

Developing an Understanding of Vocation

One of the many topics addressed by the second Vatican Council (1962-65) was that of “vocation.” The word itself comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call.”

In Chapter 40 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, we read, “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples, regardless of their situation.”

(LG 40) By virtue of our Baptism, we are all called to holiness. We can be faithful disciples and holy people whatever our particular vocation.

There are those who are invited by God to become holy as lay persons. “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.” (LG 31)

Lay people may be called to the married life. They witness to Jesus through their faithful love for each other and through their contributions to society. Married people may be gifted by God with children and become holy even as they form their children in holiness.

Lay people may be called to the single life. They grow in holiness through their loving relationships with family and friends and through their witness to gospel values in their work. God calls some men and women to become holy through living the vowed life in religious communities. “Religious life derives from the mystery of the Church. It is a gift she has received from her Lord, a gift she offers as a stable way of life to the faithful called by God to profess the counsels.” (CCC 926) Religious who vow a life of poverty, chastity and obedience serve the Church and the world in many ways. These sisters, brothers, and religious priests grow in holiness through a life lived in service and prayer.

God calls some men to the ordained priesthood. “Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time.” (CCC, 1536) The priest represents Christ and teaches, governs, and sanctifies in his name. The priest grows in holiness as he cares for the Church, the Body of Christ, and is an example of service and compassion.

God may call us to become holy by any path he chooses. How can we know what God is calling us to be and to do? We can hear God in prayer, certainly through the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments. We can hear God when we reflect on the gifts and talents he has given us which may point to a certain vocation. We can hear God in the wisdom of people of faith who advise and encourage us.

Whatever way we follow Jesus, we are called to holiness—and a life of love. “Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it’s a universe of its own, comprising all time and space—it’s eternal!” (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, CCC 826)

WAYS TO IMPLEMENT

In Class

Make a class poster with a photo of each student and the message “What vocation is God calling me to?” Encourage the students to pray about their vocation and to listen for the ways God is calling them.

At Home

Invite a priest, deacon, religious sister or brother to visit your home. Encourage the children to ask your guest about the ways he or she prepared for their vocation when he or she was young. If you can’t arrange a visit, write a letter including your children’s questions and asking for a response.

Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, from the Vatican II Documents.

Lucy Kaylin, *For the Love of God: The Faith and Future of the American Nun*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000.

Kevin and Marilyn Ryan, ed., *Why I Am Still A Catholic*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.