander where he is most needed and then take his place in battle. Can you imagine the soldier who will only go to the front line if he can be assured that his life will be spared, that he won't get hurt nor suffer? If the battle is worth fighting for—If the commander is worth following into battle, then it is essential that we get out of the barracks and other safe places of our lives and take our place on the front line where the commander desires us to be and where we can make the biggest difference.

For Discernment: The key as we grow in the call to holiness is to allow the Lord to make the call in our lives. Who is the commander in your life? If it is the Lord, then ask him where he wants you to be in battle. We believe that Jesus is God. If we truly believe this, then doesn't it make sense that every baptized young man or woman would make his or her prayer, the prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola:

“Lord, Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All that I have and cherish you have given me. I surrender it all to be guided by your will. Your grace and your love are wealth enough for me. Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more.”

Story Example: The life of Fr. Vincent Cappodano is a powerful story of the “Grunt Padre” who asked to enter into the fiercest battles in order to bring Christ to the wounded and dying soldiers in Vietnam. What is the front line for young people today? (The Grunt Padre, by Rev. Daniel L. Mode, CMJ Press, 2000). See [Appendix 6](#) for more.

Scripture: John 21.15-19: After the Resurrection, Jesus meets the Apostles on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and asks Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” In the end Jesus prophesies Peter's death. This is fulfilled in the apocryphal Acts of Peter in which Peter meets Jesus as Peter is fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome. Peter asks Jesus the question, “Quo vadis?” and Jesus answers that he is returning to Rome to be crucified again. This prompts Peter to gain the courage to continue his ministry and to become a martyr.

25. **The Courage to be Chaste:** One of the greatest battles today for young people is chastity. Jesus spoke of how blessed are the pure in spirit. To be pure in spirit is to be free to love and not be bound by our tendency toward selfishness in relationships because of Original Sin. Pope John Paul II revolutionized how we look at all vocations through the prism of Theology of the Body. God calls us to a relationship with him as he reveals to us through our bodies the mystery of the gift of our sexuality and the greatness to which we are called.

For Discernment: How do we grow in chastity as men and women in the various states of life? All of us are called to live chastely. Some are called to marriage and others are called to the single state. Some of those called to the single state are called to live chastely as celibates in the priesthood and consecrated life in order to build up the Body of Christ the Church. See [Appendix 7: Chastity and its relationship to Marriage and Celibacy](#).

Scripture: Matthew 19.10-12: There are some “who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign.”

26. **Dating and Prayer:** Often in a classroom situation young people will ask for advice on dating, I will say to them that as a priest that I have one very important principle to keep in mind besides all

the other important steps in friendship and love. I answer, “If you cannot pray together as a couple, then don’t ever get into a serious relationship with one another.”

For Discernment: If you do not know how to pray with one another, then how can you discern together if the Lord is calling you to marry this person or someone else in the Sacrament of Marriage or to be a dedicated single person or to be a priest or to enter consecrated life? Can you imagine someone about to be ordained a priest who doesn’t pray? This would be a contradiction. How can a man prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Orders and not do so in through a life of prayer? Impossible. But doesn’t the same go for the Sacrament of Marriage? How many couples pray together on a regular basis? How do they pray together? The best couples I know today begin with the foundation in prayer. Do you pray alone or together? Why is it important to learn how to pray as a couple and later as a family? See [Appendix 8](#) for more on dating and the importance of prayer for discernment.

Scripture: Matthew 19.4-6: God is the author of marriage and therefore no one is to separate what God has joined together.

**The Red Barn:** As a child we played in our red barn during the day, but at night it took on a scary aura of night sounds, of bats and hauntings. If I had to go into the barn at night I would take my father by the hand and he would lead me through the darkness. Through this he taught me that if I am with him, I do not have to be afraid of the darkness. In life, the Lord will not have us avoid that which is difficult or scary. He calls us to take Him by the hand and to take other good and holy people by the hand. When we do this, we will find peace and hope in the toughest places and times in life. As we discover the Lord in our red barns, then our life gets more challenging, because then He will ask us to take the hand of those who are suffering and searching and to enter into their red barns of fear and distrust, so that they too will discover His presence and peace. What are your red barns? Do you run away from them? Do you allow the Lord to lead you through your red barns and so discover His healing presence? Are you open to see your mission to help other people find Christ’s presence and healing in their red barns? See [Appendix 9](#) for picture.

For Discernment: Consider how many saints went boldly into the “red barns” of tragedy, suffering, disease, war, and even death, not because they gained anything by it for themselves, but to give of themselves in service to the Lord and neighbor. They did not simply follow their preferences but asked the Lord to show them where there was the greatest need. There is a saying, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s hunger meet.” We can only live when we are willing to die. We can only discover ourselves, when we lose ourselves in love. To discern one’s vocation to be willing to lay down one’s life for the salvation of others. Pope Benedict XVI writes: “We must be inspired by a holy restlessness; restlessness to bring to everyone the gift of friendship with Jesus Christ.”

Scripture:

Matthew 16.24-26: The Doctrine of the Cross

Matthew 25.35-40: The Corporal Works of Mercy

[Video Sketch: The Red Barn](#)

[Video Sketch: Not for a Million Dollars](#) This is an extension of the story of the Red Barn.

Someone watched as Mother Teresa cared for the poorest of the poor in the squalor of Calcutta, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” Mother Teresa answered, “Nor would I.” We don’t choose our deepest call out of fun or excitement, but out of a sense of call and mission and because in doing so, we love Jesus Christ.

## Part II

### Second Vocation: The Call to State in Life—Priesthood

1. **Dating the Priesthood:** What would you say to the young man who says, “I met this woman and I believe that she is the one that I am to marry. I really think God might be calling her to be my wife. The only problem is that I am not sure. I don’t want to date her until God gives me a sign that this is the one for me.” LOSER! If you think that the Lord is calling you to marriage and you think this might be the person with whom you are to spend the rest of your life, the only real response is, “You have to date her in order to find out if you are meant to marry her.”

There are many young men who think that the Lord might be calling them to be a priest, but they are not sure. They are waiting for a miracle or theophany or something that will reveal to them what they are to do. They look from the outside in and cannot come to a decision. What is the answer? If you think that the Lord might be calling you to priesthood, then you can only do so much discerning from the outside. You reach the point in which the next step is to “date the priesthood.” This means entering seminary. Does it mean that you will be a priest? No. It means that you are open to God’s Call and you will begin a serious time of discernment.

There are often seminarians who will say to me, “I don’t know if I am called to the priesthood, but I do know that I am called to seminary.” If you have received signs along the way and a growing desire that the Lord may be calling you to priesthood, take the time to meet seminarians from your diocese, visit a seminary, and consider the possibility of dating the priesthood. “You can’t marry unless you date.” “You can’t swim unless you jump in the pool.” Or as Father Brett Brannen writes, “You can’t drive a parked car.”

[Video Sketch: Dating the Priesthood](#)

2. **Jesus, the Cure for Spiritual Cancer:** If we truly understand how the Sacraments are God’s remedy, given to mere human beings in the priesthood, as the healing art for a world wrought with spiritual cancer, priesthood then becomes a meaningful life. Often when I begin a conversation with young men about the priesthood, I will ask them if they would be a priest if God called them to it? Some will say yes, and many will say no. Why would anyone say they would actually say “No” to God unless they didn’t understand who God is and what priesthood is? In the example about the “injectable cure for cancer,” young men will inevitably say that they would give up everything to be able to give the cure for physical cancer, because when great human need meets a healing art, there is a meaningful life. There is so much spiritual cancer in the world. An essential remedy for this spiritual cancer is the Catholic priesthood. See [Appendix 10](#) for more details.

[Video Sketch: Jesus, the Cure for Spiritual Cancer](#)

3. **“Every Man Is Called to Fatherhood”:** A question which is often asked of us as priests is whether the priesthood is a lonely life. I am quick to reply that “the priesthood is very...very...lonely...if you are a bachelor.” I say it with a lot of feeling and the other person looks so quizzical at me. Then I complete the statement, “...but if you are a father...then it is anything but lonely.” Every man has a natural desire to be a father, to give life, to want to teach the next generation, to make a difference in someone else’s life. That is why if you are a bachelor—which means—that you are more focused on your life, your fulfillment, your needs being met, your comfort, your self-actualization, then you will be lonely in the priesthood, as you will be lonely as well in marriage or being unmarried as a bachelor. But, if you are a man for others, who wants to give his life away, to make a difference, to give life, to be a father, then your life is difficult, challenging, but not boring nor without meaning. The question is not, am I called to be a father? Every man is called to be a father. The question is not, am I called to be married. Every

man is called to marriage. The question is what kind of father is God calling me to be? To which marriage is the Lord calling me? See [Appendix 11](#) for more.

[Video Sketch: Every Man Is Called to Fatherhood](#)

Scripture: I Corinthians 4.14-18: St Paul speaks of his spiritual fatherhood in the Corinthian community.

4. **Every Man Is Called to Protect, Provide, and Establish**, Based on notes from Vianney Days at St. John Vianney Seminary, St. Paul, by Rev. William Baer, former rector.

The familiar saying for the seminarians at St. John Vianney is, “*Men in Christ, Men of the Church, and Men for Others.*” The call to priesthood is a radical call to move beyond mediocrity. Our culture encourages men to remain adolescents and not to grow up. We live in a culture that is so concerned with not offending others, that we have often lost our prophetic character. We say, “I am Catholic, BUT...” These kind of Catholics are called “But-Catholics.” We need to stop creating Christ in our image and allow Him to conform us to His will and plan.

We are called to go beyond adolescence and to be men. To be a man means to be called to marriage and to fatherhood. True marriage and fatherhood means that we are called to be crucified for God and for others. Are we willing to die to self? For the past forty years there has been a failure to be fathers in families, and the scandals brought to light in 2002 that the failure to be spiritual fathers has even infected the priesthood. If you are called to the priesthood, you are called to a radical fatherhood. You are not called to be a bachelor. We don’t ordain boys. You are called to be a man, not a boy. The future belongs to those fathers with children, not boys with toys. Only half of all seminarians will become priests. The level of commitment you are called to in the priesthood is truly heroic. Those who become priests are called upon to pass on to others the baton which they have received with patience, dedication, purity, and holy jealousy. The following are three ways in which seminarians and priests must be formed:

*Every man is called to protect.* The priesthood is a band of brothers, who in every diocese join their bishop in unity to protect the gate of truth and holiness. We are called to protect the integrity of the Gospel message and to be faithful to Jesus Christ and to protect those souls entrusted to our care from spiritual harm, scandal, and wrong teaching. In the history of the Church many saints were willing to stand alone and suffer persecution even to the point of martyrdom.

*Every man is called to provide.* Each of us is given gifts and talents from the Lord and He calls us to use these gifts to serve and to teach. We are called to take what we have and to provide for the needs of others through a life of prayer, study, and service.

*Every man is called to establish.* We are called as men to help establish in our children the leadership they will need to learn if they are going to carry out their mission in life. We must be willing to give a vision, to train, to teach, to form, to be strong, so that as they face life and all its challenges, they have the wherewithal to be able to be strong and to be steadfast.

Another version of this can be found in the book, *Many Are Called*, by Scott Hahn. He uses a different but similar outline: *Fathers Are Called to Be Life-giver, Protector, and Provider.*

5. **“Priests are like Marines, Police, and Firemen:** by Rev. James Kurzynski. Father James Kurzynski has helped with vocation discernment for a number of years. One of his favorite talks compares priests to Marines, Police, and Firemen. See [Appendix 12](#) for more.

6. **The “Sinerator”**: When I give a talk on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Mercy of God, I sometimes will bring out a ceramic vase which my mother found at a rummage sale. It is gaudy with ugly tones of blood red, lenten purple and franciscan brown. I remove the cork and will say, “This vase contains some of the most vile, horrible sins that I have ever heard in my life as a priest. Sometimes people come to make a general confession with long lists of their sins. Sometimes people come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation saying that they are beyond redemption, that they have committed unforgiveable sins and are unworthy to receive God’s Mercy. I like to remind people who question the unforgivability of their sin, that God’s mercy is greater than their sin. I will sometimes give a cross or a rosary to someone for whom I can see that this is a particularly powerful moment of conversion in their life and will ask them to keep this sacramental in their pocket, and whenever they are reminded of their past and forgiven sins and are pulled off center by these thoughts, that they should hold the cross or rosary and repeat simply, ‘Jesus, your Mercy is greater than my sin. Help me to claim your Mercy.’ Especially during Lent I like to bring out this vase full of forgiven sins and to share with people the power of God’s Mercy in my life and in the lives of others. That is why this vase is called a ‘Sinerator’. If we take seriously the words of Jesus that He died for our sins and that when He rose from the dead He gave the power to forgive sins to the Apostles, then we will gladly bring our sins to the Lord in this Sacrament. What a powerful blessing it is to be a priest, a pencil in God’s hands, to act in ‘persona Christi Capitis’ and to witness the transformation that God’s Mercy has in people’s lives.”
- a. John 20: “...whose sins you forgive are forgiven...”

[Video Sketch: The “Sinerator”](#)

7. **Your Choices Count**: Our choices impact people’s lives here and now and into eternity. Think about it, who was your common ancestor ten generations ago? Who really knows? Some might even say, who cares? But the reality of this is that if you were to remove that one person from your family tree, what happens to everyone after that person? They don’t exist. The profound truth for every couple who marry, is that their decisions about life, love, and family will impact countless people’s lives—their quality of life and their very existence. This example helps us to consider how important it is that when we make our life choices, we do not make these decisions without discernment and prayer, because so much is at stake. We see only the immediate future. If we could see how our choices would affect people far into the future, how would that affect the way we make our decisions? How can we treat our choices about life, love, family, and vocation as a private choice when the reality is that our choices will have a direct and indirect effect upon countless thousands over time?

Thus far we have only referred to how our choices impact people’s existence and quality of life. What about the spiritual consequences here and into eternity?

Let’s move from the marriage example to priesthood. What impact did Pope John Paul II’s priesthood have on the people of Poland? The universal Church? What impact has and will his Theology of the Body have on present and future marriages throughout time? He was the most known pope in history. What impact did he have on formation in seminaries? How many young priests refer to themselves as “John Paul priests” because of the way in which he inspired them to give their lives so totally back to God in the priesthood. When he died hundreds of millions watched his funeral from around the world. It was an experience of a New Pentecost to see people of every nation and language come together in prayer and thanksgiving to God for the priesthood of this Pope. How many people have been affected and helped through the sacraments celebrated by Pope John Paul throughout his priesthood? How many have been impacted by his prayers, preaching, and his writings? How many were brought back to Christ and the Church? How many lives will be influenced by the holiness and writings of this Pope into the future and to the end of time? The number is beyond our ability to calculate.

We can use much simpler examples too. Who baptized you? Who was the priest who heard your first confession, gave you your First Holy Communion? Who was your greatest priest role model thus far in your life? Explain. Where would you be if those priests would not have been in your life? Just as we can think about how different the world would be if a biological father were removed from history, so too, how different the world would be if a man does not fulfill the spiritual mission that God has for him if he is called to the spiritual fatherhood of the priesthood. If the Lord is calling you to be a priest, don't be afraid of the Call. If the Lord calls you to be a priest, He is calling you to a very unique and essential spiritual fatherhood which will help guide, nurture, and strengthen people to come to the Father in this life, and your ministry will be the bridge for them to meet Christ in eternity.

[Video Sketch: The Difference One Life Makes](#)

8. **The Law of Spiritual Generation:** Ask students the question, "Who will be remembered as a saint 800 years from now? After some discussion the general response almost always is, "John Paul II and Mother Teresa." Then ask who do you think was the person who was most influential in transforming people and the world 800 years ago in the 1200's? People will say they don't have any idea. When I do this I will then say, I will give you a clue and I will bet that every one of you know who this person is. I will not say the person's name but only the city where that person lived. When I say the name, I want you to raise your hand when you know who it is. Ready? Set? Here is the clue: "He was from Assisi." They all answer, "St. Francis." Then I ask, "What is it that all three of these people had in common? Do this and as you lead the discussion help the students to see that common points were that they were people of prayer and faith who gave their lives totally to Christ and the Church. They did not simply want to be acceptable, or good, but to be holy, to strive to be the best they could through the grace of God.

The holiest priests and saints do not strive simply to be good. They understand the law of spiritual generation, that if we want to lead people to be saints, then we cannot strive for less. Only a total surrender to God's grace can make this possible. How far will you go to bring Christ to others? See [Appendix 13](#) for more.

9. **The Impact of the Priest in His Own Family:** When a young man is called to priesthood, he is called to complement in a unique manner the spiritual fatherhood of his biological father and the whole family. As a seminarian, he helps bring faith and prayer into family life in ways he could never have done if he were not a seminarian. As a young priest he will be asked to pray and celebrate the Sacraments with his immediate family and all his relatives. He will celebrate the weddings of his siblings and baptize their children. He will even hear some confessions of his family. He will inspire them to think about their own vocations. Some will come back to Christ through his priestly ministry and presence. A very beautiful part of his spiritual fatherhood will come to life as he will someday celebrate the weddings of his nieces and nephews and the baptisms begin all over again. He will anoint family members when they are ill or prepare for surgery. He will be a spiritual mentor to his parents as they face older age, sicknesses, tragedies, and even death. As his parents pass away, the priest in the family will be the spiritual father for the family to guide them and prepare them for the ultimate questions and our ultimate reunion with the Lord and one another in Heaven.

As Vocation Director I often will remind a family of a seminarian of the gift of having a priest in the family and that his ministry will impact all of their spiritual lives forever. Thus, there is a profound spiritual fatherhood in any family who is blessed to have one of their young men called to the priesthood.

10. **Why is Priesthood so Important?** When the present archbishop of Milwaukee, Archbishop Jerome Listeki was bishop of our Diocese of La Crosse, he once said to the seminarians, "The

priesthood is either the most useless vocation a man could ever choose or it is absolutely essential for the life of the Church and for the salvation of the world. It all depends on how you answer the question, ‘Who died on the Cross?’ If Jesus was only a man and nothing more, then priesthood is nothing more than remembering the death of a man who died as a criminal on a cross. But if the one who died on the Cross was truly the Son of God, who gave up his life as an act of ultimate love and redemption, and then rose from the dead and called the Apostles to be mediators of this love, grace, and Covenant, then the priesthood is absolutely essential for the life of the Church and for the salvation of the world.”

There is a saying carved into the stone of our former seminary which states, “The priest is another Christ who works daily among men and bears the Gifts of God.”

Once, while teaching a class of middle school students, I asked why they thought it would be important to be a priest. One sixth grade boy raised his hand and said, “I think it would be cool to be a priest, because then you would bless the bread and it would become the Body of Christ. You bless the wine and it would become the Blood of Christ. Then you give Jesus to the people.” How well said!

In an age in which priesthood is often seen simply as a presidential function within a community, it is easy to lose the mystical dimension which is given by Christ himself.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis*,” (CCC 1548).

It states further, “This priesthood is ministerial. That office... which the Lord committed to the pastors of his people, is in the strict sense of the term a service. It is entirely related to Christ and to men. It depends entirely on Christ and on his unique priesthood; it has been instituted for the good of men, and the communion of the Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a ‘sacred power’ which is none other than that of Christ. The exercise of this authority must therefore be measured against the model of Christ, who by love made himself the least and the servant of all,” (CCC 1551).

Quote: In the book, *Called to Communion*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger writes about the nature of the priesthood: “Sacrament means: I give what I myself cannot give; I do something that is not my work; I am on a mission and have become the bearer of that which another has committed to my charge. Consequently, it is also impossible for anyone to declare himself a priest or for a community to make someone a priest by its own fiat. One can receive what is God’s only from the sacrament, by entering into the mission that makes me the messenger and instrument of another. Of course, this very self-expropriation for the other, this leave-taking from oneself, this self-dispossession and selflessness that are essential to the priestly ministry can lead to authentic human maturity and fulfillment. For in this movement away from self we are conformed to the mystery of the Trinity; hence, the imago Dei is consummated, and the fundamental pattern according to which we were created is brought to new life. Because we have been created in the image of the Trinity, the deepest truth about each man is that only he who loses himself can find himself.”

Why is the priesthood so important? Because through the hands of the priest, the very presence of Jesus Christ is mediated to all people. The sixth grade boy had it right. There is no room for entitlement nor clericalism, but only to offer oneself as a gift, a living sacrifice in love and in service.

11. **“Passing the Baton”** In a race the baton is passed from one runner to another. When an elderly priest passes his chalice on to the next priest, he passes on the symbol of the priesthood to the next man. In our diocese, we offer to the newly ordained chalices which are often old and tarnished from priests who have run the race and have died.

As a young priest, I received a chalice from Father Willibald Hackner who was ordained in 1915. He died in his late nineties a good and holy priest. Imagine how many people were given the Body and Blood of Christ through his years of celebrating the Sacraments. Father Hackner had a very important insight about life and how we live our vocation. He shared with me that in life there are two great stages.

In the first stage, God gives us many gifts and the temptation is to think that the gifts come from us and therefore we can so easily fall into pride. The test of this first stage of life is to recognize God as the Giver/Source of all that we have and are, and therefore to be humble before Him—to see ourselves as stewards before such a great and loving God.

In the second stage of life, the Lord begins to take away each gift one by one. As we begin to lose our physical strength, eyesight, etc., it is very difficult to give up what has been ours for so long. Each gift is slowly taken back by the Giver until we stand naked before Him. At that point the temptation is to be bitter and frustrated. The test at this stage is to stand naked before our God in a spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude. Father Hackner used to tell the stories of all that he did as a young priest, strong and talented. In his old age I saw him lose his ability to walk, to see, to hear, and finally he lost so much of his memory that he no longer recognized me. Yet, in spite of all the loss, he held his rosary tight and spent his days praying and persevering. Father Hackner died running the race of humility, gratitude, and holiness. He gave me his chalice. As I celebrate Mass with his chalice—the baton of his priesthood, I know that I too will pass through the same stages as he did. I hope to run the race learning how to see God as the Source of all and to be humble, and finally when all is returned, to be thankful as I stand empty and naked of my talents before my God.

[Video Sketch: Passing the Baton](#)

12. **Priest as Victim:** “Host” comes from the word “hostia” which means victim, sacrifice, or holocaust. Jesus became a victim for our salvation. When we receive Holy Communion, we are called to participate in Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Saint Paul says this when he writes, “And now, my brothers, I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing and perfect,” (Romans 12:1-2). What is the priest saying “yes” to when he consecrates the sacred species in the Mass? What is he saying as he receives first and then leads the people to do the same? He is saying “yes” to be a living sacrifice and then invites others to do the same.

Dorothy Day was an American Mother Teresa of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. She worked with the poor for forty five years and established the Catholic Worker Houses across America. A classmate of mine from seminary knew her personally and shared this story in class one day:

“Dorothy Day used to come to my family’s home and spend several days at a time. One night she asked me to wake her up early the next morning for Mass. The next day came and I did not want to interrupt her sleep as she was a very elderly person at the time, so I didn’t get her up. When she awoke, she told me never to do that again. She shared with me some of her own prayer life. She said that in her work she had many who admired her work, and she had many who complained and

criticized her apostolate and mission. She said that every time she went to Mass, it is as if she heard the Lord speak to her at the moment of Consecration. As the priest consecrates the bread into the Body of Christ, it is like the Lord said, 'Dorothy, this is My Body broken for you. Will you let your body be broken for me and for others today?' When the priest consecrated the wine into the Blood of Christ, it was like the Lord said, 'Dorothy, this is My Blood poured out for you. Will you let your blood be poured out for me and for others today?'"

As a priest I think of these words at every Mass. In the Mass the Lord invites us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to Him and for others. There are countless examples of this in the lives of the saints.

"...The modern world boasts of the enticing door which says: everything is permitted. It ignores the narrow gate of discernment and renunciation. I am speaking to especially you, young Christians.... Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but go to the heart of things! And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands." (Excerpt from John Paul II's *Book of Saints*, Edith Stein, p. 22)

Anima Christi: What is the mind of Christ? It is to be totally emptied out in the service of the Father. This was the decision of our Lord. "Though he was in the form of God...[he] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant"(Phil 2.6-7). He poured himself out. That is what the Scriptures tell us is the mind of Christ, the soul of Christ, the principle of the human life of Christ. And so, when we pray: "Anima Christi, sanctificame," we are indeed making a very bold and dangerous prayer, a tremendously exacting prayer. We are saying that we want to be emptied out, to experience our own kenosis as Christ experienced his, totally given, totally spent. "Soul of Christ, sanctify me." It will not be painless. No passion ever was. (*Anima Christi*, Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., p. 19-20)

13. **The Qualities Needed for Priesthood #1:** Lead a classroom discussion asking the students to share the qualities, I as Vocation Director should be looking for in a candidate for the priesthood. Summarize their many suggestions in at least four points, for example, he needs to be a practicing Catholic; be of at least average intelligence; be psychologically stable (or at least treatable); and be someone who is truly open to the will of God, and open to do anything the Lord asks.

Ask the students if they agree with these four points if someone is going to be called to be a priest. Then ask how many of them have these qualities and repeat each one of them...How many of you love God so much that you believe that God loves you so much that he can give you happiness if he calls you to the priesthood? If someone says they cannot, then ask them to pray for the grace to be able to grow in this necessary element of our call to holiness.

14. **The Qualities Needed for Priesthood #2:** One priest told of one of the best talks he heard on the vocation and priesthood. It had three main points:

First, in order to be a priest, a young man has to be attracted to the life of a priest.

Secondly, he has to be ready to invest himself. This means he needs to be able to give up certain things which could be obstacles to this life of love of God and service to neighbor as well as to commit himself to the discipline of what that life entails.

Thirdly, he needs to be able to develop the competency needed to carry out the responsibilities of priesthood. Attraction alone is not enough. Dedication is not enough.

There needs to be the integration of all three into a life of holiness that makes up the call and

mission of being a priest.

15. **You are Jesus.** There is a saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “*You are the only Bible most people will ever read.*” We are each called through the universal call to holiness to encounter Christ and to allow Him to live and work through us. St. Augustine wrote that we are to make Jesus incarnate through our lives of discipleship. Parents are called to be Jesus for their children. There is also a special call to the priest to be Jesus for the people they serve through their role as spiritual father.

Story example: Priests are “alter Christus” in the giving of the Sacraments to the people. There is also a wider understanding and awareness that the priest has through his role as father of the community. I share two examples:

a) Jason was a little boy about one year old when I was assigned to his parish. From as early as I can recall he would come with his dad at communion and cross his arms for a blessing. After the blessing he would say, “I love you, Jesus.” This went on for about seven years every Sunday. As he prepared for his First Holy Communion, I mentioned to his father how I always admired his prayer to Jesus at communion time. His father then said, “Father, for the longest time Jason said that because he thought you were Jesus.”

b) While visiting one of my relatives, my aunt was taking care of her grandchildren. One of the little boys, Josh, came running into the room and out again when my aunt said, “Josh, you need to stop and say hello. Do you know who this person is who is visiting?” The little boy stopped, looked up, and without missing a beat, he said, “Yes, he is Jesus.” And then he said hello to me.

Many priests have shared with me the same kind of experience of being called Jesus. As priests we have a very special privilege of not just being Christ for others in the Sacraments, but in all aspects of our life. These two examples have often come to me as reminders of the need to live in communion with Jesus in prayer, in thought, and in the actions of every day. Our lives as priests have such a deep and lasting influence on others as we carry out our daily mission. What a great privilege and blessing. What a gift, a mystery of God’s incarnate presence working through us as fragile human vessels consecrated to the Lord.

## Appendix 1: Which Questions Determine the Direction of Your Life?

What makes some people do great things? The great heroes and saints in our world, what made them different? I am sure the answers can be long and complex, but as I come to complete twenty five years as a priest, one insight I have learned over the years is that I am more interested in young people's questions than their answers, because their questions indicate the direction of their search—the direction of their life.

Think about it: If there is a treasure to be found, but you don't even ask the question about whether there is a treasure or where it might be, the only way you will find it is if you accidentally run into it. In life superficial treasures are found accidentally, great treasures are found through asking questions and searching for the answers.

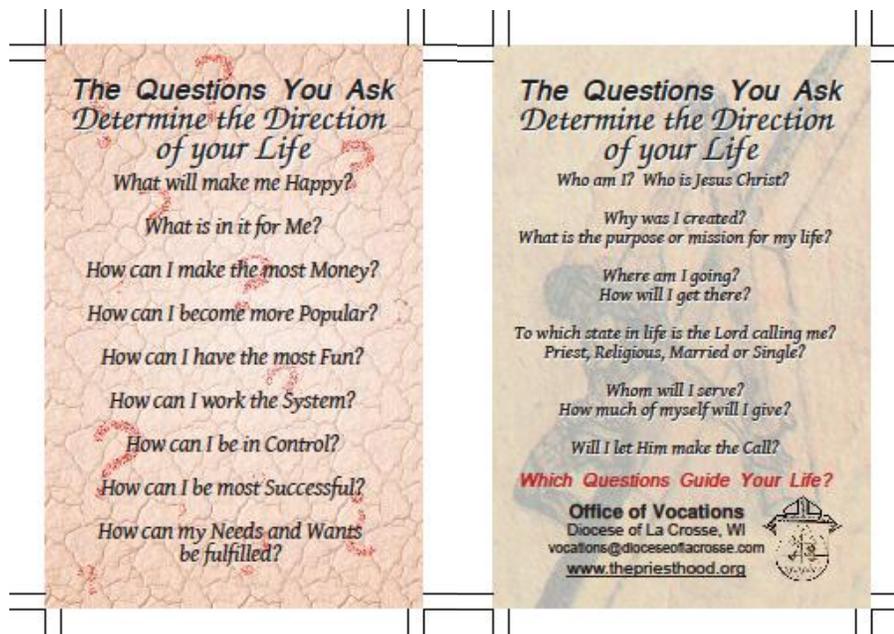
If a person wants to be a doctor, there are questions which need to be considered about goals and how to achieve them. If you don't ask the right questions, or ask the wrong questions, you don't go anywhere or you go in the wrong direction.

What about your life? What questions do you ask and in what direction do they point you? Look at the copy of the card printed in this article. If you ask simple questions like, "How can my wants and desires be fulfilled?" –this question will move you in a direction of selfishness. The best young people I have ever met ask a very different set of questions. They recognize that they are not the origin of their existence. There is a God who created them and everything we have and are find their origin in God's gift to us. This insight leads a person to ask, then how can I know more about this God? Why did He create me and for what mission in life? Once you start asking these kinds of questions and bringing them into prayer, the Lord will lead you on a search. As you persevere in seeking God in this prayer, your questions will lead to some answers and then to deeper questions and then to deeper answers.

Every man in the seminary or deacon formation is there because through prayer he is asking the deeper questions. Every person in religious life asks this kind of question. The best young people dating and the best marriages ask the deeper questions. What direction is your life taking?

You have one life to live and one life to give. How is the Lord asking you to give yours?

God is calling you to a special mission. Search. Ask the deeper questions. Bring them to prayer. Come to the retreats we offer during the year. Stay connected to your parish and the Sacraments. Please feel free to contact your Office of Vocations. You will then find your deepest happiness and lead others to find theirs.



## Appendix 2: The Chalice and the Pepsi Can

I walk into a classroom with a Pepsi can and a Chalice. I pretend to be ready to pour Pepsi into the Chalice. I stop short of doing it and ask the students if this would be good or bad? They answer it would be bad and disrespectful, because the Chalice is sacred and the Pepsi is only ordinary. I teach them the saying, “Treat ordinary things in an ordinary way. Treat sacred things in a sacred way.” Then I ask them, “Which is more sacred, the chalice or you?” Seventh grade and under usually answer that the Chalice is more sacred, because it is blessed. I ask if they are blessed. They answer that they were blessed at Baptism. I tell them that the Chalice with its blessing cannot attain Heaven. “Can you?” They answer that with their blessing of Baptism, their destiny is Heaven. Then I ask them again which blessing they would rather have. They say Baptism. “Which is more sacred, you or the Chalice?” They will answer back, “But the Chalice holds the Blood of Christ.” I answer, “And what do you hold when you receive Holy Communion?—You hold the Body and Blood of Christ. . . Which is more holy?” They answer now that they are holier than the Chalice. The main point is that if we are going to discern our vocation in Christ, we must have the starting point that we are sacred. We are called as sons and daughters of a loving Father. Only when I see myself as sacred can I truly begin to discern my Call and Mission.

### Discuss with the students:

1. What are ways in which we treat others like Chalices? Like Pepsi cans? Have them use examples with how they treat classmates, parents, siblings, etc.
2. So many young people struggle with pornography. How does one who views pornography view the person in the picture? How does he view himself? Once while preparing to do this example in front of a group of teachers, I had the Pepsi Can and Chalice on a table on stage. Someone reported to the director of the program that some idiot left a Pepsi can next to the Chalice, and they were very offended at the sign of disrespect. The director told me, and I left it there and decided to bring the criticism into the talk. After I talked a while about the two things, I brought up that someone was not happy that the Pepsi can and Chalice were on the same table. I answered that I understand where they are coming from, and that I appreciated their critique, but that if it is inappropriate for these two inanimate objects to be in close proximity, then what about the person who is a temple of the Holy Spirit and places himself/herself in the presence of pornography? A point to bring up about young people and pornography is that no one who is hooked on pornography can discern a vocation. Our imagination is too full and too distracted to be able to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.
3. We apply this analogy to dating: There are two young men. They both want to date your daughter. The first one sees your daughter as a Pepsi can. The second sees her as a Chalice. Which one do you want your daughter to date? Everyone says the one who sees her as a Chalice. Why? Discuss with the students why this is so? After one of these sessions, a very attractive 16 year old sophomore girl came up to me and pulled me aside. She said, “Father, in the class today something really struck me. I have been sexually active since 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I always blamed the boys for using me, and this they certainly did. But what I came to realize today is that it is not just they who see me as a Pepsi can. I see myself as a Pepsi can and that is why I allowed them to treat me like this. If I can learn how to see myself as sacred, I wouldn’t make these kinds of decisions.” Ask the students to comment on this and to have them think about how they see themselves at this time in their life. If I see myself as sacred, how would this affect the choices I make about dating? Sex? Drinking? Drugs? And everything else? If I don’t see myself as sacred, how can I connect with the sacredness and holiness of God, and how can I discern my vocation?
4. I Cor. 6:19-20: “You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within—the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price! So glorify God in your body.”

### Appendix 3: Stonecutter or Cathedral Builder?

There is the story of a man who came to a large city during the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a large cathedral was being built. He saw the rows of stonecutters who had worked on this church all their careers as did their fathers. Drawn to ask them about their work, he came up to one of the workers and asked about the life of a stonecutter.

The man responded: *“My father was a stonecutter. I am a stonecutter. I don’t know anything else. Sometimes I get so bored sculpting the same designs in stones over and over again. The chips fall to the ground. Every day I have to clean up a mess. When one stone is completed, it is taken away and I start all over again. I work in the stifling heat and in the bitter cold. Some might think this to be a noble work, but I find it tedious and without purpose, except for the pay check.”*

Proceeding down the long line of stonecutters, he then noticed a man who was singing as he sat sculpting his next stone. The visitor asked him what he thought of his job. The man responded: *“My father was a stonecutter. I am a stonecutter. But there is so much more to tell. Can you imagine a more noble work than mine? The stones I cut today will be placed in this church which will last for centuries. People will come to marvel at the beauty of the anonymous workers who made this place of worship possible. We are not simply stonecutters cutting stones. **We are Cathedral builders!**”*

In our lives we can get so caught up in the routine such that, at times, we can only see the job in front of us and cannot see any divine purpose or meaning. At home, work, and parishes are we stonecutters or builders of a Cathedral? St. Paul reminds the Ephesians: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22).

For discernment: If you are going to discern a vocation in Christ, then there needs to be a presence of joy, gratitude, hope, and so many other qualities that give your life passion, purpose, and meaning. Who are the holiest people in your life? How do you see the Cathedral builder in each of them? Especially if someone is going to be called to be a priest or religious how important it is that to be a person who is able to lift people up, to be a beacon of hope, who can be realists, but who guide others to be see more and to be better—to be holy.

## Appendix 4: J.V. vs. Varsity

As boys in the neighborhood we played basketball—not just ordinary basketball—we made up our own games; played when we wanted; when we didn't like it one way, we changed the rules and did it another. It was easy, no commitment, the only bad thing is we really never got very good and weren't able to compete well with others because we just did it our way.

In high school I joined the junior varsity team. Practices were scheduled as a group and they were almost every day. There were all sorts of exercises and endless running. We memorized the plays and strategies until they became second nature. When we put on the uniform for competition there was an excitement, because we knew we were participating in something bigger than just ourselves.

I never moved on to Varsity, but watched as my classmates did. They excelled and even competed in regional competition that would have scared me to death, but they were excited and even won many of those games. To be a varsity player they had to give up so much of their free time; take the late bus, change their diet—limit junk food; and their exercise routines were grueling. And yet they had a pride, which nothing else in high school could come close to.

St. Paul speaks about how the spiritual life can be compared to races, boxing, and other sport competitions. He says spiritually we need to run the race to win, not a crown of leaves, but eternal life. In other words, we are called to be spiritual athletes—Varsity Catholics. It's fine to be little league and intramural. It's great to be J.V., and we all have to pass through those stages of spiritual growth. But sooner or later in life each of us will face challenges, problems, and tragedies in life, which will come at us with varsity force. If we remain at the J.V. level we will experience all sorts of fear and ultimately fail against the pressure. When you have the problems of a thirty-year-old you don't want to be facing them with the tools of an eighteen-year-old. We are called to spiritual maturity and yet how many times don't we remain spiritual adolescents. We are called to be Varsity Catholics.

So, how do we become Varsity Catholics? Look at the lives of the greatest heroes in our history. For example, look at the big names of the saints in Scripture. Let's just take a look at a couple of people in the New Testament and some of the lessons they can teach us.

### **Prayer:**

Would Mary have been ready for the angel's invitation to be the Mother of God if she were not a person of prayer? Would John the Baptist have been able to be a prophet for the Lord if he did not first spend hours in prayer listening to what the Lord had to teach him? Jesus was found many times praying to His Father. After the Resurrection and Pentecost look at how many times the early Christian community met for prayer. When in prison for months and years at a time, St. Paul and fellow disciples prayed and were strengthened to be able to endure their trials and persecutions. There is no example of a great hero in the Old or New Testament who was not a person of prayer. How about us? How about you? Do you schedule prayer time? Is your prayer a listening to the Holy Spirit? Varsity players require a coach and they need to listen to the coach. Without prayer, we cannot listen and we cannot follow. How is the Lord calling you to improve the way you pray?

### **The Community of the Church:**

Varsity teams train and work together. Individuals don't re-make the rules if they don't want to follow them. Jesus said to Peter, "You are Peter and on this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail." Jesus established His team. He so closely identifies with it that He calls it His Bride. He tells the Apostles, "Whoever hears you, hears me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me." St. Paul teaches that the "Church is the pillar and foundation of truth." It is through this Church that the Lord is able to teach, guide, and coach us to know the truth and then through the Sacraments He gives us His grace to strengthen us to live this life. In the Scriptures the greatest of saints understood the frailty and weaknesses

of the members of the Church, but they were rooted in the fact that the Church is divine in origin and Christ is the Head of the Body.

**Vocation and Mission:**

In sports the coach has a purpose and design for the team and has the best understanding of the “big picture.” As the coach gets to know the individual players, he or she is best able to guide the young athlete to play this or that position. Similarly, the saints were very much aware in Scripture and throughout history that God has a plan and purpose for our lives. We are called to a life of holiness and as we are filled with His grace, we are sent into the world. For the saints the important question was, “What is God’s purpose or design for me?” If we stay at the level of choosing what we want or desire without asking the question of what God wants, and if we hold back from surrendering ourselves to His Plan for our lives, we will not be able to move beyond the junior varsity. Why do we have a shortage of holy marriages? Why are there so few priests? Why so few sisters? Is it that the “Church” is failing or are we not doing our part? When we are able to say, “Lord, what do you want of me? There are careers I would like to choose, but ultimately you are the coach and I will listen through prayer, be instructed through your Church, and I will follow your Call for me. If you have something difficult which needs to be done with my life, call and then give me the courage to say “yes.”

## Appendix 5: “Creating a Culture of Vocations”

Carpenters don't begin by building a roof. They start with the foundations and the walls. Similarly, when we speak about vocations, there is a foundation and walls which need to be laid first before a young person can discern his or her call in life. The building of a foundation and walls is not just for a chosen few but is the mission of all parents, families, teachers, and parishes working together within our diocese. As this takes place, we can speak of a Culture of Vocations, which will be the seed bed for the future vocations in our Diocese.

The **First Foundation** is learning how to pray in such a way that we open ourselves up to speak to the Lord in a personal manner. Families have such an essential role to teach the children about Jesus through night prayers, meal prayers and other family prayers. These can be both memorized or spontaneous. *When do you pray at home and as a family? How do you witness your love for God and your own prayer life to your children? How can you witness a love for going to Mass as a personal encounter with Christ?* When a young person can speak to God and not just about God, then a personal relationship begins to grow, which will lead the young person to the next step.

The **Second Foundation** is the importance of Catechesis—learning about our Faith. Young children love stories such as the lives of saints and Bible stories, which are a never-ending source to teach, inspire and lead them to pray. These stories help them to learn about Jesus and His relationship to all in the Church. Catholic formation in our Faith through religious education leads young people to move beyond a simplistic understanding of how the Lord works in our lives. An example I often use is, if a person is 16 years old, that person has 16-year-old problems and should have 16 year old spiritual solutions. If the person quits learning about his/her faith, then the person some years later will have 20-year-old problems and 16 year old spiritual solutions. If this persists, the person will leave the Faith by age 25, because they feel so disconnected. *How do you stay connected with your Catholic faith? How do you continue to learn as an adult how to apply your Catholic Faith in a very complex world? How many spiritual books do you read in a year? After confirmation what is your plan to grow in your faith? What adult classes have you attended?* As adults, we can only be spiritual leaders if we continue to grow in our understanding of our Catholic Faith so that when we are 40, 60, 80, we have a spiritual understanding and maturity that matches our age.

The **Third Foundation** is living a moral life—of practicing the virtues and making moral commitments. I have played the guitar for forty years. I relax by playing the guitar and express who I am through song. If I turn the guitar around and play it the other way with the opposite hands, I know exactly what I need to do, but it sounds awful and even I find it a torture to play it in this manner. There are many people who want to have a good marriage someday, but they don't practice chastity to get there. There are many who want to be sober, but don't practice abstinence. An unchaste heart cannot discern the mission that God has. Dating is the front line for discernment in so many ways. If a couple practices chastity, they will get dating right, will get marriage right, will get family right, and then all vocations will find their place. As Christians, this means making a personal commitment to Christ of our mind and heart, of our thinking and acting. As we are able to commit ourselves to Christ in the actions and habits of our lives, we are prepared to finally discern the big step.

The **Fourth Foundation** is to give the Lord, not just a part of our lives, but *all of it*. As we grow in trusting God to lead us in the smaller stages of life, we finally come to the place in life in which we are called to surrender our whole lives. In choosing a career, this means that a person will not simply follow his or her own wishes but will pray about where God is leading them. To which career? To which state in life? In marriage, this means that a couple prayerfully discerns that God is calling them to marry each other in the Sacrament of Marriage. In the priesthood or religious life, a man or woman surrenders everything to the Lord to become a priest, sister, or brother. I work with all of our seminarians—every single one of them is at this level in which they are committing years of their lives to surrender it all. *What is God's Call for you? For your children? How do you talk about this at home with your family?*

*Your children? Your spouse? Your friends?* This is not something which is meant only for those in a seminary or convent. This is the Call to Holiness that is meant for each person in every family in all parishes.

When young people see adults committing themselves to these four foundations, then they too will have the courage to do the same. When we as adults live out seeking God's Call in our lives, then we will be able to invite and challenge others to do the same.

We don't do this alone. Get involved in your parish, religious, or adult education formation. Check out the many activities for youth in the Diocese during the year and in the summer. The retreats, camps, and rallies are important ways for us to network, to support one another, and to grow in our faith, and which ultimately leads us to carry out the mission that the Lord has for us here in this corner of the Church, our Diocese.

## Appendix 6: Vincent Capodanno

Obedience through the eyes of those who have learned to radiate Christ  
Raoul Plus, SJ as quoted in the book The Grunt Padre

**Descendit**  
**Incarnatus est**  
**Passus**  
**Sepultus est**

### Radiating Christ

They will be chosen men, it is true; God will carefully select the official ministers of the Word. He will fit them by a special training for their apostolic work; they will be qualified men. The Church will have a body of teachers whose official function will be to distribute the truth; they are the priests.

### The Field Afar

What is an apostle? Etymology tells us that he is one who is sent, missus, apostolo, one who comes in the name of another, who comes not to speak of himself, not to plead his own cause, but to speak of another, to plead the cause of another, another who is understood to be greater than himself; the apostle comes to speak of God, to plead the cause of God.

### St. Martin's Cloak

Saving the world has never been an easy task. It was not easy for the Son of God. It was not easy for His Apostles. But He is with us. And that brings us back to the confidence of our beginning. Under such a leader, is there any limit to what soldiers may do, soldiers full of zeal and resolution, trained in His methods?

### The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines

The apostle must be as much a man as possible. Our lord was a man in the fullest and most magnificent sense of the word...Responsive to all His brethren, He is with them in their sorrows and their joys...He is not pontifical or sententious. Always He shows Himself cordial, simple, approachable. His chief quality is His good-nature, 'a smiling self-abandonment.'

### Priest of God—Servant of Men

We have to make Christian teaching attractive by presenting it in action, by furnishing an example of Christian life which will be not only attractive, but, if possible, even heroic. We have to make the truth admirable. Words may be effective, but actions have a hundred times their value in power of persuasion. And among actions the most persuasive of all are those which are marked with the stamp of heroism.

### Semper Fidelis

He who would exercise his power of redeeming to the utmost limit, as Christ did, must not shrink from that which awaits all saviors: the cross—*passus, crucifixus est*. Souls are won by words, they are won by example; but above all they are won by sacrifice. In this conflict it is those that fall who are victorious; the salvation of the world belongs to the crucified.

There is a thing more terrible than dying, and that is being buried; I mean being buried alive. To take part in the work of Redemption means following the Master even to that length. *Descendit; Incarnatus est; Passus; Sepultus est*. He came down from heaven, became incarnate, died and was buried.

### Books:

*The Grunt Padre, the service and sacrifice of Father Vincent Robert Capodanno, Vietnam 1966-1967*, by Fr. Daniel L. Mode, CMJ Marian Publishers.

*Radiating Christ, An appeal to Militant Catholics*, Raoul Plus, S.J., CMJ Marian Publishers

## Appendix 7: Chastity and its Relationship to Marriage and Celibacy\*

Chastity is the virtue by which I order my love. We all know that this is one of the ways we get attacked consistently. It is one of the ways in which failure really bothers us – and it should. We must see this as an invitation to vulnerability before God. Chastity is freedom for intimacy, not freedom from intimacy. If my intimacy needs are not met through my relationship with God and lived out appropriately with others – I will seek them to be met in unhealthy ways. Lived rightly this becomes one of the main ways I live a sustained vulnerability before God and in communion with others.

In order to understand the vow or promise of celibacy and virginity we need to distinguish:

- *Chastity*: “In the larger context it is the virtue of appropriate touch, not no touch, which empowers us through grace and discipline to integrate and express our sexuality through gestures in ways that respect ourselves and others and empowers us to live and love in ways consistent with our life stance” (Rev. John Yockey).
- *Celibacy* is making a vacancy for God to come in, so that in turn we can witness Jesus Christ. In celibacy we give up the genital expression our sexuality. Our sexuality is essential to who we are as persons and is relational. Thus, in celibacy, God desires to redeem our sexuality, have it integrated into our personal life and lived in our relationships with others in the manner appropriate to our state in life.
- *Charism*: A specific gift given by the Holy Spirit to build up the Community, the Body of Christ, the Church through a life of consecrated virginity.

Scripture:

- Marriage and virginity are the two bookends in the Bible. Marriage is an icon of the Covenant that God has with his people now. Consecrated virginity is an icon of the future fulfillment—marriage that all will have in Heaven. Both are essential for the life of the Church.
- Matthew 19.10-12: (Eunuch for the Kingdom) and Luke 14.26-27). (Hate =df a Hebrew expression meaning total detachment and having no competitive attachment)

Guiding images to understand the depth of consecrated celibacy and virginity:

- Marriage: Celibacy and virginity are not equivalent to being a bachelor(ette).
- Motherhood/Fatherhood/Children/missionary dimension
- Every man and woman is called to fatherhood or motherhood.

Ways to cultivate the Charism of consecrated celibacy and virginity:

- Mortification
- Healthy knowledge, appreciation, and acceptance of sexuality.
- Accepting that there will be a battle for chastity, given our weakened human nature, but that through God’s grace, healing and the redemption of our sexuality is possible.
- Support of the Community and wider Church.

Questions:

- Do I experience freedom in the areas of my own sexuality? Do I experience it as a gift from God? Do I see my body as a temple of the Holy Spirit? (I Corinthians 6.19-21)
- How is the Lord calling me to a deeper healing of my sexuality from my past?
- How is the Lord calling me to live more deeply the virtue of chastity at this time in my life?

\*Notes taken from a Priest Retreat by Rev. John Yockey, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

## Appendix 8: Dating and Prayer

Choose your date: As young men consider the possibility of priesthood, many will find themselves in a dating situation and are looking for help as to how to listen for the Lord. My first advice is that if the young man wants to discern priesthood, then he cannot date, because you cannot “date” two women at the same time, i.e, both the girl and the priesthood. He must make a choice of which one to discern—priesthood or marriage.

Discerning priesthood while dating: If the young man doesn’t feel ready to discern a call to priesthood and is already in a dating situation, then I challenge him to discern the possibility of marriage, but to do so with a listening and discerning heart. This means that both the young man and woman need to be honest about their joint search to discern God’s call for them. He has to be willing to share with her his openness to go wherever the Lord is calling and to ask her help to discern together. This kind of honesty, when brought into prayer, opens the door for the grace of God to work. If the Lord is calling the young man to marriage, they will come to a peace about this through their prayer and growth in love. If he is called to be a priest, then there will develop a restlessness and a sense that a change needs to take place in their relationship. Almost every year a young man will share how he feels led to stop dating because he/they discerned the call to priesthood.

Write a letter to your future spouse: There are single young people who also write a letter to the Lord and to their future spouse and renew this letter and promise every year until they meet the person God is calling them to marry. Each letter will begin with “Dear Lord, and to my future spouse...In this letter I hope to say someday to you, that I prayed for you before I knew you...I loved you before I knew you... and I was faithful to you before I knew you.” The letter goes on to share what the person has learned about love and life and faith during that year. Each year brings a new letter. Once the couple is preparing for marriage, the person writing the letter will share these letters at the “right” time. I have had a growing number of people through the years who write these letters. How would you respond if your partner did this for you?

Keep the Lord included in your relationship: The greatest sadness today is that so many young people are opting out of Marriage and choose cohabitation. When they do this, they can no longer discern their Call as the Lord is no longer the guiding presence in the relationship. It is only within a chaste relationship of dating and a mutual prayer life, that a couple can truly discern God’s Call.

Advice on dating: Often in a classroom situation young people will ask for advice on dating, I will say to them that as a priest that I have one very important principle to keep in mind besides all the other important steps in friendship and love. I answer, “If you cannot pray together as a couple, then don’t ever get into a serious relationship with one another.” If you do not know how to pray with one another, then how can you discern together if the Lord is calling you to marriage or to something else? Can you imagine someone about to be ordained a priest who doesn’t pray? This would be a contradiction. How can a man prepare for the Sacrament of Holy Orders and not do so in through a life of prayer? Impossible. But doesn’t the same go for the Sacrament of Marriage? How many couples pray together on a regular basis? How do they pray together. The best couples I know today begin with the foundation in prayer. Do you pray alone or together? Why is it important to learn how to pray as a couple and later as a family?

Ways couples pray: There are couples who attend Mass together, go to Adoration together, pray the Rosary or other devotional prayers or even part of the Liturgy of the Hours together. Some couples write a dating prayer which they recite at the end of their evening. Some couples will write a goodnight prayer/blessing for the other person and it is kept in their Bibles on their nightstands. Before she goes to bed she will take out his prayer/blessing and read it as it asks the Lord to bless her and to guard and guide their relationship together. At his house the young man

will take out the prayer written by his girlfriend and will pray this prayer before he goes to bed each night. Couples will write a prayer once they marry and then frame all of these prayers and hang the prayers in their bedroom. As the children grow up, they will be told about the prayers as they come to an age of questioning about them. You can bet that when the children are teens they will, at some point, sneak into their parents' bedroom to read these prayers. That is when the couple will teach their children the power of chastity. My parents wrote a prayer and they pray it daily. We pray it at every family gathering. When we pray we open ourselves to allow the Lord to shape and form our families and thus the saying, "The family that prays together stays together."

What it like to be called? People preparing for marriage will ask what it is like to be called by God to be a priest. I answer back, "What is it like to be called by God to be married. I often get a surprised look from them. Just as every priest must learn how to pray and to share how the Lord is calling him to priesthood, so too, shouldn't every couple be able to articulate to their family and friends how the Lord is calling them to this Sacrament of Marriage? There are many couples today who are doing just that.

Discernment is a team sport: Just as preparation for priesthood takes a team of people to guide the discernment, so too, in marriage it requires a team of people to help you to grow in your discernment, Discernment begins with the couple but also includes family, mature friends, and your pastor. In the seminary it takes four to eight years of formation with many people involved to finally bring a man to priesthood. How can this kind of discernment be done more in today's world?

## Appendix 9: The Red Barn

As a child we played in our red barn during the day, but at night it took on a scary aura of night sounds of bats and hauntings. If I had to go into the barn at night I would take my father by the hand and he would lead me through the darkness. Through this he taught me that if I am with him, I do not have to be afraid of the darkness. In life, the Lord will not have us avoid that which is difficult or scary. He calls us to take Him by the hand and to take other good and holy people by the hand. When we do this, we will find peace and hope in the toughest places and times in life. As we discover the Lord in our red barns, then our life gets more challenging, because then He will ask us to take the hand of those who are suffering and searching and to enter into their red barns of fear and distrust, so that they too will discover His presence and peace. What are your red barns? Do you run away from them? Do you allow the Lord to lead you through your red barns and so discover His healing presence?



Artwork by Sister Ancilla Christine, DSP

## Appendix 10: What would you do if you were given the CURE for CANCER?

Often when I speak to a group of young men about the priesthood, it is difficult for them to see that the life of a priest impacts the very souls of people and their lives and destinies. In this article I would like to share with you an image we use in our talks to help make this connection, not only with regard to vocations to the priesthood, but to all states in life. It is based on a saying I heard years ago: *"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's hunger meet."*

Suppose that the pen you see in the accompanying picture were an injectable pen containing the cure for cancer and anyone with cancer, who received this injection, would be cured of their affliction. Would you be willing to spend your life giving this cure for cancer to others? (*Young people tend to say they would, because it would help so many in need.*) This gives us a glimpse as to why someone would choose to become a doctor or a nurse. There is a deep human need, a healing art, and when the two come together, there is a meaningful life.

What is worse than physical cancer? You can die with physical cancer and still get to Heaven, but what about cancer of the soul? Those who die with spiritual cancer can separate themselves from God and loved ones forever. What would you give to have the cure for spiritual cancer? Suppose with this special pen you could bring the cure for spiritual cancer to all people in need? To bring meaning back into their lives and connect them once again with the grace and friendship with God? Would you be willing to make this your life? To spend 40, 50, 60 hours a week bringing this kind of relief to people? (*Again, young people say yes to this question, because you are helping people.*)

Now you get a glimpse as to why a man would choose to become a priest. There is a unique spiritual cure given to priests in the Sacraments, and every priest can share story after story of the impact of their priestly ministry in the spiritual lives of their people—baptisms, Masses, confessions, anointings, marriages, funerals, visits to hospitals, spiritual direction, teaching and preaching, etc... There is a deep human need, a healing art, and when the two come together, there is a meaningful life. Similarly, a man who becomes a deacon in the Church participates in this healing ministry of the ordained.

But let's not stop there. There is a spiritual cure for cancer which is unique and given to those who choose the Consecrated Life. Again, every person in consecrated life can tell stories of how their ministry transformed the lives of others and brought them deeper meaning in this life and brought them to Christ. There is a deep human need, a healing art, and when the two come together, there is a meaningful life.

There is also the healing art which is given to those who are called to the dedicated single life. The Lord calls them to reach people no one else will be able to reach. They are called to bring the cure which is Christ to others and to be that healing leaven in society. There is a deep human need, a healing art, and when the two come together, there is a meaningful life.

No matter where I go, I ask the question to people of what is the greatest suffering and need in their country or society. The answer is always the same. There are so many physical and spiritual wounds in marriages and in families. There is a cure for spiritual cancer which is given uniquely to those who enter into the Sacrament of Marriage (Cohabitation cannot address these spiritual needs). Marriage as a Vocation—a Call—puts into the hands of a husband and wife the healing power of God to help each other and their families to grow in love for one another and in their friendship with God. Marriage and family are the foundations for all other vocations. It is a stewardship in which the persons spend their lives being a healing leaven in their families, parishes, and society. There is a deep human need, a healing art, and when the two come together, there is a meaningful life.

Besides these states in life, we can also speak of choice of careers and occupations. When we understand our identity and mission as sons and daughters of a generous and loving God, then choosing a career is more than checking out my preferences or the best-paying option. Our life becomes a response in gratitude and our career or occupation becomes a means to enter more deeply into relationship with God and others. Each calling is unique and necessary for the life of the Church. Let the Lord lead you where He most wants your life to make a difference for others. The message on this pen applies to all of us:

**Jesus: the cure for spiritual cancer.  
One life to live. One life to give.  
How is the Lord calling you to give yours?**

## Appendix 11: Every Man Is Called to Fatherhood

A question which is often asked of us as priests is whether the priesthood is a lonely life. I am quick to reply that “the priesthood is very...very...lonely...if you are a bachelor.” I say it with a lot of feeling and the other person looks so quizzical at me. Then I complete the statement, “...but if you are a father...then it is anything but lonely.” Every man has a natural desire to be a father, to give life, to want to teach the next generation, to make a difference in someone else’s life. That is why if you are a bachelor—which means—that you are more focused on your life, your fulfillment, your needs being met, your comfort, your self-actualization, then you will be lonely in the priesthood, as you will be lonely as well in marriage or being unmarried as a bachelor. But, if you are a man for others, who wants to give his life away, to make a difference, to give life, to be a father, then your life is difficult, challenging, but not boring nor without meaning. The question is not, am I called to be a father? Every man is called to be a father. The question is not, am I called to be married. Every man is called to marriage. The question is what kind of father is God calling me to be? To which marriage is the Lord calling me? There is a natural desire and attraction toward biological marriage and fatherhood. I don’t understand how God works, and why he calls one man to marry this woman and not the other. I don’t know why He calls some to have biological children and he calls others to the marriage of priesthood and the rich fatherhood of parish life. The important thing is to follow the call and understand that no matter where the Lord sends you, you are called to marriage and to fatherhood. As a priest, a man is called to marry the Church as his bride, and with that comes many, many children.

A humorous way we bring this point across to young men is to say that when a man dates, he can choose from many different women, but when he gets serious about dating, he can date only one. When he gets married, he must give up all other opportunities to date, and has to give up the possibility of marrying all the other women in the world except this one woman—his wife. There really isn’t that much difference now between the man who gives up all women but one and the priest who only has to give up one more than the man who marries. Sometimes it is good to make this point, because it is easy for a young man to think that the man seeking marriage has the whole world to choose from, when in fact, whether in marriage or in priesthood, marriage requires a commitment and exclusion to other possibilities. Both Sacraments, both vocations, require total commitment, sacrifice, and self-giving.

Young people will ask if we priests ever regret becoming a priest. My answer is, “I hope that I don’t regret becoming a priest any more than your dad regrets that he married your mother.” Once we experience the meaning of our marriage and our fatherhood as a priest, we could never give it up any more than a parent would give up their children. Every priest can give story after story of the people whose lives were forever changed through their priesthood. These are our children. I find the older we get in the priesthood, the more we see our lives intertwined in the community of the people and the parishes where we have served. That fatherhood now defines us.

“By His law of celibacy, the priest so far from losing the gift and duties of fatherhood rather increases them immeasurably. For although he does not beget progeny for this passing life on earth, he begets a spiritual family. Every man wants to be a father. The option he has is what kind of fatherhood he will experience. This is the capstone, as only priests who are faithful to their celibacy know their genuine fatherhood. And let no one steal that mystery from our faith. The priest is emphatically not a pious bachelor. He is wedded to the Savior’s work in this world. And celibacy is the obvious, and if only people would believe it, congenial, happy, enjoyable expression of the priest’s relationship to God and man. All of this, however, requires deep faith in the priests. It requires discipline of his senses, especially his eyes and his sense of touch. He must be a disciplined man. No one else can remain celibate. It requires much prayer and an easy communion with God. Above all, it requires a great love of Jesus Christ. And of course, a great deal of grace from the Savior who called him and ordained him to the priesthood.”

--Pope Pius XII

One priest said the following after seventeen years as a priest in parish life, “When I begin in a parish for the first time, I look out at the people and know maybe a few of them. I haven’t done this before, but next time I move into a new parish. I would like to say something like, ‘I want to say that today we begin a very sacred relationship together which I do not take lightly. During the years that I am your pastor, we will face so much of life together. We will have to make decisions about budgets, repairs, school issues, education and formation of our young people. Mostly though, I am very aware that as pastor I will be linked with you in the most sacred moments of life: the birth of your children, baptisms and first communions; I will be with you every week sharing with you the presence of Christ in the Eucharist; I will have the blessing of giving you God’s grace of forgiveness in the confessional; I will visit you in the hospitals and nursing homes. You will call me to come and anoint your loved ones who are sick and dying. I will be with many of you as you prepare for death and eternity. Our relationship, through the Sacraments, will impact your very eternity and mine. For that reason I want to state clearly, I consider this a great blessing and privilege to serve you as your pastor and spiritual father. Pray that be worthy of this mission.’”

There is a fatherhood the priest accepts every time he begins a new assignment that should give him pause, and to realize that the gift of his priesthood is essential to the life of grace for all the people he serves.

Story example: As a teacher in a Catholic high school I had one particular year which was very difficult and I wanted to get out of teaching but was too afraid to ask the bishop. One night I went to visit an elderly priest of our diocese, Father Joe Martinson. He would die the next week of cancer. I asked him what he would have done differently if he could do his life over again. Not knowing of my disdain for teaching, he said, “I would have taught high school longer.” I couldn’t believe he was saying that and then I shared with him how I was tired of teaching and just wanted out and away from the students who were the most troublemakers. Father Martinson, answered with a strong voice, “Do not stop teaching until the Bishop asks you to. These are the years of your fatherhood. The young people will test you. That is what young people do. But don’t give up on them. They need your fatherhood. Stay with them and later in life, they will come back and you will see that these spiritual children will be a part of the rest of your life, and they will strengthen you in the future.” I prayed about what he said and some time later asked the bishop to keep me in teaching as long as possible. I would never have chosen to do that had Father Martinson not shared his sense of spiritual fatherhood with me.

## Appendix 12: Firefighters, Marines, and Missionaries

By Fr. James Kurzynski, Diocese of La Crosse

Do you have the metal to be a Marine? Do you have the courage to be a firefighter? Do you have the sense of adventure needed to be a missionary? These are three types of discernment questions. Discernment questions are meant to answer some of life's most basic questions: Where is my life going and what am I supposed to do with my life? To find God's will is a central quest we all must encounter. As a diocesan priest, I recall the years of prayer, thought, struggle, and joy that brought me to my vocation. Though I never asked myself if I had the metal to be a Marine or whether or not I wanted to be a firefighter, I see these careers, combined with the work of missionaries, as being metaphorical perspectives on attributes all priests need in our modern world.

I was a seminarian when the terror of 9/11 unfolded. The campus was wrapped in fear, anger, uncertainty, grief, and prayer. In that moment, the world we were preparing to minister to radically changed and none of us knew what this meant for our future. The first glimmer of hope and perspective I remember came through an interview with a firefighter trying to find people in the rubble of the World Trade Center. A reporter asked the firefighter why he would risk his life when, for all he knew, the people trapped were already dead. The firefighter responded, "Why should I think that my life is any more important than the lives of the people trapped in the rubble?" In my mind, this became a powerful metaphor of priesthood: We are called to reach into the twisted metal and rubble of broken lives to offer the healing hand of Christ to those in need. The sacrificial love demonstrated by all the firefighters and police was a living witness to the words of scripture, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) This is the heart of a firefighter, but this is also the heart of a priest of Jesus Christ.

Marines have the aura and mystique of being the first ones called for duty. They are sent into the most difficult situations that can, at times, seem impossible to win, but are expected to win nonetheless. They are highly trained, well prepared, and become an impenetrable force against the advancing enemy. Our soldiers are willing to sacrifice their lives for a cause and purpose greater than themselves. Priests need these similar attributes. Living in a highly educated society that is becoming more and more hostile towards faith, we need to be highly educated, well trained, and develop a little internal "metal" to be able to take the attacks we face as priests. We are asked to confront ministerial situations that are challenging and, at times, seem to be impossible on the surface. However, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to confront them, to minister Christ's presence within the "theatre of battle," and proclaim Christ crucified and risen from the dead. This priestly ministry contains a similar aura and mystique of being on the front lines of spiritual battles. This life, however, is to be lived in humility and sacrifice, fighting for a cause greater than ourselves and in service of Him who is our source and summit, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we see the heart of a soldier and the heart of a priest are similar in virtue.

When we hear of Missionaries, we often think of Priest's who go to foreign countries to sacrifice themselves for people in poverty and oppression. There is a heart of adventure necessary to be a missionary. You are, literally, a stranger in a strange land. You encounter foreign cultures and ways of living that can be both challenging and enriching. This encounter, however, always has a core goal: to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. I see, for the new millennium, this core heart of the missionary as central to the life of a diocesan priest. Developed countries that have drifted away from their faith origins are the new mission fields. Mother Teresa spoke many times of the spiritual poverty and oppression of our country. Therefore, just as we had missionaries go to foreign lands to proclaim Jesus Christ, we now need new missionaries to visit familiar lands that are growing more foreign in their knowledge of the faith. These new missionaries, diocesan missionaries, face radically different challenges than did our early missionary brethren. Yet, just as they employed their creativity and wisdom to connect with people of distant lands to proclaim Jesus Christ, so too do we need to employ our creativity and wisdom to reawaken faith in a world that is increasingly falling asleep spiritually. Therefore, we need men of adventure, creativity, and zeal to be these new missionaries, just as our first missionaries created a culture that made our faith possible.

One evening a parishioner shared with me some of her struggles about the lack of faith in our society. She said that all she ever wanted in her life was her family to grow up in a Catholic environment. To her, a central part of that environment was to have good priestly role models for her and her family to support that faith. Her sentiments are echoed by many these days: we need good men to be priests. Therefore, I conclude as I began this article. Do you have the metal to be a Marine? Do you have the courage to be a firefighter? Do you have the sense of adventure needed to be a missionary? Do you have the heart to be a Catholic priest?

## Appendix 13: The Spiritual Law of Causality

If the priest is a saint, the people will be fervent;  
if the priest is fervent, the people will be pious;  
if the priest is pious, the people will at least be decent;  
if the priest is only decent, the people will be godless.

The spiritual generation is always one-degree less intense in its life than the one who begets it in Christ.

( Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O. *The Soul of the Apostolate*, p. 39)

Each of us desires to make a difference in the world, but are we willing to pay the price? Jesus said, “*If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*” It is easy enough to believe and even attend Mass and do the minimum. The quote above is so challenging because it teaches that if we strive for the minimum, we will teach others mediocrity. If we desire to bring others to Christ and to holiness, then it will cost us our lives.

It is so easy to look at the challenges in life and in the world and to conclude that we cannot make any difference for good. Yes, we live in a difficult culture, but the Lord wants to work through us to transform culture and the world—not that we be conformed by culture to the values of the world. Saints don’t make excuses. They say “*There is no age so difficult that saints can’t thrive.*”

Think of the challenges that lay before the Apostles’ feet. Jesus asked them to reach out to all ends of the known world at that time and to announce the Good News. An impossible task! The Apostles focused, not on their limitations, but on the call and on the fact that the resurrected Jesus called them to this mission and empowered them with the Holy Spirit. Twelve men along with countless followers loved, preached, taught, suffered, were persecuted and put to death for Jesus—and the world was transformed because they strove for holiness and with the grace of God were able to bring others to a deep holiness.

Throughout the centuries the saints have modeled for us this *Spiritual Law of Causality*. Saints don’t happen by **chance**; they happen by **choice**. They choose daily to surrender themselves to God’s grace in a difficult mission field.

St. John Vianney is held up to us as a special patron saint of parish priests. He lived in a very difficult time during the French Revolution. Born in 1786, his family experienced an oppressive persecution against the Church in which priests were hunted down and put to death. Any family who would take them in and protect them would suffer persecution and be deported. John Vianney’s family harbored enough priests in their time that they would have lost everything and been deported many times over. The people of Father Vianney’s time were living immoral lives, and yet during the forty-one years that he would be their pastor, they experienced a profound transformation unequalled anywhere in France. What was the secret? St. John Vianney strove with God’s grace to be a saint and thus was able to lead others to be saints. By the end of his life a railroad spur had to be constructed to bring over 300 pilgrims daily into Ars, most of whom were seeking to confess to “the saint.”

Today the Lord is calling many to marriage. If you believe the Lord is calling you to the married life, do you strive for holiness with your partner? Spouse? Family? If the Lord is calling you to the priesthood, do you surrender part? Most? Whole? Holiness is a mysterious combination of our free choice and God’s grace.

How far will you go to follow Christ and carry out His mission for you? The Saints teach us through their lives how to give a deeper and more committed response to God’s Call in our lives. We live in an age of poverty, war, oppression, broken families, etc. There are so many challenges, distractions, contradictory values, and yet we live in an age of unbelievable opportunity to do good.

We are called to serve the greatest Cause. We are called to serve the Greatest Leader. We are called to serve within the family of the Catholic Church. What will be your response?

How far will you go to serve Jesus Christ? What will you choose—mediocrity or greatness? It’s your Call!

## Part III

### Examples of Outlines for Talks or Retreats

# The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are like a spiritual muscle. If we don't exercise them, they will atrophy. We need to exercise the seven spiritual muscles of the Holy Spirit. But how can we do this if we don't even remember them??? Let's review them and then later you can make a bracelet and hang it in your room or car as a reminder when you go home. Another way of looking at this is to imagine that you had seven very essential tools to do an assigned task, but if you don't know how to use them, they can never really help you in any meaningful way.

### 1. Wisdom: Clear, like the lens of a telescope.

What is your goal, not just now but your ultimate good? Pictures of saints show them at times meditating with a skull near them. Why? To remind them that someday they too will die. Society tells us that we should get a good job/career, a nice home, an adequate retirement and we will be happy. But retirement is not the end. Where do you want to be in 100 years? What is your most important goal? Is it something or someone? Is it God? Heaven?

Another way of thinking about wisdom is to consider the analogy of the chalice and the Pepsi can. Always treat ordinary things in an ordinary way, but treat sacred things in a sacred way. Never treat something sacred in an ordinary way. St. Paul states in I Corinthians 6:19ff, "Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Your body is not your own. It has been purchased by the blood of Christ." Do we see our body as sacred? If my body is not my own, then I am a steward and not master of my body and life. If I am sacred, then others are too. What difference does it make if two people dating see each other as ordinary? As sacred?

### 2. Understanding: Yellow, the color of illumination.

Know Jesus: Spiritual illumination will only come as we learn to pray, as we learn to listen in quiet prayer of meditation and contemplation. Example of saints such as Thomas Aquinas who would spend hours in contemplative prayer. Mother Teresa would have her sisters pray 3 hours a day in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Fr. Burke told me as I was about to go to seminary that I would find my vocation in the Blessed Sacrament chapel. How often do you pray alone? With your family? At Mass? Young people ask for advice regarding dating. My response is, "*If you cannot pray together in a meaningful way, do not get serious with the person you are dating.*" A man cannot be a good priest if he cannot pray. Marriage is the vocation from which come all other vocations. If a couple cannot pray together, how can they grow together spiritually? How can they discover and live out God's call and vocation? This kind of prayer is for everyone. We all have the Call to holiness which means to a relationship with the Lord.

Know about Jesus: We cannot love a person if we do not know anything about that person. We need to take the time to learn our Catholic Faith. There are many who quit learning at 17, upon receiving Confirmation, and then as they get to 30, they now have 30 year-old questions/problems and 17 year-old answers. They find their Catholic Faith so irrelevant because of the gap.

In short, learn your Faith and then take the time to pray and reflect on the teachings of our Faith (meditation). The next level of prayer is to take time for quiet contemplative prayer where we just listen to the Lord speak to us. As we grow in this prayer our spirituality and understanding will reach new depths.

### 3. Counsel: White, the color of the baptismal garment. The white garment reminds us we are a member of the Church. The Church is our counsel or guide.

If you were going to climb Mt. Everest would you ever do it alone? Would you ever go without a guide? All would agree that this would be senseless. As we go through the journey of life and climb toward eternity our goal is so much higher than that of Mount Everest and yet we hear every day how people don't want to have anyone telling them how to get to Heaven. They don't want anyone to guide them through the Church. They pray on occasion. They believe in the existence of the top of Mount Everest, but they refuse to accept any guidance.

St. Paul tells us that the Church is the Bride of Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-32). To focus on Jesus without the Church would be like someone acknowledging one person in a marriage and completely ignoring the spouse. What honor can be given to Christ if His Bride is ignored? If you want to know the Bridegroom, stay close to the Bride.

The Bible states that the Church is the “*pillar and foundation of truth*” (I Timothy 3:15). For Jesus, the Church (Scripture and Oral Tradition) wasn’t an option for the weak. It is His bride who is our certain guide.

#### **4. Knowledge:** Tan, the color of the path to the goal.

An alcoholic wants to be sober, but just wishing the end without being willing to take the path to the goal leaves one no where. We want to be holy, but if all we do is think about it we get nowhere. We can’t just believe in God, we have to cooperate with him by our actions (James 2 and I John 1). People want to have a good marriage. Do they take the path which will get them there? **We become what we practice.** If I practice basketball, I become a basketball player. If I practice the guitar, I become a guitar player. If I practice lying I become.... If I shout at my parents, I will become... If I sneak alcohol with my friends, I... If I have sex outside of marriage, I... If I experiment with drugs, I... If I entertain myself with pornography, I... Who are you becoming? What are your actions? What are you practicing? Do you want something different? You can, but it will require taking the path which will lead you to your goal.

#### **5. Fortitude:** Red, for courage. Do we have the guts to follow Jesus? To hold ourselves accountable? To step forward? To take a hit? To sacrifice for the good of another?

Are we willing to pay the price in order to follow Christ and to reach our goal? We live in a world in which we want salvation without sacrifice, love without commitment, holiness without self-denial. We are willing to follow Christ as long as He doesn’t demand too much of us. People often tend to pick and choose what rules they are willing to follow. This would explain why drugs, drinking, pre-marital sex, contraception, abortion, etc. are so common for people who profess to follow Christ. Eleven of the 12 Apostles were martyred, and John was sent into exile. Does that sound easy? We exercise this spiritual muscle by being willing to sacrifice whatever we are asked to in order to reach our goal—Christ now and in eternity. Why did God expect so much of the saints and so little of us??? He doesn’t.

To love means to love the good of another even at personal cost to ourselves. Jason Evert tells young people that pornography emasculates men. That means that it robs them of their masculinity. If a man is to love, he needs to be able to sacrifice himself for the person he loves. Pornography robs him of this ability, because it places personal pleasure and sensuality as first. Do you want to love? Ask for the Gift of Fortitude and practice it with God’s grace. Jesus didn’t say that being good would be easy; He said that with His grace it would be possible. Expect the difficult. Choose the difficult. My father told me as a senior in high school, “*Don’t ask God for an easy life. Ask God for the grace to do something difficult with your life for Him and for others.*”

#### **6. Piety:** True blue, the color of fidelity.

In this gift we are faithful to God. We exercise this spiritual muscle by “loving the giver more than the gift.” We are called to love Christ more than belongings, personal wants or goals or preferences, more than parents, friends, more than even our girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe you are not there yet. A sophomore is not yet graduated, but needs to be on the road to that goal. We do not graduate until we complete the goals and responsibilities of high school. We cannot enter heaven until we learn to love God above everything and everyone else. Ask God for the grace to grow in your love of the Giver of all the gifts in your life.

As we learn to entrust the choices of our life to God, there comes a time in which He asks us to entrust to him our vocation. What does God want you to do with your life? Which career? Which state in life—vocation? Is He calling you to Marriage? Single life? Priesthood or diaconate? Religious life? If we truly love God above all else, then let us let Him make the call. Can we pray the prayer of Mother Teresa which is: “*Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I shall follow You wherever You shall go, in search of souls, at any cost to myself, and out of pure love for You.*”

#### **7. Fear of the Lord:** Black, because if we separate ourselves from God then we are truly in the dark.

There are two kinds of fear. The first is called “**servile fear—the fear of a servant.**” This means that we serve God because we realize that to reject God we are placing ourselves outside of His saving graces. In other words, we can lose our salvation. It is so common to presume that simply because we don’t hate God, we are all automatically saved. Jesus did not teach this in the Bible. He has called us, and we have a serious responsibility to find Him in this life, and the responsibility is greater to the degree that we have been given opportunities and talents. In short, there is a Heaven and a Hell. Jesus died on a cross to show us the horror of sin and separation from God. He died so that no one would have to experience Hell or separation from God. This fear of the Lord is a fear not to separate our selves from God, or else we are truly in the dark.

The other fear of the Lord is called “**filial fear—the fear of a son or daughter.**” Scripture says that “(servile) Fear of the Lord” is the beginning of Wisdom. But it is not the end of it. To be truly wise means that we should grow and advance so as to have the (filial) Fear of the Lord which means that we never want to offend the One who deserves all our love.

### **Have a Plan:**

These are the **Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit**. As mentioned earlier, if these spiritual muscles are not exercised, they will atrophy. It isn’t God who fails, but we who fail to cooperate with the graces given to us by God. When we cooperate through our freedom and choices, it is God who is able to do in us what we could never do ourselves. But keep in mind, holiness does not happen by chance, but rather by choice. Saints don’t happen by chance, they happen by choice. Memorize these Gifts and reflect on them, because you can’t exercise what you don’t know. Ask God for the grace to grow in these gifts. Which one is the Lord especially calling you to practice?

Note: the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed in Isaiah 11:1-3 and in CCC#1831.  
“The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.  
And He will delight in the fear of the LORD.”(Isaiah 11:2-3)

# Call to Holiness and Mission:

## Personal Call to Holiness:

- Prayer (interior life) and Sacramental life
- Catechesis
- Moral commitment and formation
- Allow the Lord to test you: Example of Three Hunters or Boot Camp

## Call to Mission/Service

- **Stewardship:**  
I Corinthians 6:19-20: My life is sacred. I am not my own.
- **State in Life as Mission:**  
To which state in life is the Lord calling me to fulfill my Motherhood/Fatherhood? Is it to priesthood? Consecrated life? Marriage or dedicated single life?
- **Career as Mission:**  
What is God's Call and Mission for my career?

## **Prayer of John Henry Cardinal Newman**

God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission - I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. I shall do good, I shall do His work. Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am. I cannot be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me - still He knows what He is about.

# 4 C's of Discernment

## Call:

1. Psalm 139—Who better to guide us than the Designer?
2. Call to Holiness: Image of God and the Chalice analogy. Do you see yourself and your life as Sacred or merely ordinary. The way you answer this will determine much of your behavior.
3. Call to State in Life: Marriage, Single, Priest, Consecrated Life. How do you know that what you want is what God created you for? How will you choose? Your happiness and that of many people is at stake.
4. Call to Career: God has created you for a mission in life. He wants your life to make a difference for those people he will send you to serve. How do you make your decisions regarding your career? If God called the people in the Bible, doesn't he want to call people today? Will you let him call and send you?

## Choice:

1. "Who do you say that I am?" As C.S. Lewis wrote, Jesus didn't claim to be a just a good guy. He claimed to be God. Therefore he is either Lord, Liar, or Lunatic. If you say he is Lord you cannot keep him at a distance.
2. We are not masters but stewards of our life. I Corinthians 6.19+, John 15, Romans 14.7-9.
3. *Analogy of the Gift and Giver*: In your life how do you show your love to the Giver?
4. How can you let God choose the direction your life takes? Why is this so difficult?
5. *Analogy of the Eagle and the Wolf*. We become that which we choose.
6. Ever think of praying for your future spouse. Why would this be a good idea? There are couples who pray with the person they date. Why would this be good? Or not good? Think about writing a letter to your future spouse each year making a commitment to them and then show them the letters when you marry.
7. Will you choose an easy life or a life which will make a difference? Example of my father's saying, "*Ask God for the grace to do something difficult with your life for Him and for others.*" Is this worth it? Why are we attracted to this? Why do we admire the people who do this?

## Commitment:

1. What are you willing to sacrifice in order to find the treasure which is your call and mission?
2. *Analogy of the 3 hunters*: Do you want to be a lucky pray-er or a good prayer?
3. *Analogy of boot camp*: Do you want to have a good time or be trained?
4. *Analogy of the front line*: Is the battle worth fight for? Don't stay in the barracks.
5. *Analogy of the Varsity vs. J.V.*: When life comes at you with Varsity force will you be at the J.V. or Varsity level in your life?
6. What is your Plan? Saints are by choice, not by chance.
  - a. Spiritual Plan
  - b. Moral Plan
  - c. Be ready to be tested

## Church:

1. We need a guide: Would you climb Mount Everest without a guide? How about getting to Heaven without a guide? Not a good idea. What does St. Paul say about the Church in I Timothy 3.15?
2. If Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride, then you stay close to Christ by staying close to the Church through living in communion with the teachings of the Church passed down through the Popes and Bishops, and the Scriptures.
3. Mass and Sacraments, Prayer and Rosary are a sure means for guidance.

# Living a Purpose-Driven Life

## Foundation Principles for Discernment:

*Scripture and the Lives of Saints testify that a call and vocation do not come from us but from the Lord. "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..." (John 15.16). How can we cooperate with this Divine Initiative in our life? Here are some guiding principles which can help you in your discernment of God's Call and Purpose for your life:*

1. Prayer and interior life lead us closer to Christ and the Church:
  - a. The interior life is absolutely essential if we are going to discover the Lord's vocation in our life. In a life of prayer we come to realize that we are created in God's image and are loved by Him. Prayer leads us to an ever deepening friendship and intimacy with the Lord. When we see our lives as sacred, we understand that we are not masters of our life but stewards who give our life back to Him in a spirit of gratitude. In I Corinthians 6.19-20, St. Paul speaks of how we are temples of the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Advice from spiritual director when I entered the seminary: "You will find your vocation in the Blessed Sacrament chapel." It may take hundreds of hours but the life of prayer nurtures our relationship with the Lord and develops an intimacy such that when the time is right, He will reveal to each of us our vocation. This involves a prayer which is an open conversation with the Lord and is able to express our deepest concerns, questions, and desires.
  - c. Intimacy with the Lord in prayer leads to a deeper love for the Church as the Body of Christ and as the Bride of Christ. By drawing closer to the Bride we come closer to the Bridegroom. The Mass is the renewal of our Covenant with the Lord and all Sacraments become personal encounters with Christ and His Body, the Church. Through the Church we are instruments of God's grace to one another through prayer and service.
  - d. Devotion to Our Lady. Throughout Catholic history a devotion to the Blessed Mother has been a most powerful means of growing in holiness and remaining strong in our Catholic Faith. Father John Hardon S.J. advised me before ordination to pray one rosary every day just for myself, so that I would be faithful in my vocation as a priest. If a full rosary is too much, then pray one decade a day for your vocation.
2. Trust in God: All the spiritual masters speak about one of the starting points in the spiritual life is that we do not have overconfidence in ourselves, but in God.
  - a. John of the Cross spoke of how we are "nada" compared to God and yet he is able to transform our "nada" into his work if we allow ourselves to be clay in his hands.
  - b. Mother Teresa: She was so aware of how the Lord was able to work through our littleness. She would say as she pounded her chest, "Look what God can do with nothing."
  - c. Therese the Little Flower (St. Therese of Lisieux) and her Little Way.
  - d. Father Benedict Groeschel spoke before his accident that in the spiritual life the Lord starts us out in the shallow water. Little by little he takes us into deeper waters asking all the while that we learn to trust in him. Father said that as we mature through the stages of the spiritual life, the water gets deeper until we are almost always in water over our head and yet we are able to be at peace because we have learned to trust in the Lord.
3. The importance of ongoing conversion for healing and discipleship:
  - a. Conversion from sin: In order to have intimacy with the Lord we need to share with him our weaknesses and sins. Isn't it interesting that the greater the saint, the more they regard Confession as important in their life? By going through general confession(s) the Lord is able to help us heal from sins and wounds of the past. We are then better able to live in the present moment and to listen and follow the way the Lord is leading us in our vocation.
  - b. Conversion through discipline of our senses: Custody of the eyes, ears, imagination, moderation in eating—fasting and abstinence. If we are slaves to our senses and to pleasures obtained through them, we will not be able to have the self-mastery to hear the Lord's call and lead. Pornography is an example of an addiction, which destroys countless vocations in our society today. In all of this we are not disciplining ourselves so as to be more worthy for the Lord. Rather, we call upon the Lord and invite him into our lives so that it is his grace which is working in us and helping us to discipline our senses and convert closer to him. This is a subtle yet important distinction. We cannot make ourselves holy. It is the Lord who works His holiness in us.

- c. Conversion of life: As we learn to conform our moral choices to Christ and we grow in the life of virtue, then this gives us the courage to offer the Lord, not just part of our life, but our whole life. Thus, we gain the courage to seek the Lord in our vocational choices.
4. Learning our Faith and learning through the lives of the Saints: We cannot love what we do not know. We cannot love God if we do not know Him. What kind of spiritual reading do you do? There are so many materials available now in books and CD's. Allow the writings of the saints to show you how to listen to the Lord in your life. The saints teach that reading helps us to meditate, which helps us to pray, which helps us to contemplate.
5. Learning to wait in trust and never to give up the search: The best things in life take time. Many times people will go on a retreat and seriously seek God's call for them for a time and then when the dry times inevitably come, they give up and they never discover their vocation.
- a. In the story of the three hunters, the first hunter is so nervous in the woods, that he scares away the deer. The second hunter is so laid back that he sleep by a log and every now and then looks up. He misses the deer. The third hunter is vigilant and after seeing fresh tracks in the morning, spends all day searching and waiting. Not until the end of the day does he spot a buck in the distance and continues to wait another hour. Finally within range he takes the shot. To be a good hunter the person has to have vigilance, patience, and never give up. The hunter who gets the buck in the first minute of the season is a lucky hunter. The good hunter is the one who perseveres. Do you want to be a good pray-er or a lucky pray-er? If the Lord were to answer your prayers in the first little while after you pray, you will only be a lucky pray-er. The Lord will allow you to wait long periods in your life, not out of punishment, but because he is training you to be a good pray-er. (cf. *Spe Salvi*, #33)
- b. Think of the Magi who spent months and months seeking the Messiah. What if they would have quit half way into the journey? Three quarters? There is a treasure for each of us—a calling from the Lord. Don't give up until you discover the vocation God has for you.
6. Tests are good and necessary if we are to learn trust and discipleship:
- a. God doesn't cause but He does allow trials and even temptation in our lives in order to strengthen us. See Hebrews 12.7-8 and James 1.2-4.
- b. The analogy of Boot Camp: When a man joins the army, they don't have pizza parties for him for months until time for combat. They train him and take him to the limit so that he learns endurance and the skills necessary for combat. Then when he gets to the front line he will stay alive and will be able to protect the lives entrusted to his care. The Lord will allow tests in our life so that through his grace we will be strong and faithful and be able to protect the souls entrusted to our care.
- c. Traditionally, we speak of temptations coming from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The first two have their origin in our wounded human nature. The devil will try to wear good people down through busyness, distraction, persecution, pleasure, sensuality, fear, self condemnation, etc. (See Ephesians 6.10-20)
7. Learning the language God speaks:
- a. The Lord speaks his own language through consolations and by allowing desolations. He speaks to us through thoughts, feelings, and the deepest desires of our heart. As we learn to deepen in prayer the Lord will reveal Himself through these affective movements of the heart and will be able to guide us. Only through silence, prayer, listening, will we be able to hear him speak to us through the various levels of the heart. We can speak of the 3 Hearts (external, psychological, and spiritual).
- 1) Example of Mother Teresa from *Come, Be My Light*, p. 188.
- 2) *Spe Salvi*: Saint Augustine #29; Paul Le-Bao-Tinh (+1857) #37
- 3) The Ignatian Exercises are a reliable and proven method to learn how the Lord speaks to us through the desires and movements of the heart.
8. You need a Guide:
- a. "*Nemo est iudex in causa sua.*" ("*No one is a judge in his own case.*") The saints have always said that if you rely on yourself as your guide, you have a fool as your leader. Example: You would never climb Mount Everest alone without a guide. You would be a fool after a couple of weeks—dead. Heaven is infinitely higher than the highest mountain. How much greater the fool we would be if we try to get to Heaven without a guide. We have the teachings of the Church, Magisterium, Scriptures, Catechism, and the lives of the saints, etc. To whom do you hold yourself accountable? Whose moral code do you follow? What map do you follow?"

- b. If you are contemplating your call from God in your life it is important to have someone else as a guide. It could be five minutes in confession. It could be a person who is further down the road of life than you. If you are contemplating a call to the priesthood or religious life then it is essential that you seek a guide because there are so many ways people can fall off the road. Spiritual direction is not only necessary for those seeking a religious vocation; it is also one way to help people to stay faithful to their vocation as it holds them accountable and helps them continue to conform themselves regularly to the God who called them to their vocation.
9. “God doesn’t call the equipped. He equips the called.”
- a. Saint John Vianney was almost not ordained because of academic difficulties and yet because of his holiness, a railroad had to be built to accommodate the pilgrims who came to him for confession in Ars, France in the 1800’s.
- b. Saint Padre Pio had poor health. The Lord gave to him a share in His Passion through the Stigmata. It was because of his life of holiness that the Lord was able to do so many miracles through him.
- c. Mother Teresa would often say, “Look what God can do with nothing.”
10. Discern from the inside:
- a. If a man or woman feels called to marriage, he or she needs to date. You cannot find your vocation just looking in from the outside.
- b. If a person feels called possibly to the priesthood, he can only discern so much from the outside. If you feel the attraction but cannot get past a certain point, you may need to “date” the priesthood by visiting a seminary, making some retreats, and even entering the seminary to see if this is God’s call for you. The same goes for a woman seeking the possibility of religious life.
11. Aim High: Ask God for the grace to do something difficult for Him and for others. In finding our vocation we can learn a lesson from the front line: In preparing for battle the foot soldier doesn’t tell the commander where he will be in the front line. The commander tells the foot soldier where he is needed. Similarly, in our Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ. Therefore don’t stay in the barracks seeking an easy life. Don’t tell the Lord where you will go on the front line. Ask the Lord where he needs you and go wherever he tells you to go.
12. Have many children: Each of us is called to a spiritual fatherhood or motherhood. Priests and those in Consecrated Life are fathers and mothers. Parents give physical life and lead their children spiritually as mothers and fathers.

**“Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I shall follow You wherever You shall go in search of souls at any cost to myself and out of pure love for You.” --Mother Teresa**



## Stages in Discernment:

1. My life is Sacred—I am created in the Image of God (*Imago Dei*).
2. Call to Holiness—I am loved by God who calls me into a relationship as His son.
3. Stewardship: My life is not my own (I Corinthians 6:19-20).
4. God has a Call and Mission for me. To which state-in-life? Career? I choose to be open and to seek God's Call in my life.
5. Spiritual Direction: To whom am I accountable?
6. Healing through Conversion and Confession.
7. Healing through forgiveness and extending mercy to others.
8. Healing by confronting the wounds in my life. What are my deepest wounds? How do I open myself to God's desire to bring me healing?
9. Formation through Silence, Prayer, Lectio Divina, Adoration, Devotions.
10. Formation through learning the Language of God through affective movements of the heart: Consolation and Desolation.
11. Formation through Scripture, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Lives of Saints, Books on Spirituality and Theology.
12. Formation through Retreats and volunteer outreach.
13. Virtues: Developing habits of choosing well. We become what we practice.
14. Learning to Trust over Fear (Mark 4:35-41, Phil. 4:6-7).
15. Perseverance: Being able to search and wait.
16. Tests are necessary for growth in the spiritual life (James 1:2-4).
17. Self-offering: "Of my own free will, dear Jesus, I shall follow You wherever You shall go, in search of souls, at any cost to myself, and out of pure love for You." --Mother Teresa
18. God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called.
19. Each man is called to fatherhood and each woman is called to motherhood within the Church—to be fathers and mothers under the Father (i.e. submission). Is God calling you to fatherhood as a Catholic priest, religious, married or single man? Is God calling you to motherhood as a consecrated religious, married or single woman?
20. What is God calling you to do as your next step?
21. Could the Lord be calling you to the fatherhood of the priesthood? Could the Lord be calling you to the motherhood of consecrated life?

# Made for more! So Why Settle For Less?

Based on John Eldridge's book, *Wild at Heart*

So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well. Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. To satisfy the one who recruited him, a soldier does not become entangled in the business affairs of life. Similarly, an athlete cannot receive the winner's crown except by competing according to the rules. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David: such is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory. This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him (*II Timothy 2.1-12*).

Theme: In every person's life there is a battle to fight; an adventure to live; and a beauty to rescue.

A. In every life there is a BATTLE TO FIGHT.

1. Battle for Truth.
2. Battle to turn away from evil.
3. Battle to turn toward good/life of virtue.
  - a. Eagle and the Wolf analogy.
4. Battle to witness and defend the truth to others.
  - a. Be ready to take a stand on the moral topics of today and defend what is right.

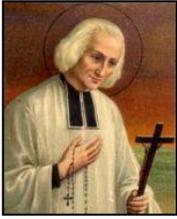
B. In every life there is an ADVENTURE TO LIVE.

1. How do you see life? Do you see it as something to endure or as a blessing?
  - a. See example of the "Stone-cutter vs. Cathedral builder."
2. Joy is not the absence of pain but the presence of God.
  - a. Don't tell God how big your problems are; tell your problems how big your God is.
  - b. There is no age so difficult that saints can't thrive.
3. The Holy Spirit will give us strength greater than ourselves and to have a peace and even joy in the midst of trials.
  - a. Example of Varsity vs. J.V.

C. In every life there is a BEAUTY TO RESCUE.

1. St. Francis of Assisi in his vision of the church in peril.
2. God gives to each of us people to care for. There are some persons who you can reach better than anyone else—at school, in your family, in your neighborhood.
3. "Don't ask God for an easy life. Ask God for the grace to do something difficult for Him and for others."
4. "This is My Body broken for you. Will you let your body be broken for me and for others today? This is My Blood poured out for you. Will you let your blood be poured out for Me and for others?" –Dorothy Day

"For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God," (*II Timothy 1.6-8*).



# St. John Vianney

## Model of Discipleship

Each of the Saints teach us through their lives how to give a deeper and more committed response to God's Call in our lives. St. John Vianney was born into a poor family during a difficult time in history in France. His life shows the truth of the saying, "There is no age so difficult that saints can't thrive." We live in an age of many challenges, distractions, contradictory values, and yet we live in an age of unbelievable opportunity to do good. We are Called By Name to serve the greatest cause. We are called to serve the greatest leader. We are called to serve within the family of the Catholic Church. What will be your response?

1. As a child, John Vianney learned faith from the heroic witness of his family and many others. At that period of time of the French Revolution it was forbidden to shelter a priest or attend Mass. Priests were put to death and families severely punished. For a number of years the Vianney family sheltered priests and John witnessed the courageous faith of priests, religious, and especially his family. **Who have been the heroic witnesses of Faith for me in my life? How has my family helped me grow in the Catholic faith?**
2. John had a focused desire to seek God's Call for him in his life. **Do I desire to seek God's Will for my own life? Can I trust that the God who created me and gave me life has a design, purpose, and mission for me? (Psalm 139)**
3. John did not blame God, others, or life for the handicaps or limitations which he had to endure. For example, being illiterate and not being able to study until he was an adult and for having to spend several years in the Service as a "deserter" because of situations beyond his control and misguided information. **Is there anyone I am holding a grudge against and need to forgive? Are there any bad experiences or memories that I am still dwelling on and need to let go of? Do I blame God or make excuses for the problems, tragedies, or damages done to me in my life?**
4. He understood his smallness and his greatness. Humility is not simply acknowledging one's smallness. Humility is a strength when it recognizes that we are totally unable to be holy or successful without God's grace, but with God's grace we can do things which far transcend our native abilities. John Vianney was even able to make a joke when someone called him an ass. His reply was "*Samson killed one hundred Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. What do you think God could do with a whole one?*" Another phrase comes from Mother Teresa who used to say, "*Look what God can do with nothing.*" **What are my strengths and talents from God? What are my weaknesses? How can God use my weaknesses for good?**
5. Perseverance: Great things happen one step at a time. When Father Vianney arrived to Ars, the level of the practice of the Faith was very weak. Father Vianney worked tirelessly and faithfully for a number of years before conversion happened. People resisted his call for conversion. They spread rumors about him that he was unfaithful as a priest. The diocese was called to investigate the priest. Father Vianney never gave up on the people nor his mission. **How do I react when people criticize me or make fun of me for living my faith? Anyone can be strong for a moment. The Lord is calling us to be Marathon runners, not just sprinters. In what areas does the Lord want to teach me perseverance through a deeper trust and hope?**
6. Fatherhood(motherhood): Every man is called to Fatherhood and every woman is called to Motherhood. We are called to lead others to the Fatherhood of God. Souls will be entrusted to our care. Father Vianney was very aware that he was a Spiritual Father to the people who came to him for the Sacraments. **What are the qualities of a good father or mother? How can I develop or grow in those qualities now? (For women)How can I as a woman imitate the Motherhood of Mary?**
7. Father Vianney had a special devotion to the Sacraments of the Eucharist. He would often speak of his love for Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and would spend much time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. **How much time do I spend praying before Jesus in the Eucharist? In addition to Sunday, is it possible for me to go to Mass during the week? How does the Eucharist lead me to a deeper encounter with the person of Jesus Christ?**
8. As a confessor St. John Vianney witnessed personally the power of God's healing mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He would spend 15-18 hours a day hearing confession. He understood the mercy and the love of God for sinners and spent his life being that instrument of God's mercy for the people he served. By the end of his life up to 300 people would come daily to his parish to see him or to confess. How do I encounter Jesus in this Sacrament of Reconciliation? **Are there any sins that I am holding back and need to confess? How often do I go to confession?**

## How does the Lord want to bring me to a deeper healing through this Sacrament?

9. Father Vianney had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother and to the saints. He regularly prayed the Rosary. A special saint for him was an early Roman martyr, St. Philomena. He was aware of the Communion we have with the saints through our prayers. **How can I grow in my devotion to Mary and the saints? What does it mean to really say I believe in the “Communion of Saints”? How can the intercession of the saints, this “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12.1) help me to live my Faith and discover my Vocation in the Church?**
10. Redemptive suffering: Colossians 1.24: *“I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”* St. John Vianney fasted and offered daily sacrifices in union with Christ for the conversion and salvation of his people. One of his prayers was, *“My God, my all, You see how I love You, and I do not love You enough. My God, You have given me all; behold the little that I give You. Give me the strength to give more. My God, here is all—take all; but convert my parish. If you do not convert it, it will be because I have not deserved it. My God, I count my merits as nothing, but Yours are infinite. May they win for me the grace of suffering. My God, I consent to suffer all that You may wish for all my life...for a hundred years...and the most bitter suffering, but convert them.”*(p.33-34). **What value can my sacrifices and suffering have for the good of others? How willing am I to make sacrifices or offer my sufferings as prayer for others? What is Jesus asking of me?**
11. St. John Vianney was a spiritual athlete. He lived a life of service giving himself completely to God. His prayerful asceticism had the effect of teaching him to be a disciplined disciple. Through God’s grace, he gained a self mastery over the temptations which are part of every person’s life. **We live in an age of self-indulgence and comfort. How do I practice self-control of food, drink, speech, etc? I will never learn self-mastery without training. In what ways is the Lord calling me to a deeper union with Him through the moral virtues, especially Temperance? Chastity?**
12. Father Vianney had to discern through what are true consolations(true good) and false consolations(apparent good). He thought for a long time that God was calling him to leave the parish for a life of prayer and contemplation. In fact, he learned over time that his real vocation was to remain in the parish ministry. The difficulty in discipleship is not just to reject sin, but to discern what is good, better, best, and to choose to do and to be the best for Christ. **The beauty of the saints is that they did not give God what was left over but gave Him their best. What is the best that I could give to God right now? In the future?**
13. Absolute trust in God’s Providence: At the Providence School for the poor children of his area, St. John Vianney was under-staffed, under-funded, and overcrowded. The needs always exceeded the resources; yet the good priest always had a childlike trust that the God who calls will also supply. Read the story about the corn on page 60 as just one example of this trust. **Do I tend to feel like all the weight and stress of my problems and of my future are on my shoulders and depend too much on myself? There is a saying, “I don’t know what my future holds, but I know Who holds my future.” How is the Lord calling me to place my trust more completely in Him?**
14. The power of evil over good: Father Vianney experienced harassment from the devil during the night. He experienced the power of evil and yet did not fear the devil and his machinations. Instead he would say after a difficult night that the devil was angry because the next a great sinner was preparing to come to confession; *“There will be a big fish tomorrow!”* **How often do I become afraid of the problems and challenges of life? How can I learn from St. John Vianney how to trust and hope even in the face of scandal and true evil?**
15. Father Vianney’s love for Jesus Christ overflowed into a mission of service to those in need whether they were members of the parish who needed visits or the children of the Providence School. **Who are the people in need in my family? Parish? School? Do I thirst like Mother Teresa to spend my life for others?**
16. We become who we are through the self-giving of others. Early in his life Father Bailey was a special inspiration for John Vianney. During his ministry there were many lay people who helped and supported Father Vianney to care for the children and the needs of the parish. Even the saints could not become saints without the help of others. **Who has been an inspiration in my life and a support? What difference do I want my life to make for others? What price am I willing to pay to be God’s instrument others?**
17. The Book of Sirach states, *“Call no one happy before his death; by how he ends, a person becomes known.”* St. John Vianney died as he lived spending his life for others in a spirit of prayer and deep faith, hope, and love. **A hundred years from now what will be important to me? What relationships will be most important? Who makes eternity with loved ones possible? What will I wish I had done with my life? What difference will I wish my life would have made for others? How do I live my life today directed to my final goal?**
18. What is the next step the Lord is asking me to take in my Call, Vocation, and Mission? St. John Vianney, pray for us!

# Promoting Vocations in Your Family:

1. Speak of Christ in the home: Speak often of Christ in terms that endear your children to him. Let his name be part of the family vocabulary. Talk about how your faith in Christ has impacted your life and led you to where you are today.
2. Carving out Family time together: In the midst of the busy schedules, when do you gather as a family? How many meals do you plan during the week to be together? How do you make those meal times a special time to be able to visit and to share? What are some family activities or hobbies you can do on the weekends? How is Sunday different than all other days in your family?
3. Pray for your children's vocation: Pray for your children and for whatever vocation God is calling them to, and teach them to do the same. The greatest and deepest wish of every parent for a child is that he or she discovers and does God's will for his or her life. This is your child's greatest guarantee of happiness, and your major concern. Prayer is necessary, since there will always be the tempting mirage of an easier way shimmering invitingly on the horizon for your child.
4. Pray as spouses for your children: Find a prayer that you can say as husband and wife asking the Lord to consecrate your family to him and to the mission he has for you. Some couples compose their own prayer and pray it regularly. If a couple can pray together the witness of united prayer speaks untold volumes to the children.
5. Pray with your children: Nighttime prayer is a natural time to teach prayer to children and to develop in them this important habit. When you pray the meal prayers, use a variety of prayers and prayer forms including spontaneous prayers from the heart. Teach them how to bring their concerns and needs to Jesus in prayer. They will learn only what you model for them. Write a family prayer which can be said regularly by the family when they pray. Use the liturgical seasons of the year to bring added prayer to your home such as during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter seasons.
6. Teach Bible Stories: Especially when the children are young introduce them to the hundreds of stories in the Bible. Begin with a children's Bible and give them Bibles through the years that correspond to their understanding of the Faith. Let the Bible stories be the means to be able to talk to your children about the virtues, right and wrong, life and death, etc.
7. Teach the Lives of the Saints: Help your children grow, according to their age, in their relationship with God and knowledge of their faith. The lives of the saints are a great source of inspiration for children—and adults. Celebrate the patron saint days of your children. Help them to know who their patron saints are and the virtues which marked their lives.
8. Teach Devotion to Mary: Many families pray a decade or the whole Rosary as part of their prayers at home. Teach your children how the Rosary is like a photo album of the life of Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles. By meditating on the Mysteries we come to reflect on the Mysteries of Jesus' Life and Mission and how he calls us to an ever deeper discipleship and mission with him in community with others.
9. Bless your children: A custom we had as children was to have our dad bless each of us children at night with holy water. He would make the sign of the Cross on our forehead with the words "*God bless you*" and then he would say our names. This ritual went on for many years. You will find this a wonderful way of integrating parental love and affection with spirituality. It would also be good to have a holy water font somewhere in the house where the children can bless themselves and be reminded of their baptism and commitment to Jesus.
10. Speak to your children openly about God's Call for them in their lives: Remind your children often that God has created them in his image and likeness. He loves them so much as his son or daughter. As our Creator he designed each of us for a purpose. Invite them to pray about God's Call for their career—what they are to do with their life as well as their state in life—whether God is calling them to Marriage, Single Life, Priesthood, or Consecrated Life. Teach them how to allow the Lord to make the Call in our lives.

11. Chastity formation: Speak to your children about developing a deep reverence for the way God has created us and our bodies. Teach them about God's plan for sexuality and for marriage and family. There are many resources available today. Jason and Crystaline Evert have many resources available in book form and online, <http://www.chastity.com> Christopher West has CD's and books for young adults and couples preparing for marriage. Many young people wear chastity rings and have a special service for this with their pastor. Let us know if you want more information on this. Speak with your young people about the challenges to chastity in today's world. Take the time to be formed so that you can help the young to be formed. Chastity is the front line for young people. If they get chastity right—they get dating right—then they will get marriage right—then they will get family right—then all vocations will prosper. Ideas: dating prayers, writing a letter to future spouse.
12. Adult faith formation: If we are thirty years old but have a faith knowledge at the sixteen year old level, we cannot witness a living faith to our children. What spiritual reading do you do on a regular basis? Books? Periodicals? Diocesan *Catholic Times*? What is your strategy for personal formation for yourself and your spouse? As you develop yourself in your faith, you are better equipped to be a spiritual model and leader to influence the faith formation in your family?
13. Enthroned your family and home to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. By having a picture or statue of the Sacred Heart in your home you witness your faith to those who come to visit, but more than that you are reminded as a family that Jesus is the center of your family. It is common for families to have pictures of family members displayed in their homes. The same should be true about our spiritual family. Place a crucifix in the rooms. Have several statues of the Blessed Mother and the saints throughout the house. Give sacramentals and statues as gifts to your children to mark special occasions.
14. Teach your children to love the Mass: I cannot remember a time in which my parents purposely missed Mass. This witness impressed upon me that how essential it is to come every Sunday to receive Jesus who said, *"Unless you eat my Body and drink my Blood, you have no life in you."* Even if you are on vacation, especially when you are on vacation take your children to Mass. Dorothy Day, who served the poor in this country for forty-five years used to say that at Mass during the Consecration it was as if the Lord was saying to her, *"This is My Body broken for you. Will you let your body be broken for Me and for others today?"* At the Consecration of the wine it was as if he said, *"This is My Blood poured out for you. Will you let your blood be poured out for Me and for others today?"* If we understood the Mass from this perspective, would we ever miss? Or could we ever say it is boring?
15. Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament: I was advised by Father Burke when I entered seminary that I would find my vocation in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. Mother Teresa taught her sisters to pray before the Blessed Sacrament three hours a day so that, once filled with Christ's presence, they would bring Christ's presence to others. Our lives are so full of busyness and distraction. Model and teach your young people to listen to the Lord in prayer. Find time to make Holy Hours and to encourage your children to make visits and to spend time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Come to Mass early with the family each week and let the time before Mass be a quiet time with the Lord.
16. Teach your children the importance of conversion through regular Confession: If a person cannot apologize, it will be very difficult to grow in friendship or intimacy with others. Similarly, if we do not learn how to reconcile ourselves with God through the Sacrament of Penance (Confession), there is a level of intimacy with the Lord which we will not attain. Model for your children the need for this Sacrament by your own practice.
17. Pay special attention to the use of media in the home: How much television is watched in your family? How do you balance time with the media and time with your family? How do you shape the way media is used in your home rather than be shaped by the media? What programs do you watch as a family? How do you help your children to critique the values they are being exposed to? How do you monitor the use of the computer and internet? Internet pornography tragically is becoming epidemic among people of all ages. Spiritually, it divides their hearts and they cannot grow in prayer or friendship with the Lord thus making it impossible to discern one's vocation in life. The media is a double-edged sword. It can either help or hinder spiritual growth in your family. Don't leave its effect to chance. Talk about it, strategize and then carry out your plan.
18. Write a letter or card to each of your children at least once a year at a special occasion in which you share with them your unconditional love and also share something of your faith and your prayer that they continue to listen

to and follow God's call for them in their life.

19. Aim High: My father asked me in high school not to simply seek an easy life. He said, "*Don't ask God for an easy life. Ask God for the Grace to do something difficult with your life for him and for others.*"
20. Camps and Retreats: As your children get into middle school, introduce them to camps and retreats. Young people need more and more integration of faith with experience within a faith community. In our Diocese we have the Adventure Camp and so many other retreats and rallies for every age group. These experiences help the young people to move beyond the family and parish experience of Church and to grow in their awareness that we are a universal Catholic Church.
21. Enable participation in outreach, service, or missionary work: This participation is very important for young people. It is here that they will see how much Christ and the Church call them to move beyond themselves to serve the needs of others. They will begin to understand how much they have received and how much they are being called upon to give in return. This can include visiting the elderly in nursing homes or helping aged relatives or neighbors. Later this can include mission trips to soup kitchens or other missions.
22. All states in life are essential to the life of the Church: All vocations begin with the family. There can be no priests or religious without families. Sacraments are essential for the spiritual life of the family. Without priesthood, there is neither Eucharist nor Confession. Every man is called to fatherhood and every woman is called to motherhood. Celibates are not spiritual bachelors or bachelorettes. Ask your pastor to speak about his spiritual fatherhood. Ask a religious sister to speak about her spiritual motherhood. Learn more about brothers, deacons, and the single life as a life of mission and service.
23. Don't push, but don't be silent: Do not push priesthood or consecrated life on your children, but don't be silent either. Answer questions and at times, bring them up yourself and raise possibilities, but do so always with a sense of freedom and love. Talk openly and support the possibility of your child choosing to be a priest or sister. Look for opportunities for your children to visit a seminary or convent. They can only learn to love that which they know.
24. Speak positively about bishops, priests, and consecrated persons: Your respect for those in the Church will witness to your children the need to respect those dedicated to God's service and to the spiritual mission of the Church. We live in an era of anti-authority. Showing respect to those whom God has given to guide us in the Church will go a long way to teach your children how to respect your own parental authority, as well as to teach them how to place themselves under the mission of God in their lives.
25. Have a well-rounded concept of the education of your children: Do not neglect the formation of character, self-discipline, human virtues, perseverance, and physical health. You are creating the fertile ground for God to act. Besides faith, you will want your children to have the strength of character to be able to do what might be difficult, to overcome peer pressure, and to be faithful to what is right.
26. Develop the minds and the sense of beauty and joy in your children: This includes, but is not limited to, the knowledge of the *Catechism*. Help children develop their critical sense, awareness of objective truth, and appreciation for music and the arts.

Christ asks you to be a holy parent, not necessarily a perfect parent. Seek to sanctify your spouse and children by your loving and nurturing—God will do the rest. Trials will inevitably occur within your family. You preach your most powerful sermons during times of difficulty. The saints have said that a holy family is a struggling family. When the Apostles were in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told them not to be afraid. If we have Jesus in our boat—home life—he will get us through. Your witness of trust in those times will speak a thousand words.

*"...The modern world boasts of the enticing door which says: everything is permitted. It ignores the narrow gate of discernment and renunciation. I am speaking to especially you, young Christians.... Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but go to the heart of things! And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands."* **--Pope John Paul II**

Father Paul Hoelsing from the Archdiocese of Omaha shares the following discussion starters for young people to speak about the priesthood:

**Example One:**

I'm fond of framing the vocations talks in the church (where groups often gather) in nuptial terms. Ladies sit on the bride's side. Guys with the St. Joseph side...

Then we imagine a wedding day...the vows, the silence, the tears (and ask "why the tears")  
Teens understand tears of joy, then move into the choice of God for any man for priesthood, and any woman for consecration...

The joy and majesty of being chosen out of love seems to provide much clarity and answer many of the celibacy questions, implicitly and explicitly.

**Example Two:**

Leatherneck Magazine (1968 and 1969)...they are my father's from his tour in Vietnam.

The back pages have the medals awarded for that month's issue.

Every issue posthumously recalls the story(s) of bravery (with a photo of the young man) that earned the Medal of Honor.

I read these stories as a teen, and they moved me deeply.

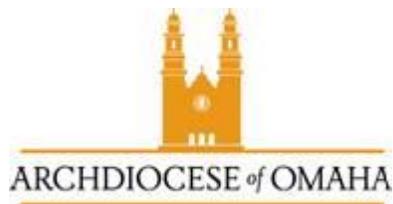
Often, these men fell on grenades or stormed hills.

It's great to read those stories aloud.

Guys want to give themselves...

They "get" that desire...to lay down one's life for one's friend.

It's a good starting point for young men.



**Reverend Paul C. Hoelsing, S.T.L.**

Director of Vocations

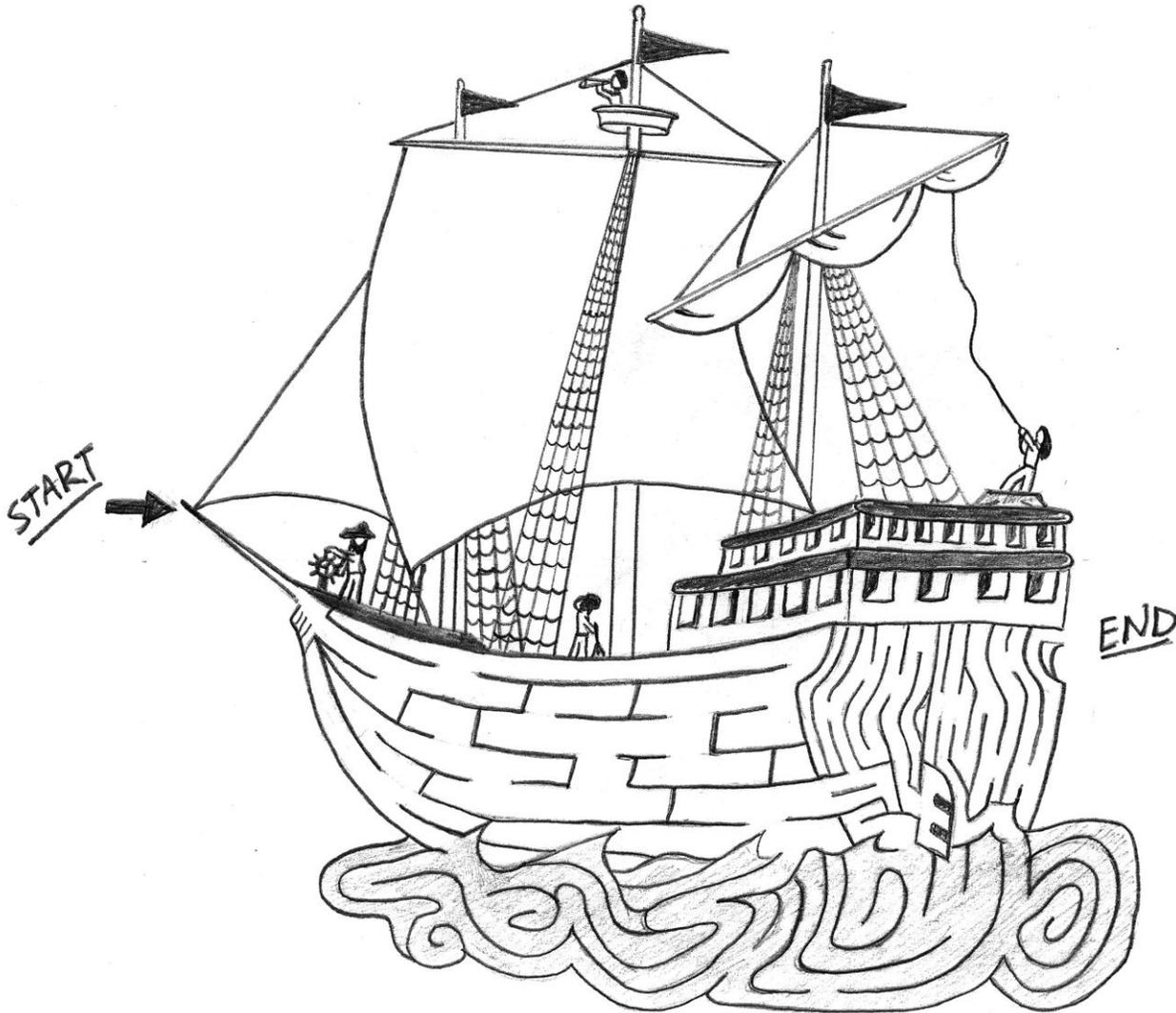
100 N. 62nd St.

Omaha, NE 68132

The following lessons from the Office of Vocations in Syracuse, New York help primary grades to understand that a call to a vocation takes time and involves searching out Jesus' plan for you.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

## The Calling of the First Disciples



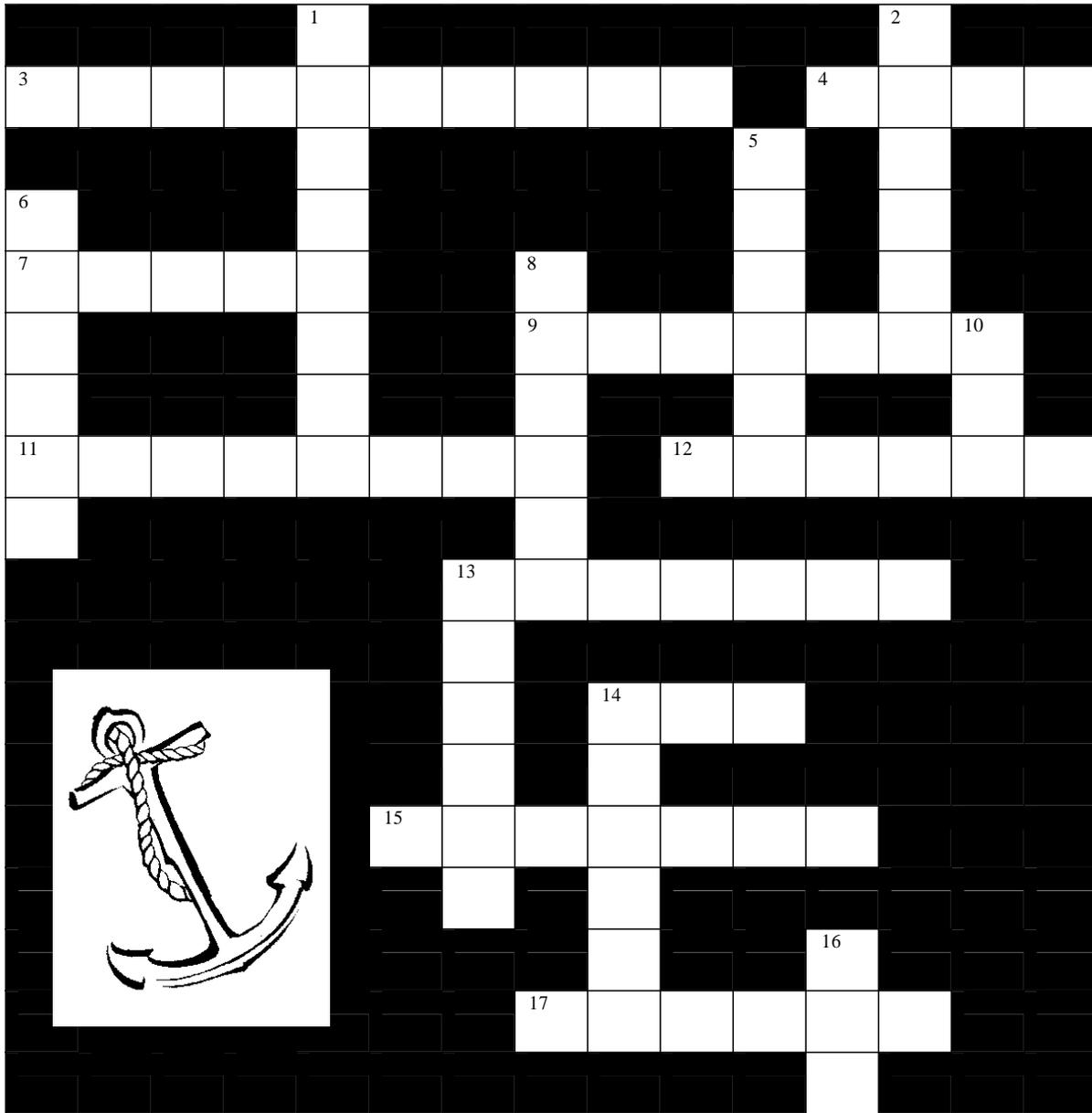
**Matthew 4:18-22**

### **Children's Vocation Prayer**

Dear Jesus, guide me to my vocation.  
Help me to find my special place in the world.  
And help me to say YES to you with love. Amen.

For videos, stories, and more, visit: [www.vocations-syracuse.org](http://www.vocations-syracuse.org)

## Vocations Crossword Puzzle



### ACROSS

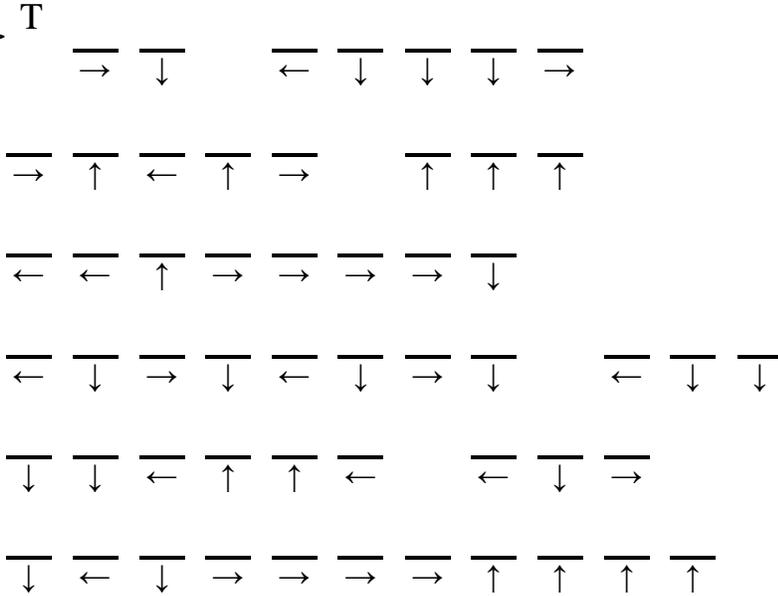
3. the sacrament that makes a man a priest
4. what you hear if you have a vocation
7. what a Religious Sister, Brother, or Priest may wear
9. where a priest lives
11. where a man goes to study to become a priest
12. he has the power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ
13. a man who is part of a religious community
14. a woman who gives her life to God in a Cloister
15. where a Religious Sister may live
17. he is ordained to serve; he can preach and baptize

### DOWN

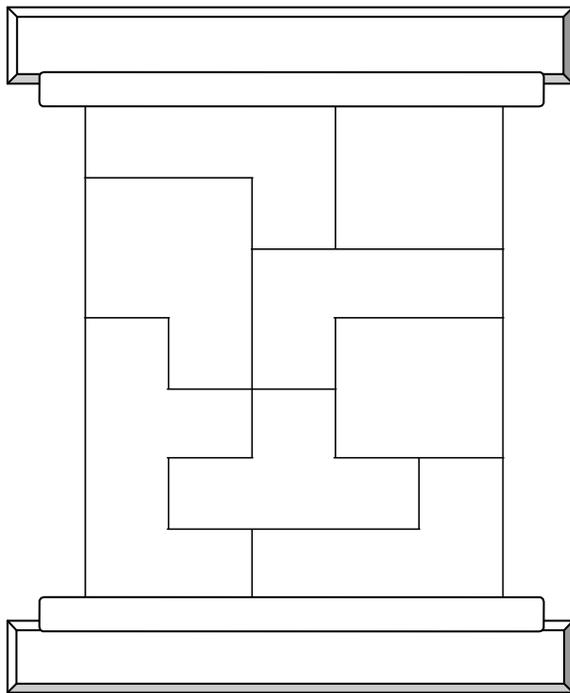
1. a call from God to follow a special way of life
2. what we call a priest
5. what we call a woman in a Religious Community
6. at ordination the priest is anointed with this
8. a conversation with God
10. what we should say when God calls us
13. he celebrates the sacrament of Holy Orders
14. a woman beginning membership in a religious community
16. public promise made to God

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Living Stones (1 Peter 2:4-7)



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U	B	E	R	S
T	H	H	E	J
S	E	T	C	E
T	C	H	T	E
O	I	H	H	D
N	E	W	A	E
T	E	M	S	N
H	E	O	B	O
O	C	C	E	T
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**Build a firm foundation for your future vocation.**

For videos, stories, and more, visit: [www.vocations-syracuse.org](http://www.vocations-syracuse.org)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Searching for Disciples



Find these disciples who left everything to follow Jesus:

ANDREW	JAMES	JOHN
MARY	LUKE	SALOME
MATTHEW	MARTHA	PETER
JOANNE	MARY MAGDALENE	THOMAS

**Jesus is still searching for disciples today!**

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*Sketches in Discernment: The Call to Holiness and to Priesthood*

