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Introducing Chapter 2: God's Plan for Your Life: Single Life, Consecrated Life, Marriage, and Holy Orders

In the corner of the room, a spider treads a tender tightrope. Outside, a bee flits from flower to flower. The spider knows that it must spin. The bee knows that it must gather nectar. Neither asks, "Why am I here?" or "What am I to do?" Those questions belong to us, to human beings. We have others as well: "Where am I going?" "What's there to live for?" "What's worth dying for?" There are no easy answers.

We seek a plan. We want to plot a course that's meaningful and true. We search for a way through life's obstacles and into life's mysteries. As people of faith we strive to discover God's plan for us, to hear clearly the divine call. In our seeking, we learn an extraordinary truth: God's plan for us is no imposition but the way of our own welfare. To follow God does not diminish personality. It enhances it, opening life to blessing and ultimate holiness.

In this chapter the students seek to discern God's will for them. They begin to recognize that this is a life-long journey that implies openness: to get in touch with their fears, concerns, and gifts; to listen to God's word for them even when it is hard to accept; to tear down barriers that prevent them from hearing God's call; and to confront past failures with hope for the future.

The students learn centering prayer and begin to realize that often it is better to shut up and let the Spirit be our spokesperson, for the Spirit knows our needs better than we do. They begin to recognize that perhaps it's best to become a wind instrument, empty of all sound and impediment, and just let the heart receive the music when it comes. Such prayer is a hard but healthy exercise. And it leads to discernment.

Discernment helps us distinguish God's voice and the promptings of divine love from the tug of unmet needs and fears, the cravings of personal desires,

chapter outline

♦ Finding a Calling

Finding a calling is much more than determining a career or profession. It involves determining a God-given vocation.

♦ Journeying to Perfection

God's providence directs us to perfection that will not be reached until the fullness of the kingdom is revealed.

♦ Discernment through the Ways of Prayer

A discernment process helps us to prayerfully consider the many available vocational options in life.

♦ Exploring Christian Vocations

The sacraments of initiation and the sacraments at the service of communion frame an understanding of the Christian vocations.

♦ Christian Discipleship: Serve One Another

We must put aside our personal desires to follow God's will.

Chapter Outline

- Finding a Calling
- Journeying to Perfection
- Discernment through the Ways of Prayer
- Exploring Christian Vocations
- Christian Discipleship: Serve One Another

Chapter Objectives

The students will be able to:

- understand the differences between a career, profession, and a vocation
- realize that perfection will only come in the fullness of time
- learn a method for discerning major life decisions
- name some specific Christian vocations.



chapter two



God's Plan for Your Life: Single Life, Consecrated Life, Marriage, and Holy Orders

You open wide your hand and satisfy
the desire of every living thing.

You, Lord, are just in all your ways, faithful in
all your works.

You, Lord, are near to all who call upon you, to
all who call upon you in truth.

Psalms 145:18-18

the legitimate attractions and pleasures of created goods, the weight of our own rationalizations, and our overwhelming urge to go-it-alone. Discernment can also lead to vocation realized and lived to the full, love purified, joy relayed, peace made, forgiveness imparted, sufferings accepted, and beauty conveyed—the sweetest music in life's polyphony.

Would you buy a suit without trying it on? Purchase a car without a test drive? Never. That's why this chapter also invites the students to investigate—"try on" or "test drive," if you will—a number of Christian vocations: the single life, the consecrated life, married life, and ordained life. It does not ask the students to make instant decisions with regard to a vocation, but it does demand that they know about these possibilities and ponder them in their hearts as well as their heads.

Finally, the students gain a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a disciple of Christ: putting aside personal craving so that God's will may be done; accepting suffering when it comes our way—even suffering leading to death; and reaching out in service to others. These are the steps to the kingdom.

Advance Preparations

- Review resources for materials you may wish to provide for the students' use.
- Make copies of the handouts needed for these sessions.
- *Optional:* Arrange to have recordings of "I Have Loved you" by Michael Joncas or "The Servant Song" by Richard Gilliard and a player available for use in this chapter's prayer service.

Finding a Calling

Bell-Ringers

- Re-teach:** Use the Chapter 1 objectives to review the main content of the chapter. Also, review the students' copies of the graded Chapter 1 Test. Take a moment to go through it with them and answer any questions they may have.
- Write the following quote from Goethe on the board: **"Whatever you do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."** Distribute card stock and markers. Invite the students to imagine themselves ten years from now. Tell them to create a "business card" for themselves that notes their name, marital status, where they live, and who they've become. Don't give the students any further information. Mention, however, that they may add anything else—words or pictures/symbols—they want to their cards. Allow about ten minutes for this activity. Afterward, have the students post their finished cards on a bulletin board.
- You will return to the card display later; for now, simply read a few of the



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MANAGING AND BELLY BUZZES

★ Finding a Calling

Perhaps on the far reaches of your life's radar screen you have begun to think about what profession you might like to work in when you are older and

None of the reasons above is better than another. Certainly, personal interest and aptitude will have a major influence on which area you eventually choose as a college major. Likewise, selecting a major to help prepare you for a profession or graduate school is a very typical practice.



finished with school. More likely, you probably haven't even gotten that far in the midst of keeping up with your high school classes, an after school job, athletics, and your social life. As far as future planning, you may have only just begun exploring college choices and filling out college applications. If so, when you get to the section that asks you to list a college major, what will you do? Which one of the following statements best represents how you will respond?

Equally common are students who begin college as "undeclared majors" and others who quickly determine their original major is not suited for them.

Choosing a college major that leads to a profession is an important decision that you may face shortly. However, it is really just one piece of the life puzzle that involves finding your calling.

"Finding a calling" is much different from "finding a profession." A profession is associated with a career. A career builds on the kinds of work you have aptitude for and like to do. Careers are different than jobs, whereas you may have several jobs in your lifetime, you may change careers a lot less frequently.

Today, many students enter college with the thought of preparing for a career. Decisions are made based on a

career
A chosen occupation that is more likely to express one's talents than a job.

- I will list a major based on a subject I like in high school.
- I will list a major that will prepare me for a future profession.
- I will list a major with the expectation that I am likely to change it.
- I will not list any major, as I have no idea at this time what I want to focus on.

Extending the Lesson

Print the following want ad on the board:

Wanted! Dedicated individual of any color, race, sex, or size to work hard to create a just, peaceful, and enjoyable planetary future. Must be a self-starter but also someone who enjoys working with others—a diversity of others. Long hours. Great benefits.

Refer the students to the "business cards" they created earlier in the lesson. Have them work in pairs to determine whether what they wrote jibes with the want ad. Encourage them to ask themselves if they need to make changes in their planning to respond positively to the ad.

Have the students search the Scripture for other examples of calls. Have them apply the "Characteristics Common to Vocations" to each one. For example, the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1–5), the call of Samuel (1 Sm 3:1 ff), and the call of the first Apostles (Mt 4:18–22).

For Enrichment

Just for fun, invite your students to find out what medieval career (e.g., minstrel, shepherd, knight, lady in waiting) they might have had by completing an Internet quiz by the authors of the business-management book *Kingdomality*. Have them check out www.cmi-lmi.com/kingdom.html.



professional approach; for example, making a list of advantages and disadvantages for a particular career. Their survey is a very rational one based on the probability for achieving success in areas like social importance, personal satisfaction, and income potential. The decision is also based on personal aptitude and skills as well as personal likes and dislikes. This means that you are unlikely to choose a career in medicine if you are doing poorly in sciences like biology and chemistry. Or, even if you do well in science, medicine might be a poor career choice if the sight of blood makes you squirm.

As we make these important decisions about our future professions,



there is another decision process we should be involved in. It involves choosing a course for life based on vocation. Recall that the word vocation is taken from the Latin word *vocare*, which translates "to call."

In Chapter 1, you learned that we all have a primary Christian vocation to love and serve God by loving and serving other people. The fulfillment of this vocation leads to Christian beatitude, or eternal happiness. There are some more specific ways Christians accomplish this vocation. The laity seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in daily, worldly tasks and directing these to God's will. For married people, this includes sharing love for each other and raising a Christian family. Priestly and religious vocations are dedicated to the service of the Church. Bishops and their helper priests are entrusted with teaching, sanctifying, and governing the Church in the name of Christ. Religious sisters, brothers, and priests live out their promises of chastity, poverty, and obedience and of engaging in missionary work as directed by their communities.

Chapter 2 introduces these particular Christian vocations and offers some more suggestions for discerning your own vocation. Part of the formula for determining your life's calling is easy to decipher: your "caller" remains the same God of the Old and New Testaments. Other parts of the formula may not be as clear. What is your special gift? Are you able to make a lifelong commitment to your special gift? How will sacrifice be a part of this vocation?

Remember: your vocation is much different than "having a job" or "choosing a career." The risks are greater. But so are the rewards.

Laity
All of the baptized faithful except those who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

cards aloud, pointing out the diversity among the cards and commenting on the thought and creativity that went into making them.



Teaching Approaches

1. Draw attention to the four statements regarding college majors on page 40. Read aloud. Have students who would choose the first statement to stand at the front of the classroom, those who would choose the second to stand on one side of the room, those who would choose the third to stand on the opposite side, and those who would choose the fourth statement to remain seated. Call on different students from the first three groups to explain their choices. If any of the seated students indicate that they do not plan on attending college, invite them to share their intentions with the class, but don't push.
2. Write the words **vocation**, **career**, and **job** on the board. Ask: "Are these terms synonyms? Are they interchangeable? If not, what differentiates them from one another?"
3. Distribute copies of Handout 8, "Job? Career? Vocation?" Have the students

Homework Assignment

- Have the students complete no. 1 of the Assignments/Applications on page 68.
- Direct students to read "Journeying to Perfection" (pages 43–44).

Chapter 2 Additional Resource Suggestions

Printed Materials

Trustful Surrender to Divine Providence: The Secret to Peace and Happiness by Jean Baptiste Saint-Jur and Saint Claude de la Colombiere is a classic book that underscores the grace and rewards that come when one abandons his or her life completely to God. Available from Tan Books & Publishers (June 1983)

A variety of prayer forms are introduced in *Anyone Can Pray: A Guide to Methods of Christian Prayer* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

A Guide to Religious Ministries for Catholic Men and Women is published annually by the Catholic News Publishing Company (210 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10801). It contains information on most religious communities in the United States and several diocesan vocation offices. It can also be accessed at www.religiousministries.com.

fill in the blanks, deciding whether the statements refer to a job, a career, or a vocation. Invite students to name some jobs, careers, and vocations. List on the board, under the appropriate headings. Finally, refer back to the “business cards” the students created. Discover whether any of the students mentioned a job, a career, or a vocation on their cards.

- Briefly summarize the key points of the feature “Life Strategies” on page 42 of the text. Use the outline “Characteristics Common to Vocations” on Handout 8. Then divide the students into two groups. Have them turn to Assignments/Applications on page 69 and call attention to no. 2. Assign one group to read and then work together to analyze the call of Moses (Ex 3:1–4:17). Assign the other group to do the same for the call of Mary (Lk 1:26–28). Afterward, have the groups present their findings to one another.
- Have the students turn to the feature “Choosing a Major” on page 42. Read through it with the students and use the questions in the text to discuss the effectiveness of the Coach Holtz system. Finally, direct attention to the Journal/Discussion question on page 43.



Life Strategies

James VanCott, author and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Seton Hall University, traces the two biblical calls of Moses (Ex 3:1–4:17) and Mary (Lk 1:26–38) to explain four characteristics common to any vocation. He writes:

First, a person is called for a special purpose. Moses to lead his people from captivity to the Promised Land, Mary to give birth to God's son. Accepting a call means making a commitment to its fulfillment.

Second, the person who is called has a special gift. This should not be confused with aptitude, skill, or talent. The gift associated with vocation must be revealed to the individual.

Third, implicit in vocation is the presence of a caller. In biblical narratives, the caller has a name—Yahweh, God, Jesus. The caller's voice is heard as something outside the person being called.

Fourth, accepting a vocation leads to a life of sacrifice, faith, and often darkness. Neither Moses nor Mary could have predicted what answering the call would mean. Each had to sacrifice other life possibilities in order to say yes to the caller. Each had to exercise faith in order to accept the unknown, to walk into darkness in order to find the light.²

Choosing a Major

Former Notre Dame football coach Lou Holtz likes to describe an age-old formula for a direction for life. It goes like this:



First, think about what it is you like to do.

Second, determine something you like to do that you are also good at.

Finally, find someone to pay you for it.

There may be a few other ways to state the final part of the formula. Maybe, “Does what you like to do have value for yourself or others?” Or, “Does anyone need you to do it?”

Use this approach to determine an area of study [major] you might like to pursue in college with the thought that it may lead to a career. Next, analyze: What are the strengths of this process? What are its weaknesses? How would this process work for determining a vocation?



Chapter 2 Additional Resource Suggestions

Videos

Fr. John Wijngaards presents a practical method of prayer for ordinary people in *The Seven Circles of Prayer* that includes the seven circles: “the situation (silence and space), opening our eyes (seeing), encountering (suffering), and the importance of contact (touching and listening). The last circle is achieved through reading the Bible and finally coming (face-to-face) with God.” This thirty-minute video is available from St. Anthony Messenger Press.

The classic film *The Widow's Mite* tells the true experience of a young missionary in Hong Kong who learns from an elderly convert the real meaning of evangelization; forms the basis for a practical discussion of the call to missions that is the vocation of every baptized person. Produced by Teleketics (26 minutes).



Journal discussion

- As of right now, what would you name as your college major? What is the basis of that decision?

✦ Journeying to Perfection

You are at an age when some major life decisions are on the horizon. Besides choosing a college and an academic major, you will face broader life decisions involving a particular Christian vocation. For example,



Will you be married?

- Marriage is the most "popular" vocation in numbers. Nearly 85 percent of adults over the age of fifteen years old are married.

Will you be a lifelong single person?

- The percentage of never-married persons aged twenty-five to thirty-five has increased by 20 percent in the past thirty years, suggesting more lifelong singleness.

Will you choose a religious vocation as a sister or brother?

- Religious vocations have risen in some developing countries recently. However, in the forty years from 1965–2005, the number of religious sisters decreased in the United States from 179,954 to 68,634, and the number of religious brothers from 12,271 to 5,451. Opportunities for a life of radical service, discipline, and excitement remain available for those men and women willing to take the plunge into religious life.

If you are a male, will you pursue a calling to the ordained priesthood?

- The total number of priests in the United States has also decreased since 1965. By 1998, 24 percent of diocesan priests were over seventy years old, the retirement age for priests. There is certainly a need for men to prayerfully consider a vocation to the priesthood.

Devoting a life to any of these Christian vocations requires many choices—both prior to the initial commitment and through the challenges of living out the vocation. Think about some of the questions that are likely to arise for the various vocations:

- Whom will I marry?
- What type of parent will I be?
- Who will take care of my parents when they are older?
- How will I get along with others in a religious community?
- Will I be able to keep a vow of celibacy?
- Will I be accepted into a seminary to study for priesthood?

Encourage students to respond either by sharing with a partner or simply by writing in their journals.

Journeying to Perfection



Bell-Ringers

- Call on volunteers to share their report on college majors with the class. Ask if they were surprised by discovering different interests or goals or by the way their personal profiles matched up with college course majors.
- Re-teach.** Briefly review what the students learned about perfection in Chapter 1. Remind them that Christian perfection means seeking deeper union with Christ. Ask: "What are the three steps that guide us to that union?"

- Sacraments
- Service
- Sharing Christ's cross

Finally, stress that on the journey to perfection, we do not travel blindly or solely under our own power. Rather, we do so under Christ's watchful eye and powered by the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2 Additional Resource Suggestions

Internet

The students may do a web search on "career planning" or explore the website of a college they are considering for articles on "choosing a major" or careers related to particular academic majors. See for example:

- www.careerplanning.about.com
- www.mapping-your-future.org
- www.princetonreview.com/cte

The article "Vocation Education" from *America* (July, 2002) can be accessed at: www.americamagazine.org/gettext.cfm?articleTypeID=1&textID=2012&issueID=377

Frequently cited Church statistics in areas like total numbers of priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, as well as areas like Mass attendance can be found at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) website at www.cara.georgetown.edu/index.htm.

The article "The Our Father in the Catechesis of Teens" by Tom Richard, DFF provides strategies for encouraging a deeper understanding of the Lord's Prayer among teens. It can be accessed at www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Faith/1998-01-02/catechesis.html.

The Office of the Catechism offers quizzes on the Lord's Prayer. See:

- www.usccb.org/catechism/quizzes/ourfather1.htm
- www.usccb.org/catechism/quizzes/ourfather2.htm

Teaching Approaches

- Write the word **journey** on the board. Tell the students you realize that the phrase "Life is a journey" has almost become a cliché. Likewise, the phrase conjures images of people trudging doggedly and glumly up some unforgiving mountainside. That's too bad. Such an image implies that a journey has only two crucial elements: the beginning and the end. The part in between? Boring, drudgery, unimportant. Not so for Christians! Why else would we be called a "Pilgrim People," a "People of the Way"? Remember John 14:6? Note the term "people." Journeying to perfection is not a solo act. We have traveling companions. We call them the Church. And journeying with us is Jesus himself—Jesus, *the WAY*, who promised to be with us always on our way. Not bad company, that!
- Distribute copies of Handout 9, "Whom Do You Trust?" Allow time for the students to fill in the blanks. Afterward, share responses.
- Have the students turn to page 44 in their texts. Point out the vocabulary phrase "divine providence." Ask one of the students to read it aloud. Write the following Scripture references on the board: **Jeremiah 31:3**; **Isaiah 49:1**; and **Ephesians 1:4**. Have the students look them up in their Bibles. Ask how each speaks to us about God's providence. Conclude by assuring the students that no matter how little or how much trust we have in others, we can be certain of our trust in God, who guides us on our journey to perfection.
- Seek First the Kingdom.** Summarize the main points in this text section:
 - God has a plan for us, a plan that can be accomplished only with our cooperation.
 - We need to strive to live in a way that demonstrates that cooperation—both in what we do and in why we do it.



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OUR FATHER AND OUR BROTHERS

Though the median age is getting older for commitment to each of these vocations (e.g., twenty-seven for males and twenty-five for females getting married for the first time), the likelihood is that in the next ten years you will have made a commitment to pursue one of the particular Christian vocations described above. There is also a chance you could already be married, a parent, a professed religious, or a priest before the age of thirty.

Charting any of these life courses can bring feelings of anxiety, anticipation, excitement, and more. But any undue concern about your future should be eliminated when you come to an understanding that God is in control of your life and that God only wants the best for you.

As the *Catechism* teaches, "Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator" (CCC, 302).

Instead, the universe, including each person, is created by God "in a state of journeying" toward an ultimate perfection that hasn't yet been reached. The ways that God guides his creation toward perfection is known as divine providence.

It is comforting to know that God loves and cares for us so much that he has a special plan for our lives and guides us to it. As the book of Proverbs teaches:

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the decision of the Lord that endures. (Prov 19:21)

divine providence
God's interest and
action in guiding his
creation to perfection.

Seek First the Kingdom

Jesus spoke to his disciples about their anxieties for their lives on earth. He said:

So do not worry and say, "What are we to eat?" or "What are we to drink?" or "What are we to wear?" All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. (Mt 6:31-33)

Jesus seems to be telling us that we should not worry about our futures. But what else is he saying? What does this mean for you practically as you get ready to make key vocational choices for your life?

Essentially, Jesus tells us to put our trust in divine providence, the will of God. We should trust that our heavenly Father will take care of not only our "bigger" needs, like whom we might marry or whether or not we should seek out a religious calling, but also our smaller day-to-day needs. In fact, trusting God means that we depend on him for every detail of our lives.

God is the master of his plan of creation. He is also the master of our individual lives. But to carry out his plan he makes use of our cooperation. The *Catechism* explains:

God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (CCC, 308 quoting Phil 2:13)

Background Information

Straining Forward

The fathers of the Church, in particular Gregory of Nicea, spoke of the soul's journey toward Christ and heavenly perfection as something in which we must consistently engage. They referred to this process as *eppektasis*—an unending "straining forward," as Saint Paul calls it in Philippians 3:13 ("Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus"). *Eppektasis* is going forward, exercising spiritual muscles, reaching out to God and others, and straining with hope. *Eppektasis* begins in this life and extends into the next, for eternity. Thus, even eternal life is part of—not the end of—our journey.



God will always work in us and with us as "unconscious collaborators" of his will. However, we can enter even more completely into the divine plan when we consciously align our actions, prayers, and sufferings with him.

Applying this to your immediate and long-term future, it is wise to create a life that first of all involves God in every facet and in every motivation. For example, if your primary motivation for being a lawyer or a doctor is to make money, not to help those who are in need of legal assistance or to heal the sick, your motivation is skewed in terms of following God's will. Remember the story of King Solomon from the Old Testament. When God said to Solomon, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you" (1 Kgs 3-5), Solomon first chose the gift of God's wisdom, and God was pleased, saying to him:

"Because you have asked for this—not for a long life for yourself, not for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right—I do as you requested . . . In addition, I give you what you have not asked for, such riches and glory that among kings there is not your like." (1 Kgs 3:11–12a, 13)

Following God's will for our lives brings us blessings and holiness. Observe the way the rest of natural creation allows God to guide them.



Imagine if the climatic seasons, the animals of land and sea, and day and night itself resisted following God's will rather than being guided by it. Rather, nature proceeds in harmony and with regular motion. Yet often people do resist the will of God for their lives:

- Mary, a high school junior, has never felt closer to the Lord than after a school retreat. However, when Sister Catherine invites her and some other girls to a day of prayer led by her community's vocation director, Mary declines. "Me, a nun?" She does not accept the invitation.
- Patrick has been told often by his teachers that he would "make a good priest." Patrick has always been drawn to private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. But he is careful never to let his mind wander to thoughts of the priesthood. "What would my parents and friends think if I told them I wanted to be a priest?" he wonders. But he never asks them.
- Kendra, a high school senior, is the youngest of five children. Her parents are older now, and her father's health has been poor. All but one of her siblings live some distance away. Kendra is not sure about her college choice. All her friends are leaving home for college. She really would prefer going to the local college and staying near her parents. But everyone seems to be encouraging her to move away. "Maybe I should try it. It might be fun," she thinks.

How should the teenagers mentioned above handle their dilemmas? What do Jesus' words—"seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides"—have to do with these situations? What does it mean to you to determine God's will for your life? The next section explains some of the ways to connect with divine providence.

Thy Will Be Done

We pray to follow the will of God each time we pray the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God's

- Following God's will brings both blessing and holiness.

5. Divide the class into three small groups. Assign one of the dilemmas on page 45 to each group. Have small group members work together to create and present an alternative ending to their dilemma, one that demonstrates cooperation with God's will. If your class is comfortable with role playing, have them act out their solutions rather than simply explaining them. Afterward, invite the class to suggest other dilemma situations in which people their age might find themselves resistant to God's will for them. Discuss these dilemmas as a class. Finally, be sure to address the questions in the final paragraph of this section (page 45).

6. Call attention to the first Journal/Discussion question on page 47. Either allow time for the students to write responses in class or assign it as homework.

7. **Thy Will Be Done.** List on the board St. Claude's ways to pray for God's will to be done:

- Ask for what we want.
- Ask to be delivered from evil, recognizing that God can help us bring good out of the evil that comes our way.
- Ask to accept all God grants us as blessings.

Invite the students to think of a time Jesus prayed these three ways at once:



Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." (Mk 14:32-36)

Point out that real prayer never happens apart from life, life that is frustrating as well as fulfilling, troubled as well as trouble-free. Prayer is more than pouring out the fullness of our hearts to God. Rather, it is our free choice to respond to God's will for us whether our hearts are full or empty—just as Jesus did.

8. Call attention to the second Journal/Discussion question on page 47. Ask volunteers to respond. Be careful not to make any judgments.



Kingdom will reach its fullness only at the end of time, but we are to live, experience, and work for it right now. We do this by following the plan God has intended for us.

The more we seek God's plan for us, the more we advance toward perfection. When we resist God's plan for our own desires, we go backward. Saint Francis de Sales suggested that "for my part I know no other perfection than loving God with all one's

things. He shared these other reflections on how to pray for God's will for our lives:

- We can pray to obtain what we want. We are not prohibited from praying for money and position in life, but, like Solomon, we must pray for things in their proper order.
- We can pray to be delivered from evil; however, we are reminded that God is even able to derive good from evil and sin. For example, poverty of materials or of the spirit can increase our dependence on God. If we suffered these things, would we seek out God much more than we do? What benefit would that be for our sanctification?
- We can pray to accept all of God's gifts as blessing. For example, we can pray, "either give me so much money that my heart will be satisfied, or inspire me with such contentment for it that I no longer want it."



Saint Francis de Sales

heart. Without this love the virtues are only a heap of stones." Also, we can recognize God's will through the experiences of our daily lives. Remember, "God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' cooperation" (CCC, 306).

Also, to know God's will for our lives, we can pray. Saint Claude de la Colombiere reminded us that Christ promised that he would give us *everything* we need, even the smallest

When we cooperate with God we are exercising his great gift of free will. With the angels, people journey to the ultimate destination of perfection by free choice and by loving God and others. Because this choice is free, the possibility of going astray and committing moral evil exists. God is not the cause of moral evil but he does permit it because he respects our freedom and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from evil.

As the Catechism explains:

Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God "face to face," will we fully know the ways by which—even through the drama of evil and sin—God has guided his creation to

Extending the Lesson

Do a trust exercise with the students. Have them form two lines, facing one another, creating a corridor or gauntlet. Direct the students to extend their arms straight in front. Tell them that their arms should intersect, overlapping by about a hand, with arms of people opposite them. Explain that the student at one end of the line will peel off and walk down the corridor. In order to let him or her pass, everyone else raises and then lower their arms, creating a "wave" effect—a ripple through which the student is walking. The student then joins in again at the end of the line. Then the next student, peels off, walks, down, and so on. Be sure to take part yourself to demonstrate your trust in your students. Finally, as the class becomes more confident, invite students to walk quickly, run, and then sprint down the corridor. If you wish, for a finale, have the students in line chop their arms up and down, only pausing to allow the corridor-runner through. It works. Just trust. Afterward, take time to process the experience with the class. Ask what was comfortable/uncomfortable. What concerns, if any, did they have when in line? When walking/running the corridor?

Homework Assignment

- Have the students complete no. 4 of the Assignments/Applications on page 69 and read "Discernment through the Ways of Prayer" (pages 47-48).
- Direct students to write responses to the Study Questions on page 47.



that definitive sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth. (CCC, 314)

In the meantime, we continue to delve deeper in prayer to discover more about ourselves and about God. Discernment is a process that helps us to make good choices in line with God's will.



study questions

1. What does it mean to say that we are created by God "in a state of journeying"?
2. Define divine providence.
3. How can we become conscious collaborators with God?
4. What did King Solomon first ask for in prayer? What was he given?
5. How do we advance toward perfection?
6. What did Saint Francis de Sales say about perfection?
7. Define free will.
8. Why does God permit moral evil?



journal discussion

- How have you resisted God's will for your life? What was the result? How have you accepted God's will? What happened then?
- If you could have any prayer answered, how would you answer it? How might your answer be different than God's to your prayer?

✦ Discernment through the Ways of Prayer

As God gradually reveals himself to us and leads us to know more about our own selves, the way we reciprocate to him is through prayer. Saint John Damascene described prayer as "the raising of one's mind and heart to God." When we pray we consciously pay

attention to God. We direct our thoughts to the loving God who first calls us.

There are many different ways to pray. Jesus modeled several of the ways of prayer. For example, he prayed the Father for revealing God's will to the humble and lowly (see Lk 10:21). He thanked God when he raised Lazarus from the dead (see Jn 11:41-42). He prayed prayers of petition (see Lk 22:31-32) and intercession (see Jn 17). And when his disciples asked him to teach them to pray, he taught the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7). Jesus is the perfect model of prayer. He prayed before



all of the important decisions of his life; for example, in the desert before beginning his public ministry, before choosing his Apostles, before performing miracles, and on the mountain at the time of his Transfiguration. His final words were a prayer of trust: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

9. Invite the students to create prayer petitions to use in a prayer service to conclude class.

- Direct them to begin with a request for something they want: *To become more patient with my parents,*
- Then a request for deliverance from evil: *to refuse to complain even when I feel they're being unfair,*
- Finally, a prayer to accept all as blessing: *and to recognize that the decisions they make are made out of love for me, let us pray . . .*

Have the students write out their petitions.

10. Gather the students around a lighted candle. Tell them that the response to each prayer petition is "Thy will be done." For example:

To become more patient with my parents, to refuse to complain even when I feel they're being unfair, and to recognize that the decisions they make are made out of love for me, O Lord, we pray . . .

All: Thy will be done.

Invite the students to offer their petitions one at a time. Conclude by joining hands and praying the Lord's Prayer.

Page 47 Study Question Answers

1. We are always "on the march" to perfection, always moving toward perfection in God.
2. Divine providence is God's abiding interest and action in guiding all creation to perfection.
3. We can become conscious collaborators with God by choosing to trust in God and depending on him for every detail of our lives.
4. Solomon first prayed for wisdom. God granted him not only wisdom but also glory and vast wealth.
5. We advance toward perfection by following God's will for us.
6. St. Francis de Sales declared that the greatest perfection lies in loving God with all our hearts.
7. Free will is the divine gift that allows us to shape our own lives and direct ourselves to the goodness God intends.
8. While God is not the cause of moral evil, God permits it so that we can make our own decisions, and so that God can derive good from it.

Discernment

Bell-Ringers

1. Check the students' answers to the Study Questions on page 47 against those given on page 55 of this text. Either collect answers or make sure students have written them in their journals. Remind the students that these answers will serve them well in reviewing the chapter and studying for the chapter test.
2. Invite any student who wishes to share some of the "wants" he or she listed while completing no. 4 of the Assignments/Applications on page 69.
3. Introduce this lesson by writing the word **feelings** on the board. Check the students' feelings on random current events/topics by pointing to a student and saying something like the following: "(Student's name), how do you feel about (current event)?" After calling on a number of students, explain to the class that naming our feelings is very important when it comes to making sound choices about God's will for us.

Teaching Approaches

1. Pass out copies of Handout 10, "Naming Feelings." Call on a student to read the opening paragraph aloud. Point out the instructions at the bottom of the page and have the students respond to the first two. Share some responses.
2. Afterward, have the students get into the same small groups they were part of last class when they presented alternative endings to the dilemmas on page 45. Have group members work on the same dilemma to name the feelings its main character might have had and then present their conclusions to the class. Ask small group members to explain their answers.
3. Point out and ask the two questions on Handout 10. After the students respond, tell them that in addition to *naming* feelings, we also need to *claim* feelings. That means taking responsibility for them. Explain that because feelings just *are*, we can't blame or



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Constant and consistent prayer is a way to determine what God intends for us, especially when we are faced with an important decision. We can express our prayer in different ways in vocal prayer (mentally or aloud) as Jesus did when he taught the Our Father, in meditation in which you actively use your thoughts, imaginations, and desires to think about God's presence in the world and in your life, and in contemplative prayer, a form of silent, wordless prayer in which you simply rest in the presence of the all-loving God.

Discernment is the name for a process of prayer that incorporates many of the types of prayer and expressions of prayer described above.

Discernment calls us to look at all sides of a decision, considering many alternatives. Discernment involves praying over a decision, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and, finally, actually making a decision, acting on it, and evaluating it.

Discernment is not only for big decisions. It also involves reflecting on the ordinary, everyday actions of our lives. It is not really the events themselves that are the focus, but rather the feelings the events evoke in us when we reflect on them—for example, joy, sorrow, anxiety, contentment. It is through these feelings that we can begin to understand more about how God is calling us each day.

Beginning any discernment process means you have a sensitivity to your innermost thoughts and desires and that you can reflect on what you experience. This is harder to do than it might seem, as it means taking time to remove yourself from a world filled with noises and distractions to

find a place and time to be *alone*. Is there ever a time around your home when it is quiet and you can be alone? In most households, these times (and places) are rare. A first step for discernment is to determine when and where you can devote at least ten minutes to a *centering* prayer, with the purpose of finding God in the depths of yourself. Follow a process like the one described in the following section to help you begin deciphering how to stake out on the best course for your life.

Listening to God

Making a decision about what you are going to do with your life and what you are going to be in accordance



dance with God's will cannot be accomplished without making a habit of prayer. Discerning your vocation really means finding out how you will personally respond to God's love. It means continuing to develop and deepen your relationship with God. This is accomplished through perseverance in prayer.



You might have been taught as a child that prayer is "talking with God." More accurately, prayer is a dialogue with God in which the greater half is spent listening to what God has to say to you. There are many ways to pray, but in any of them, there can be no greater objective than simply being tuned in to God's presence in your life and the ways God speaks to you constantly through the experiences of your day. The Sacred Scripture, the liturgy of the Church, and the practice of virtues are other sources of prayer. A



centering prayer is an effective way to quiet down and place yourself in the presence of the Lord. Follow these steps to take on this process:

- **Step One:** Find a quiet place to pray. Ideally, you should have a place in your home where you can be without noise and distraction. Relax by slowly inhaling and exhaling. Assume a comfortable position with your spine in a straight line. Close your eyes. Now move to the very center of your being. Become aware of God's presence. Express your faith in words like these:

"Lord, I believe you are with me."

"Still my thoughts."

"Thank you for keeping me alive in your love."

"Be with me now, Lord."

"Help me to experience your presence."

- **Step Two:** After a minute or so, select a special word that makes you think of God and His love. Recite this word over and over. The repetition will help you to keep distractions away. Choose a name, quality, or title that carries some deep meaning for you. For example:

- Jesus • Father • Spirit
- Love • Lord • Truth
- Savior • Life • Way

After a short time you can stop reciting the word as you become aware of the Lord at the center of your being. If distractions come your way—and they often do—return to the word to refocus on God and His loving presence.

- **Step Three:** At the end of your time in prayer, thank the Father for his presence. Tell Jesus of your love for him. Ask the Holy Spirit to remain with you always. Slowly and meditatively recite an Our Father.

If you make this type of prayer a habit, you will be better able to think about your life and describe how you feel about a variety of your experiences. It is these insights that will help you determine a vocation. This process is very similar to the one undertaken by Saint Ignatius Loyola in the sixteenth century.

Saint Ignatius's story is well known. He was a Basque soldier who was wounded in battle. During his convalescence from an injury, he asked the nuns who were caring for him to bring him some romantic novels to help him pass the time. The only books the nuns were able to provide were of the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. Ignatius pored through these books, pausing from time to time to think about what he would do when he was fully recovered. Sometimes he would picture himself as a knight who was pledged in service to a rich lady. Other times, due to what he was reading, he would imagine himself doing heroic service in God's name.

hold anyone else responsible for the way we feel—likewise, we can't be responsible for the way other people feel. Claiming feelings simply means being responsible for what we do with the feeling—how we react to it.

4. To help the students understand how naming and claiming feelings can act as signals about what is happening around us, ask:

- If you were driving down the highway and suddenly a pickup crossed the median and headed straight for you, how might you feel? (*frightened, terrified, shocked*)
- What might that feeling(s) signal you to do? (*Get out of the way! or Faint.*)
- If someone told you that you were a terrific soccer player, how might that make you feel? (*happy, proud, inspired*)
- What sort of signal might that feeling give to you? (*It might tell you that you're doing well and encourage you to keep it up OR It might give you a big head and encourage you to act like a hot shot.*)

Finally, direct the students to complete the sentence at the bottom of Handout 10 so that it reads, "Feelings can be named and claimed but never blamed."

5. Distribute copies of Handout 11, "The Christian Discernment." Use it to review the text section "Discernment through the Ways of Prayer" (page 47) with the students. Go through the steps of discernment with them one step at a time, making sure the students understand each step before moving to the next:

- 1) Name the problem/decision to be made. (What's happening here?)
- 2) Name and claim responsibility for how you feel about the problem/decision. (How do I feel about it?)
- 3) Through prayerful reflection, examine alternatives. (What is God inviting me to do?)

Exploring Christian Vocations

Bell-Ringers

1. Ask a variety of students to share the “surrendering” prayers they discovered. (See the feature “Abandonment to God’s Will” on page 51.)
2. Check the students’ answers to the Study Questions on page 53 against those given on page 59 of this text. Afterward, either collect answers or make sure students have written them in their journals.
3. **Re-teach.** Review the students’ experience with centering prayer at home. Ask:
 - Were you able to spend some time in centering prayer?
 - What problems, if any, did you have?
 - What strategies did you use to overcome distractions?

Use the following to lead the students in an abbreviated centering prayer. Be sure to pause at the places indicated.

Sit comfortably . . . Close your eyes . . . Quiet yourself outside and inside . . . Breathe slowly and deeply and know that God’s breath breathes in you . . . Pray: “Be with and within me, loving God.” Now choose a sacred word—Jesus, Father, Spirit, Love, Savior, Way. Recite the word over and over silently as a symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. Give yourself over to the presence of God at the center of your being. If you become aware of distractions, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.



✦ Exploring Christian Vocations

The sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—are mainly intended for our holiness and salvation. These sacraments provide us with the graces we need to live a life in Christ and evangelize the world with our words and actions.

Two other sacraments—Holy Orders and Matrimony—are mainly directed to the holiness and salvation of others. Those who are ordained are appointed to nourish others by sharing God’s word and grace with the whole Church in Christ’s name. Those who are married help one another attain holiness and they pass on the faith to their children, thereby extending the People of God well into the future. Because of their focus on others, the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are called **Sacraments at the Service of Communion**.

Both the sacraments of initiation and the Sacraments at the Service of Communion provide a framework for understanding Christian vocations. In Baptism and Confirmation, we receive a share in the common priesthood of Christ. We have great freedom to live out Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king according to our own particular life choices. Lay people share in Christ’s priestly office by uniting their lives to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and by their participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Lay people share in the prophetic office by teaching and evangelizing, spreading the Gospel of



Christ. Sometimes this is done formally through tasks like catechizing in parish programs or using the media to share the good news. Most often we are prophetic when we share our faith in Christ through our daily conversations and actions with our friends, fellow students, co-workers, and all those with whom we come in contact. Lay people participate in Christ’s kingly office by helping to remove sinfulness in secular institutions overrun with corruption.

Callings involving the many different charisms of religious life, the committed single life, as well as priesthood and marriage, flow from the graces of Christian Baptism. The Sacrament of Matrimony provides an additional source of consecration for the duties of marriage and parenthood. The



ministerial priesthood of bishops and priests likewise has its own sacrament of consecration. The ministerial priesthood serves the common priesthood. The ministerial priesthood is "a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church" (CCC, 1547).

Though there is exemplary value in taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for the sake of God's Kingdom, God calls us to holiness in many different ways. As Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. (1 Cor 12:4-6)

This is the time of life when you should take the time to consider prayerfully the way to holiness to which God is calling you. Learn about several specific Christian vocations, including ones described in this text.

Committed Single Life

Probably the main reason that the single life is not often thought to be a permanent Christian vocation like marriage, priesthood, or the religious life is that there is no ritual to mark a commitment to the single life due to the fact that everyone transitions through the single life on his or her way to other permanent vocations. However, the single life is an authentic and valuable vocation that more and more Catholics are freely choosing. Some singles may desire marriage or religious life, but circumstances have kept them from those vocations. Widows and widowers also find themselves returning to the single life and, in many cases, embracing it as a new calling. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains some of the reasons a person might choose to remain single:

Some forgo marriage in order to care for their parents or brothers and sisters, to give themselves more completely to a profession, or to serve other honorable

ends. They can contribute greatly to the good of the human family. (CCC, 2331)

There are many benefits of a vocation to the single life, both for the single person and for the Church. Without the responsibilities of marriage or religious life, single people can have a dedicated devotion to their career. Tim, age fifty, has spent most of his career as a drug and substance abuse counselor living in residential treatment facilities. "I love my work. The rewards are great," Tim shared. "Early on I realized that to continue in the exact type of work I am doing, I would have to give up the idea of being married. Living at the residential home five days a week precludes for me, at least, being an effective husband and father."

Single persons have a greater opportunity for silence and solitude that is often translated to a deep prayer life. Amy, thirty-three, spends the first hour every morning before work in quiet prayer. "My prayer time is the fuel for my day. I can't imagine my life without it." Single people also have the time to develop talents in creative areas like writing, poetry, and art that improve the quality of life in the world for all.

Single persons also provide support to those who are married, ordained, or religious. Because they are not committed to any one person, single persons are free to love all. They can have deep friendships with men and women of a wide range of ages and vocations. They remind married couples of the spiritual love that is a vital component of their relationship—one that outlasts their earthly life.

Of the challenges faced by single persons, loneliness is probably the greatest. A single person has no immediate family member to offer consolation and support when he or she experiences a rough day on the job or to share the joy of a rewarding day at work. For this reason, it is important for single people to cultivate close and lasting friendships with other Catholics committed to the same lifestyle. Also, living a chaste life



Allow at least five minutes for silent prayer before moving on. Conclude by inviting the students to repeat each of the following lines after you:

Caring Creator, thank you for your power and presence.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your saving love. Show me how to love in return.

Abiding Spirit, be with and within me now and always.

Before moving on, remind the students that centering prayer is not a replacement for other kinds of prayer. Rather, centering prayer helps us put all the rest of our prayer into a new and deeper perspective. Centering prayer allows us to consent to God's presence and action *within*. Other forms of prayer move our attention outward to discover God's presence everywhere else.



Teaching Approaches

1. Call on volunteers to read the first two paragraphs of text on page 54 aloud. Note the sacraments of initiation and the sacraments at the service of communion, and their differences. Then ask the students to underline or make note of the first three sentences in the third paragraph.
2. Write the words **Priest**, **Prophet**, and **King** on the board. Ask: How often do you think of yourselves as a priest? A prophet? A member of the royalty? Explain that as a Church, we are all called to be priest, prophet, and king—to worship and bless, to preach and teach, to lead by service. For example:



- As a “priest”—someone who leads the community in blessing and worship—ask the students: How are you a blessing to others? What do you do to make certain that our worship is alive and meaningful to others?
- As a “prophet”—someone daring and willing to risk speaking for and about God—ask: Could anyone recognize that you are a Catholic Christian by listening to you? By observing the way you act? Are you continuing to wear your faith on your sleeve?
- As a “king”—someone who leads the Church all the while understanding that the Church is not for itself but for the world, and that leadership is not lording over others, but helping others love the Lord—ask: What sort of example are you to those who look up to you? What leadership roles in your parish, school, or community are available to you? Have you stepped into any of those roles? Could you create others?

3. Draw attention to the first sentence of the fifth text paragraph: “The Church does not teach that one Christian vocation is better than another.” Have the students underline this sentence or copy it in their journals. Remind the students that every vocation is a life journey with Jesus, and since we’re all known by the company we keep, we’re all in good company, no matter the diverse paths we might tread.



evangelical counsels
Virtues needed to achieve perfection in Christian life: poverty, chastity, and obedience.

is difficult in this day and age for single adults. Society and culture promote promiscuity and uncommitted sexual relationships. Friendships help in this area as well. As the Catechism teaches, “The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship” (CCC, 2347). The challenge to remain chaste while acknowledging that sex is to be reserved for a committed marriage partnership is likewise a powerful witness to the sanctity of sexual love.

A vocation to the single life must be compatible with a person’s temperament and gifts. A person who wishes to accept the challenges and reap the rewards of a vocation to the single life should have some or all of the following characteristics: self-confidence, self-reliance, self-motivation, resourcefulness, compassion, and hospitality. To succeed in this vocation single persons need a great dependence on God. Living in this dependence, single people are a dramatic witness to all the Church of a life in Christ.

Consecrated Life

Under the umbrella of the consecrated life are many particular and traditional Christian vocations. Consecrated life is defined as a life dedicated to living by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. All Christians are called to live these counsels based on their state in life. However, professing these counsels within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church is what characterizes a life consecrated to God. Those who follow the call to the consecrated life have made a commitment to follow Christ more completely to give themselves to God above all things, and to seek out the perfection that comes with loving God and loving other people. The example of those

living a consecrated life shows that there is more to life than what we experience on earth. The consecrated life proclaims the glory of the world to come.

Religious who make public profession of the evangelical counsels have been with the Church since its earliest days. Religious are both men and women. In fact, they are both lay people and ordained, as many ordained men live in community with other religious



and take public vows to follow the counsels. Bishops have the role of discerning new forms of living the consecrated life and submitting those grounded in the Holy Spirit to the Pope for approval. Traditional ways the consecrated life is practiced in the Church include living in community with others (sisters or brothers). This is the type of consecrated life that we commonly describe as “religious life.” Other styles of consecrated life include an eremitic lifestyle as a hermit, taking a vow as a consecrated virgin or widow, or participating in a secular institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life. In all of these models, the evangelical counsels are embraced.

Characteristics of Religious Life

You are probably most familiar with religious life as lived by sisters or brothers, some of whom may be or



have been your teachers. Teaching and the operation of Catholic elementary and high schools has been one of the primary ministries of religious in the United States throughout the nation's history. Generations of American Catholics owe their education to religious women and men who founded and then supported countless schools. More commonly, since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, religious, women and men have taken the opportunity to choose many other ministries besides teaching. Today's religious, responding to new needs, are involved in many types of service to the Church; some work as pastoral associates and pastoral ministers in parishes, others as chancellors of dioceses. The other ministries in which religious participate are even more varied: they might do anything from running homes for battered women and children to working in the media to produce and direct programming for Christian evangelization.

While it is true that there has been a decrease in vocations to the religious life in recent years, some religious

communities around the world are flourishing. For example, the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa, has eight branches, all of which are growing: active sisters, contemplative sisters, active brothers, contemplative brothers, missionary fathers, lay missionaries, volunteers, and sick and suffering coworkers.

The most common characteristic of religious life is belonging to a community. This lifestyle has roots in the Gospel and in God himself: Jesus ministered to others in community, with both men and women followers. When Jesus sent out his disciples, he sent them out in pairs. God, too, is a relationship of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Religious communities often mirror the lifestyle and purpose of their founder who established the community's charism. Religious women traditionally have lived in convents. Religious men have lived in monasteries or rectories. However, today, because of a variety of different ministries that may require a religious to live separated from the community, some religious live alone though they remain in communication with their sisters or brothers.

Two other characteristics of religious life are the active and contemplative forms. Contemplative religious spend the majority of their days in solitude and silence, praying, studying, and doing penance. Female religious contemplatives are known as nuns. Male religious contemplatives are known as monks. Their lives center around praying the complete Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office, the Church's official prayer. Some contemplatives live an eremitic life as hermits, people who seek God while living alone. Hermits most often live on the grounds of a monastery or hermitage. The monks or nuns bring the hermits

eremitic life

The life of a hermit, a person who chooses the eremitic life most often lives alone and devotes himself or herself to developing a deep intimacy with Christ through silence, prayer, and penance.

4. **Committed Single Life.** Put a student "on the spot," and have him or her stand and explain in his or her own words how he or she understands the committed single life. Correct any misconceptions. Go on to ask volunteers to name some of the pros and cons of a vocation to the committed single life, as well as the human characteristics that would prove helpful in living out this vocation. List on the board. Conclude by suggesting that perhaps one of the charisms of the committed single lifestyle is its *carpe diem*—its "seize the day"—outlook on life that calls the rest of the Church to recognize and appreciate the grace of the present moment, the now of the Good News.

5. See to it that the class understands that making a decision to be a committed single person doesn't make either the desire or the possibility for physical intimacy (marriage) go away. Stress that it is important for someone in the committed single life to have authentic relationships with others including family, friends, and classmates or coworkers. In fact, tell the students that finding our vocation in life means answering two crucial *relationship* questions. Write the following on the board: "Whom do you want to be with?" and "How do you want to be with them?" Distribute index cards. Have the students copy these two questions on the card. Suggest they keep the card in a place where they can see it—locker, bathroom mirror, night stand, dashboard—and ask themselves the two questions every day.





6. **Consecrated Life.** Tell the students that those called to the consecrated life help us to recognize Christ present in our lives and, with Him, to take up the cross which is our salvation. Distribute copies of Handout 13, "The Consecrated Life." Have the students read the passage from the *Code of Canon Law*, which provides a description of the vocation to the consecrated life. Then, have them work in pairs to respond to the eight questions and to list their responses in the grid on the bottom of the handout. Finally, have the students use the answer in the grid to look up a Scripture passage that speaks powerfully to who and whose we are. The grid, with correct answer, is as follows:

1 P E T E R 2 : 9
A B C D E F G H

The Scripture passage reads: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God, who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." Ask the students to read it aloud as a group.

7. Distribute Handout 14, "Another Vocation Equation." Read aloud the



food or drink. By devoting their lives to contemplative prayer, these religious remind the world of the time when everyone will be caught up in contemplation of God.

Active religious also pray and do penance and live in community. However, these sisters and brothers are out in the world participating in some of the active ministries described above. Many religious are missionaries, meaning they evangelize either in foreign missions in other countries or in home missions in their own countries.

Other Types of the Consecrated Life

There are some consecrated lifestyles that do not require a person to be a fully professed member of a religious community.

One example is *consecrated virgins*. These are women who live a life of perpetual virginity but remain lay women and support themselves. They are consecrated by their local bishop to their diocese. Consecrated virgins support the clergy through prayer and sacrifice. Traditionally, the Church has consecrated women to a life of virginity. Saint Agnes, Saint Cecilia, Saint Lucy, and Saint Agatha are well-known virgin martyrs. This tradition died out before being restored in 1970. There are approximately two hundred consecrated virgins

living in the United States working as accountants, university professors, doctors, fire-fighters, and in many other professions.

Secular institutes are forms of consecrated life for single lay people and diocesan priests. They profess the evangelical counsels but do not take public vows and do not live in community. Secular institutes usually take on a special focus; for example, the Mission of Our Lady of Bethany, founded in 1948 in France, works and prays to bring God's love to the most rejected of society, including prostitutes and prisoners. There are over thirty recognized secular institutes in the United States. Some are for men only or women only. Others have members who are lay men, lay women, and priests.

Also standing alongside the consecrated life are *societies of apostolic life*, whose members do not take public vows but engage in many good works for the Church. One familiar example is the Knights of Columbus, a lay organization with over 1.5 million members worldwide. Founded in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1882 by Father Michael J. McGivney, the Knights of Columbus was intended to provide a structure to make sure Catholics could receive insurance benefits not afforded to them in the workplace due to bigotry. The Knights of Columbus continue to provide this benefit along with serving many charitable causes within the Church.



SAINT AGNES

Background Information

In the World

Committed Single Life

Christian Marriage

In the Church

Consecrated Life
Active Religious
(sisters/brothers)
Consecrated Virgins
Secular Institutes
Apostolic Societies
Monastic
Hermitic
Contemplative

Holy Orders
Bishop
Priest
Deacon



Formation for the Consecrated Life

There are really two steps to choosing the consecrated life: discernment, followed by acceptance into a religious community. Under these two steps are several other stages in the process.

A discernment process may take shape like the one described on pages 49–50. Two additional things can help you when personally discerning a vocation to the consecrated life. First, choose a person to be your spiritual director. This person may be found with the help of your parish priest or through a religious community. A spiritual director can provide more perspective on religious life and help you to gauge whether or not you might flourish in such a situation. Second, research several different religious communities to find out their charism or gifts. Talk with some of the members and prayerfully determine which community most attracts you.

The second major step of formation is acceptance into a religious community. This takes place through an application process followed by a series of interviews with the vocation director and other members of the community. Once accepted, these stages of formation typically follow:

- **Postulancy.** The first stage is one in which the candidate lives with the community in one of its houses and participates in one of the ministries the community is involved in. The person is called a postulant, that is, one who is beginning formation.
- **Novitiate.** After a period of about one year, the candidate progresses to a more intensive time of study, both of theology and of the community's history and life. A novice begins to live the life of the vows of the community; he or she may study the community's charism. This period typically lasts for two years, with the last year set aside for solitude so that the novice can concentrate more on personal prayer.
- **Temporary Profession.** At the end of the novitiate, the novice requests entrance into the community. She or he makes temporary

vows which are renewed annually for up to nine years. During this time the person may be known as "junior professed."



- **Perpetual Vows.** After several years, if the religious continues to have a total desire to remain consecrated to God, he or she is invited to make a public, perpetual profession of religious consecration.

Formation programs vary from congregation to congregation, and often depend on whether or not the community is an active or contemplative community. Also, formation does not end with final vows. Throughout their lives, religious continue to form their lives to live more completely the counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

vocation director
A contact person for a religious order or for a diocesan office dedicated to answering questions of inquirers and encouraging vocations.

excerpt from Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*. Ask the students if they agree with the "vocation equation" on the page and have them explain their answers. Use both Handout 13 and 14 to summarize the material on the consecrated life, including the subsections "Characteristics of Religious Life," "Other Types of Consecrated Life," and the feature "Formation for the Consecrated Life," on page 59. Use the chart on Handout 14 to demonstrate how the vocation to consecrated life, as well as that of Holy Orders, is love lived out in a life of commitment in the Church, while vocations to committed single life and to Christian marriage are more love lived out in a life of Christian commitment in the world (see Background Information, page 66).

8. **Marriage.** Brainstorm about the word "marriage." Have the students simply say whatever words come to mind. List as many as you can on the board. Then have them work in small groups of three or four to write terse definitions of marriage, using—or based on—the brainstormed words. Allow time for this exercise, then invite sharing. Have the class decide which, if any, of the definitions is best. Then ask: Does our definition jibe with the description of marriage in the text (see page 60)?
9. Go on to help the students understand that when we declare that the vocation of marriage springs from God's love, we are asserting our faith that:

For Enrichment

Assign students to research the way marriage is portrayed on prime-time television. Have them watch at least four different programs and report whether the married people in the programs evidence the traits and qualities outlined on page 60 of their text.

Extending the Lesson

Consider showing the video *The Sacrament of Marriage* by Dr. Kathleen Chesto (25 minutes), available from Twenty-Third Publications. Conclude by singing a song of vocation and service, for example "Will You Come and Follow Me?" (Bell, Iona Community).

- God lives in loving relationship (Trinity).
- Since we are made in God's image, we can't disown the God-given impulse to connect and commune, to be "God-like."
- God gave us marriage—a mutual, lasting relationship—to help us become more loving—more like God—who is love.

10. Distribute copies of Handout 15, "Getting Ready for Marriage." Call on volunteers to read the quotes about love and marriage. Direct the students to rate themselves on the five practical ways to prepare for a vocation to marriage. For each of the five statements, have the students circle the response that best applies to them (see page 60). Afterward, suggest to the students that they work on developing plans to improve themselves with regard to any quality for which they circled "Terrible," "Not so Good," and even "Fair."
11. **Priesthood.** To sum up the key points in this text section (page 61), begin by having the students open their Bibles to John 13:1–15. Explain that this passage is the Gospel reading for Holy



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Marriage



Marriage is a vocation founded by God with the intention of furthering the human race and of offering the means that contribute to the eternal destiny of both the husband and wife and their children. Christ himself blessed marriage in his ministry. Marriage is modeled on Christ's union with the Church.

The vocation of marriage is one that springs from God's love. A man and woman work in their marriage to duplicate for each other the committed and eternal love that God has shown to them. The love between a man and woman often develops slowly and is cultivated by a growing friendship that leads to intimate sharing. At the time of the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the husband and wife exchange and bestow the marriage vows with and on each other. In fact, the man and woman are the ministers of this sacrament; the priest or deacon only serves as a witness and a representative of the Church.

Living in a Christian family helps us to imagine and prepare for marriage. Witnessing the loving example of parents, grandparents, and neighbors in marriage is a way to begin to plot out a style for married life that you might eventually choose as a husband or wife, and as a parent. Besides just observing and thinking about what it would like to be married, there are several practical things you can do now to prepare for a possible vocation to marriage. For example, you can work on:

- **Respect and Honor.** Both of these qualities demand giving other people their due and acknowledging their worth and goodness. You can practice these skills now in the way you treat your family members and friends of both sexes.
- **Listening.** Successful married couples are adept at good conversation. Good conversation involves excellent listening skills as one person concentrates on what the other is saying rather than just thinking up what to say next. How good a listener are you? Work in your current relationships to practice good listening skills that involve give and take and learn to make reasonable compromises when experience conflicts with family and friends.
- **Commitment.** Marriage demands faithful and unbroken commitment. Remember, the intimate bond between a husband and wife is intended to represent the same bond that Jesus shares with the Church. It is an unbreakable bond; this is the reason that the Church does not recognize divorce. You can practice commitment in your schoolwork, an after-school job, in your participation on a team or other extracurricular activity, and to your family and friends.
- **Chastity.** In marriage a husband and wife are faithful to each other physically. This is how they observe the counsel of chastity for their state in life. For you, chastity means refraining from sex until marriage. Remaining chaste until marriage is the best gift you can give your future spouse on your wedding night and beyond.
- **Love.** Married people have a particular, exclusive love for one another. They also have an all-encompassing love for all persons. It is difficult to imagine the exclusive love that will one day be yours if you marry, but you can prepare for it by cultivating an exclusive and deep love for God through prayer, works of charity, and love for your neighbor, including your enemies.

Much more on the preparation for marriage, the rite of Matrimony, and the challenges and rewards of marriage will be covered in Unit 2.

Page 62 Study Question Answers

1. Holy Orders and Matrimony are called sacraments at the service of the communion because both sacraments are directed to the holiness and salvation of others.
2. A lay person lives out Christ's mission of priest, prophet, and king by uniting themselves to Christ's sacrifice and celebrating the Eucharist, by teaching and evangelizing, and by striving to eradicate sinfulness in secular institutions.
3. A person may choose to live a committed single life in order to care for relatives, to give himself or herself more completely to a profession, or to serve other worthy ends.
4. Probably the greatest challenges to living the committed single life are loneliness and the difficulty of living chastely.
5. A life consecrated to God is characterized by the promise to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.
6. Religious life shared in community is rooted in the Gospel and in the community of the Trinity itself.
7. The active and contemplative forms of religious life are the same in that both pray, do penance, and live in community. They are *different* in that "contemplatives" spend most of their time in solitude apart from the world. "Active" religious are out in the world, participating in a variety of ministries.
8. Consecrated virgins are women who choose to live a life of virginity, to support the clergy through sacrifice and prayer, but do not become part of a religious order. Secular institutes are groups of single



Priesthood

Like the call to consecrated life, a call to the vocation of priesthood may not take place in typically



logical or sequential steps. It is likely that each priest has a unique story about how his vocation was first awakened. Some of the signs that a man is being called to priesthood may include:

- other people telling him he would make a good priest;
- a desire to pray;
- going to Mass more than usual and imagining himself as presider;
- trying out some of the ministries associated with priesthood (e.g., teaching, caring for the sick, counseling others).

The Sacrament of Holy Orders confers a sacred power on the priest for the service of the faithful. The sacrament is conferred only on baptized men, following the example of Jesus and the early Church, who only called men to be Apostles and bishops. In the Roman Catholic Church, priests live celibate lives and promise to remain celibate as a witness to the kingdom of

heaven. The sacrament is received in three degrees—bishop, priest, and deacon. These ordained ministers serve the Church by teaching, by leading worship, and by their governance.

Priests can also be members of religious communities, for example, the Jesuits or the Franciscans. A religious-order priest takes the same vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as the other members of the community (i.e., the brothers). The difference is that the religious priest is ordained and a brother is not. Diocesan priests are not members of religious communities. They are ordained to serve in a particular diocese, giving obedience to the local bishop. The diocesan priest makes promises of celibacy along with the promise of obedience. However, he does not typically take a vow of poverty. Most often a diocesan priest is assigned to work in a parish.

Unit 3 offers more information on each degree of ordained ministry on the preparation men typically undergo on the road to priesthood, and on their life and ministry as priests.

Vocation Week



Organize and help with the planning and production of a "Vocation Week" at your school or in your parish to call attention to the various Christian vocations. Do some or all of the following:

- Make several posters and collages that emphasize words like call, prayer, vocation, discernment as well as the particular Christian vocations and display them around your school or parish.
- Arrange for a panel of speakers to address teens on the specific preparation and practices of vocations like marriage, religious life, ordination, and the committed single life.
- Plan a prayer service or Mass with the theme of vocation awareness.
- Organize a standing committee that will continue with vocation-themed events throughout the year.

Thursday, when Jesus commanded his apostles to act as ministers "in memory of me." Stress that Jesus' example of washing feet demonstrates that above all else, ordained ministers—bishops, deacons, and priests—need to be servants, people whose first priority is to build up the people of God through service to all. Ask the students to tell whether *their* home parish is served by religious-order priests or diocesan priests. Ask them to explain what is the difference between the two.

12. **Vocation Week.** Call attention to the feature "Vocation Week" (page 61). Read the opening paragraph aloud. Make this a class project by having the students volunteer to serve in one of three groups: (1) publicity; (2) speaker organization; (3) liturgy planning. Begin working on the Vocation Week by deciding on a schedule and timetable. Let the groups come up with their own job descriptions and tasks, but be ready to help out. Be sure each group sets a time to meet again before leaving class today.

people and/or priests who profess the evangelical counsels but don't take public vows or live in community. Societies of apostolic life are organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus, whose members don't make vows but do engage in good works for the Church.

9. The purpose of marriage is to further the human race and to aid the wife, husband, and their entire family to attain eternal happiness with God.
10. The man and woman celebrating the sacrament of Matrimony are its ministers.
11. A religious-order priest takes the same vows as other members of the order (religious community). A diocesan priest serves a particular diocese under the auspices of the local bishop, and takes vows of celibacy and obedience, but not poverty.

Homework Assignment

- Have the students choose one of the following Assignments/Applications to work on: nos. 6, 7, 8, or 9. Explain that they will need to complete their work in time for their review lesson.
- Direct the students to journal their responses to the Journal/Discussion statements and questions on page 62.
- Have the students write responses to the Study Questions on page 62 and read "Christian Discipleship: Serve One Another" (pages 62–66).