

## Accompany, Educate, Form

Teachers are key players in the pastoral plan for vocations promulgated by the United States and Canadian bishops. In all five action items in the pastoral plan, you can have a high-impact role.

The first priority is **prayer**. Vocations begin with God. Through human interactions and interaction with God in prayer, people discover their vocations. In your classroom, are you and your students part of a community of prayer and learning? In your own prayer life, do you pray for your students?

**Evangelization** encompasses teaching and challenging students to personal growth. Do you affirm student development in academics, as well as personal characteristics such as leadership, generosity, and respect for the dignity of all people?

Young people tend to be concrete thinkers. **Experience** is important. In your classroom, do students experience a sense of community in working together and helping one another?

**Mentorship** is also an action priority. You chose a career in education; you are either married or single; you can name the influential people in your life. By using your firsthand experience, you can serve as a role model for students as they begin to identify their future direction.

The fifth priority is **invitation**. Do you invite your co-workers to respond generously in helping students to grow academically and personally? Do you invite students to explore options including ministry?

This teachers' guide is meant to give you basic information and answers to FAQ's about vocations. Depending on the student's question, you may find the answer at a glance. If not, the resource section below offers assistance. By encouraging students to approach life choices using head, heart, and soul, you will help them find ways to use their gifts to help build a better world.

## Resources

**Vocations Directors:** Vocations directors serve as speakers and meeting facilitators, provide information, answer questions, and assist individuals in discernment. They are committed women and men who find joy in helping others to discover God's path for their life. The work of the Vocation Director is a sacred work. Should teachers need any assistance in answering the questions of their students, or in contacting vocation directors in our diocese, do not hesitate to call Sister Rosemary Ann at 518-674-3818.

## The Teacher Who Encourages Vocations

Studies have shown how important a vote of confidence and encouragement is to the students in a teacher's care. This is true in all areas of academic life and most especially, it is true when students are old enough to understand that they have been created by God for a specific primary vocation in life: marriage, priesthood, diaconate, religious life or dedicated single life. Above all, teachers know the age-appropriate ways of teaching vocation awareness. They have a tremendous opportunity to instill an enthusiastic openness to God's call within the hearts and minds of our children, adolescents and young adults in college. Just as we would encourage the scientific or mathematical ability of a student, so too, teachers have the unique privilege of seeking out and calling forth those who have the gifts of leadership for our church.

## Theology of Vocation

Without skipping a beat, our society has chosen to downplay the call to **ALL** primary vocations. Seldom do people offer **ALL** of the options open to the person regarding his or her life. A thorough education is a treasured gift. Thoroughness in presenting **ALL** of the choices to students regarding their primary vocation is fundamental in helping them to eventually make a mature and conscientious decision. A teacher is instrumental in the formation of many of the values and attitudes of those in the classroom. When a teacher encourages students to pray and be open to God's plan for their lives, the seeds of authentic discernment are sown. All of the primary vocations are holy. All are a gift from God. Some are called to priesthood, diaconate or religious life. Many are called to marriage. And some are called to the generous and dedicated single life. So the question is not *if*, but *how* are we called? Some are called to give their lives to our Lord as priests, deacons, religious brothers or sisters. What a wonderful thing to encourage in your classroom!

## Top Ten Ways to Discern Your Call

1. Pray. Ask God to show you what God needs you to do with your life. Make a list of all the reasons it would be a good idea for you to become a priest, deacon or religious. Then make a list of all the reasons to be married or remain single. Bring them before God in prayer and listen.
2. Imagine yourself 5 to 10 years from now. Do you want to continue in life as you are now? Imagine yourself as a priest or religious ten years from now.
3. Fantasize by going through an entire day in your future as a priest or religious. Visualize yourself being what you imagine a priest or religious sister or brother to be. Notice how your gut reacts to this exercise.
4. What is usually the most life-giving part of your week? What brings you a deep sense of joy? What does that say about you?
5. For one week, live as if you decided to enter the seminary or formation program. Notice how you felt. The following week live as if you decided to drop the church vocation question and dismiss it. What feelings are stirred within you?
6. Imagine Jesus looks you in the eye, calls you by your first name, and says, "What is it you really want?" Spend time with the question. Tell Jesus all you hope for in life. Then spend time listening to his response to your dreams.
7. What was the last major decision you made about your life? How did you come to that decision? Was it a good one? What can you learn from that experience about your vocation discernment?
8. What advice would you give someone in your shoes regarding a Church vocation?
9. Reflect on priests or religious who have been mentors for you. Which qualities would you like to imitate if you were called?
10. Do you have a tug in your heart towards the priesthood or religious life? Talk to a priest, sister or brother about it.

## Volume I

*As a teacher, you have the opportunity to give students knowledge and perspective, challenge and affirmation, ideas and feedback. We all have a vocation to use our gifts in service to others. Making a career and life choice involves intellectual, emotional and spiritual consideration. This guide is designed for teachers dedicated to helping students identify their future direction. The invitation to explore various vocation possibilities and the encouragement to follow God's dream for the student's life, is a gift that teachers can offer to those in their care. This guide is offered to teachers as to assist them in recognizing the qualities and gifts that the priesthood and religious life call forth from a person. Though the child's vocation is in seed form, ready to be nurtured through education and life experience, a teacher has the graced opportunity to seek out and encourage those who clearly have the necessary gifts and qualities.*

# The Role of

# Teachers in Identifying Vocations

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, N.Y. Vocations Office

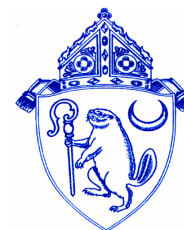


40 North Main Avenue  
Albany, N.Y. 12203

Email: [jjwalshie@aol.com](mailto:jjwalshie@aol.com) - 518-312-9397  
[rosemary.cuneo@rcda.org](mailto:rosemary.cuneo@rcda.org) - 518-674-3818

Website: [www.albanyvocations.org](http://www.albanyvocations.org)

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, N.Y. Vocations Office



[www.albanyvocations.org](http://www.albanyvocations.org)

# Definitions

**Brother:** A man becomes a religious when he professes vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. A brother chooses to love God who loved him first. Thus, everything the religious does and all that he is as a person is colored by the mutual love that exists between God and the religious. The religious works as an educator, in the medical profession or in any other occupation, which gives the opportunity to bring the love of God to others. The needs of the Church, of the religious community and of society, brought to daily personal prayer, often help the religious to know what kind of job will be right to do.

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

**Consecrated Life:** Priesthood and belonging to a religious community or secular institute are the most common forms of consecrated life. Vowed hermits and consecrated virgins are also included.

**Deacon:** Men at least 35 years old, married or single, may be ordained as deacons. Justice issues and advocacy for the poor are primary in a deacon’s ministry. Deacons assist and preach at liturgical celebrations. They may baptize, preside at marriages and funerals, and minister in other ways. They may have jobs outside the Church, in addition to serving as deacons.

**Discernment:** When talking about Church vocations, discernment means the process of discovering whether or not God calls a person to priesthood, religious life, or other ministry.

**Laity:** All the faithful, except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. The Laity share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

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

**Ministry:** *Service to the Church* and *ministry* mean the same thing. A ministry is something ongoing done to serve God and his people.

**Novice:** A man or woman in the first formal stage of joining a religious community is called a *novice*. This stage is the *novitiate* and usually takes one to two years.

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

**Priest:** A man is ordained to priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. An individual and the Church both discern (discover) whether or not a man is called to become a priest. Diocesan priests work mostly in parishes. Priests in religious life belong to communities with particular charisms. All priests celebrate Mass and the Sacraments. Diocesan priests promise celibate chastity, prayer for the Church and obedience to their bishop. They also choose to live a simple lifestyle.

**Religious Life:** Priests, brothers, or sisters in communities that embrace the spirituality and teachings of the community’s founder call their way of life *religious life*. An individual and the religious community both discern (discover) whether or not a person is called to become a religious. Members of these communities take vows of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience.

**Religious Community:** The founder of a religious community brings together a group of men or women dedicated to the same charism (mission). There are religious communities of priests and

brothers, and communities of sisters. They may also have lay associates. Some religious communities are dedicated primarily to prayer, while others focus on apostolic (active) ministries.

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

**Sister:** A woman becomes a religious when she professes vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. A sister chooses to love God who loved her first. Thus, everything the religious does and all that she is as a person is colored by the mutual love that exists between God and the religious. The religious works as an educator, in the medical profession or in any other occupation, which gives the opportunity to bring the love of God to others. The needs of the Church, of the religious community and of society, brought to daily personal prayer, often help the religious to know what kind of job will be right to do.

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

**Vows:** Formal promises of poverty, celibate chastity, and obedience made by members of religious communities are called vows. The vow of poverty is a promise to live a simple life, without many things that consumerism tells us is “necessary.” The vow of chastity is the promise to live as a consecrated person with others in community, choosing not to enter into marriage or to have sexual relationships with anyone. When vowing obedience, the religious seeks to accomplish God’s will in the context of Scripture, the Church, and the community.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Life-style

**Can a person who has some sexual experience ever become a priest?**

Maybe, but most dioceses and religious communities will require at least two years of celibate chastity (no sexual relations) before acceptance into a formation program.

**Can a person who was married become a priest, religious brother, or sister?**

If a spouse has died or the marriage was annulled (determined to be invalid) by the Church, the marriage will not preclude ordination or acceptance into religious life.

**What happens if a person has a personal belief that goes against the institutional Church?**

Canonized saints have challenged the institutional Church. A spiritual director can help a person sort out the essential elements of a vocation.

## Priesthood

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

A diocesan priest commits himself to a specific geographical location (a diocese or archdiocese) and promises obedience to the bishop and bishop’s successors. Most diocesan priests live and minister in parishes. Some serve as chaplains, seminary faculty, canon lawyers, or in other special assignments.

A priest who belongs to a religious community commits himself to the spiritual practices and charism (mission) of the religious community, such as teaching, preaching, ministering to the poor, or missionary work. Members take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live as a community.

**Do priests get paid?**

Priests in religious communities may work in paid employment, but their earnings belong to the religious community. Diocesan priests keep their earnings and fringe benefits, and they pay taxes.

**How long does it take to become a diocesan priest?**

✚ 4-year college degree;

✚ 5-6 years in a seminary Program of Priestly Formation, including a Master of Divinity degree.

## Religious Life

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

✚ 2-4 years as a postulant and novice, living in a religious community and learning about it;

✚ 3-9 years of temporary vows, during which a person fully participates in the religious community;

✚ Permanent vows (a lifetime commitment to religious life), after which a seminary Program of Priestly Formation may be undertaken by religious brothers.

**How does a person choose among the many different religious communities?**

Each religious community has a spirituality and purpose. Members of all religious communities participate in daily prayer. Apostolic (active) religious communities focus on service. Contemplative communities focus on prayer.

## Deacons

**What does a deacon do?**

A deacon is an ordained minister of the Church. Deacons preach and assist at liturgical celebrations (but cannot consecrate the Eucharist), baptize, witness marriages, preside at funerals and burials, and distribute the Eucharist. Deacons do not hear confessions or anoint the sick. They are committed to serving the poor and marginalized.

**What are the basic requirements to become a deacon?**

Someone preparing to become a deacon must be active in the Church. He may be married or single and should be between the ages of 35 and 60 at the

time of ordination. He must complete an appropriate formation (preparation) program and serve in the ministries of lector and acolyte before ordination as a deacon.

## Options

**How does a person choose which seminary to attend?**

Diocesan priests make a commitment to serve a particular diocese and attend the seminary to which their bishop sends them. Those in a religious community’s formation program discuss seminaries with a director from the religious community. In the Albany Diocese, people preparing to become deacons attend *St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry* as well as participate in the diaconate formation program of the diocese. Those preparing to become lay ministers in the diocese attend *St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry*.

**What if the thought of making a permanent commitment seems scary?**

The thought of any big commitment may evoke some fear. Formation programs in seminaries and religious communities and for diaconate provide time and space to discern God’s call before making a lifetime commitment.

**What other choices are there besides being a priest or religious sister or brother?**

The lay person may become an Associate Member of a religious community. In this way, the person lives the spirit and mission of the religious community while remaining a single or married person. The Associate Member does not take religious vows of chastity, poverty or obedience, but often makes promises to live chastely and simply and to strive to know and do God’s will in the circumstances of married or single life. A lay person may serve in a variety of ministries, such as parish administration, music ministry, the ministry of teaching in Catholic Schools or religious education programs, youth ministry or lay missionary work.