

# *The Role of Teachers in Awakening Vocations*



“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

What teachers do and how they act are more significant than what they say — inside and outside the classroom. That's how the Church evangelizes.

The more completely an educator can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person [Christ] that is being presented to the students, the more this ideal will be believed and imitated.”

- Blessed Paul VI



## **What is this booklet?**

Teachers are called amidst already busy schedules to be more than knowledge transmitters. Students send out signals as they tackle academic and life issues. As a teacher, you have been gifted with the opportunity to respond to your students and to touch their lives by example, by listening, and by providing meaningful feedback. The purpose of this Quick Reference Guide is to suggest ways that you can encourage vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and other Church leadership without sacrificing time needed to complete your curriculum.



## What Is Discernment?

To say “Yes” to God is more about answering a call than initiating or manufacturing it. The process that leads to hearing the call, answering it, and later affirmation by the Church is called discernment.

In some ways, vocational discernment is similar to career planning. Both involve recognizing talents and personality traits suited to work tasks. However, a vocation is more than just a career in the Church.

*A career is what you do; whereas a vocation is who you are.*

As a teacher or school administrator or staff, you can help your students develop openness to the possibility of priesthood, religious or consecrated life. *Their discernment might begin with you!*

## How Can You Help?

Research reported by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops had identified three stages of occupational decision making. Young children choose what they might like to be when they grow up based on adult role models or idols. Around age 11, children begin to associate occupational choices with their developing interests, talents, and values. By the time they become juniors or seniors in high school, young people engage in more realistic explorations of career and life choices.

Teachers, school administrators and staff are often role models to their students. It would be helpful to take some time to reflect upon your own call to holiness and your important mission as a Catholic educator and mentor.

As an educator, be on the lookout for emerging qualities that apply to vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Point out these qualities to students, and encourage your students to consider themselves as potential future leaders in the Church.

### Key Qualities to Look for in:

#### Middle School Students

- Interacting or relating well with others
- Openness and interest in serving others
- Compassion
- Ability to forgive
- Generosity
- Prayerfulness
- Willingness to take a stand for the truth
- Honesty

#### High School Students

- Leadership
- Critical thinking
- Energy and stamina
- Comfort in relationship with Christ and His Church
- Care for others as well as self
- Cooperativeness in teamwork
- Humility, and a healthy sense of humor
- Trustworthiness

## Cultivating a Vocation: Not a problem but a tree

It's easy to think of vocational discernment as a problem to be solved. Plug the right information in (I like this, I don't like that; I am good at this, I am not good at that; people say this about me, etc.) and voila... you get an answer. But the answers to the fundamental questions (who am I, why do I exist, and who does God want me to be) are not questions of logic. They can't just be "figured out."

A better way to think of discernment is as a tree. After all, it's Jesus' analogy; He's the one who calls us to bear fruit that will last! Let's say you are given a tiny sapling and told it will bear fruit after some time. You don't know what the fruit is at first, but if you think about it, that isn't the important thing to focus on at the beginning! You need to give your tiny tree good conditions for growing. You need to provide it with fertile soil, give it water, make sure it is in proper light, and protect it from harsh weather. This will take time, effort, and most importantly, patience.



It is only after much cultivation and caring for the tree that you'll see the first fruit blossoms, followed by the fruits themselves. Only then will you discover with great joy what type of fruit your tree produces. A vocation also requires a similar cultivation. If we are to produce good fruit, we need to place ourselves in the right conditions, adapting ourselves so that we are open to answering the call of God.

### **Allowing the Fruit to Mature:** Basic conditions for cultivating a vocation

- **Total Trust in God**

God can and will give you the means to overcome any obstacle, no matter how insurmountable it seems. Have a childlike trust in your Heavenly Father and in His limitless love for you.

- **Faithfulness to Personal Prayer**

God longs for you to understand what He wants for you, and will speak to you in your heart. Develop an intimacy with Him through frequent mental prayer. Over time you will hear Him more clearly.

- **Immersion in the Word of God**

Answers are often found in Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels. Allow the Holy Spirit to influence and form your mind and heart by praying with scripture and resting with His Word.

- **Give Yourself Totally to God**

Do not worry about being holy, smart, or talented enough for God's Plan. Just be willing to give yourself to the Lord as you are, with all your gifts and imperfections. God does great things with a sincere "yes."

- **Be Patient**

While a sense of urgency in discovering your vocation is good, God's plan may include allowing you to suffer through periods of doubt and uncertainty.

# The Scientific Method of Discernment

The scientific method can be a useful tool in teaching your students how to approach discernment. They might feel overwhelmed by the idea of figuring out what God is calling them to do and not know where to begin. Applying what they have learned about the scientific method can provide guidance and help the discernment process seem more approachable.

- 1. Question:** The scientific method begins with a question, and the steps that follow all work toward answering this question. *Discernment seeks to answer the question, "Who is God calling me to be?"*
- 2. Research:** In order to answer your question, you must have a broad understanding of the possibility of results. *We can help young people with this step by teaching them about the different vocations, sharing stories of the saints, providing spiritual reading, inviting a religious sister, brother, or a priest to speak to the class, etc.*
- 3. Hypothesize:** Make an educated guess about the answer to your question. *Prayer and knowledge of oneself can help provide a young person with a working theory about the vocation they might be called to.*
- 4. Experiment:** Design an experiment that provides you with empirical data, sensible, tangible results; repeat it multiple times to achieve consistency. *Encourage your students to get out there and explore their vocation hypothesis! They can experiment by going to QV and FIAT events, hanging out with religious sisters or brothers, priests, and seminarians, visiting seminaries or convents, going on a retreat or day of recollection, spending time with other discerners, or talking to a priest or religious about their life.*
- 5. Analyze:** Carefully consider the meaning of the results of your experiment and how they fit into your research. *In order to fully benefit from their experiments, your students should make time to reflect on the concrete steps they've taken to explore their vocations, bring their experiences to God in prayer, and discuss them with a spiritual director to see if these experiences bring them peace.*
- 6. Conclude:** Did the experiment prove the hypothesis true? Sometimes the hypothesis is proven partially true or even false. In these cases, return to the hypothesis and begin again, incorporating this new data. *Did your students gain some clarity? Great! If not, tell them not to worry. What they've learned will be a great help to them as they move forward. Help them keep in mind that part of their hypothesis might be true even if they have found part of it to be incorrect. For instance, one might feel called to religious life, but not to that order, or feel called to enter seminary but not yet. They just need to adjust their hypothesis and try again.*

# Build a Culture of Vocations in Your Classroom!

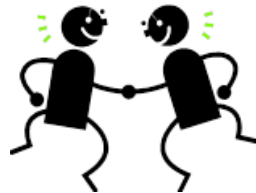
“Pastoral work for vocations needs, especially today, to be taken up with new vigor and more decisive commitment by all members of the Church, in the awareness that it is not a secondary or marginal matter, or the business of one group only, as if it were a ‘part’, no matter how important, of the entire pastoral work of the Church...Indeed, concern for vocations is a connatural and essential dimension of the Church’s pastoral work.” - Pope St. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 34



**PRAY:** “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to His harvest.”



**INFORM:** Spread the word! Get vocational brochures, posters, fliers, and calendars of events out there!



**INVITE:** Personally encourage youth and young adults to consider the priesthood and religious life as an option.

# 10 Simple and Quick Ways to Promote Vocations Within the Classroom

1. Speak often and speak well of priests and religious, especially the ones in the parish.
2. Have a Vocations Bulletin Board near the door or where the students line up/gather.



3. Pray for vocations everyday... and pray for a specific person by name.



4. Define terms like “vocation,” “discernment,” “religious life,” etc.... help them to remember the terms by using them often.
5. **3Ps: Photos, Pictures, Posters...** faces and photos make it more real. (This is true for the saints as well!)

6. Use technology: Share movie clips, stories and links from the internet and Facebook (e.g. Arlington Vocations, Imagine Sisters, CMSWR.org, Vianney Vocations and many more.)



7. Share a vocation story... and tell it like you would a love story.

8. Invite priests, sisters, and religious to come and visit, and be sure to **BUILD UP** the visit to make it the most successful possible!

9. Adopt a seminarian, priest, religious brother and or sister... have the students send them cards and messages.



10. Invite each student to personally consider why God created them and invite them to be open to His will.



# Definitions & Terms

***Apostolate:*** The type of work or mission of the order through which their particular charism is lived out.

***Brother:*** Brothers live in religious communities. They take vows and promise to use their talents to serve God wherever the community decides they are needed. Brothers are not ordained

***Charism:*** Each religious community has a *charism* - a unique way of returning God's love to Him and His people which manifests a particular attribute of God's being.

***Consecrated Life:*** A permanent state of life recognized by the Church, entered freely in response to the call of Christ to perfection, and characterized by the making of public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

***Deacon (Permanent):*** A third degree of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, after bishop and priest. The permanent deacon is ordained for ministry and service, but not to the priesthood. He assists and preaches at Mass, baptizes and presides at weddings and funerals. They have jobs outside the Church to make a living. Men at least 35 years of age, married or single, may be ordained permanent deacons.

***Deacon (Transitional):*** Men who are called to the priesthood who are in the final stage of formation before being ordained as priests. They receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders and usually serve as deacons for one year before ordination to the priesthood. During their year as a deacon they continue their studies and serve in parish assignments.

***Discernment:*** When talking about discovering your vocation, discernment means the process of that discovery through prayer, reflection and discussion as to how God calls each person to love Him, whether as a priest, a consecrated religious man or woman, a married person or a consecrated single person.

***Holy Orders:*** The Sacrament by which the mission entrusted by Christ to His Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church through the laying on of hands. By receiving Holy Orders men become members of the ordained clergy - deacons, priests and bishops. All three confer a permanent, sacramental character to the man ordained.

***Laity:*** People within the Church including religious brothers and sisters as well as all other single and married person who are not ordained as bishop, priests or deacons are known as the *laity* or the *lay faithful*.

***Novice:*** A man or woman in the second formal stage of becoming a consecrated religious is called a *novice*. This stage of the *novitiate* usually takes one to two years.



***Nun:*** Nuns are sisters and brides of Christ who are called by Him to pray and serve the needs of the Church in a more hidden way. They live in cloistered communities and do not leave their convents for any outside apostolates.

***Priest:*** A man is ordained to priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Together each man and the Church discern (discover) whether or not he is called to become a priest. Diocesan priests are called to serve the people of a particular diocese. Men called to be priests in religious orders belong to communities and in addition to receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders they also take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (*the three evangelical counsels*)

***Religious Community:*** The founder of a religious community brings together a group of men or women who share the same charism and are dedicated to the same mission in the Church. These are religious communities of priests and brothers and communities of sisters. The apostolates of the communities vary according to their mission. Those dedicated primarily to prayer are *contemplative* communities; those who combine prayer with apostolic ministries are called *active* communities.

***Religious Life:*** Priests, brothers or sisters in communities that embrace the spirituality, charism and teachings of the community's founder call their way of life *religious life*. Members of these communities follow Jesus through taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

***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:*** Sisters belong to religious communities and are brides of Christ who are chosen by Him to love Him and serve His Church like His Mother Mary as virgins and spiritual mothers. They serve the Church in whatever ways their superiors decide is best given their talents and inclinations.

***Vocation:*** Vocation means a call. It is God's invitation –His call- to each person to love and serve Him and His Church in a particular state or way of life.

***Vows:*** Formal commitments made to God to follow Jesus in His poverty, chastity and obedience as members of religious communities. The vow of poverty means that members hold all things in common. The community takes care of each other's needs through the providence of God and their own charity. The vow of chastity means that the member gives up the goods of marriage and marital relations for the sake of God's kingdom. The vow of obedience allows the member of the community to imitate and share in Jesus' obedience to His Father in order to accomplish His will. (Diocesan priests promise to live in celibate chastity, obedience to their bishop and a simple life.)

# Prayers for the Classroom

## **Prayer to Discover My Vocation**

*Recommended for 5th grade and up*

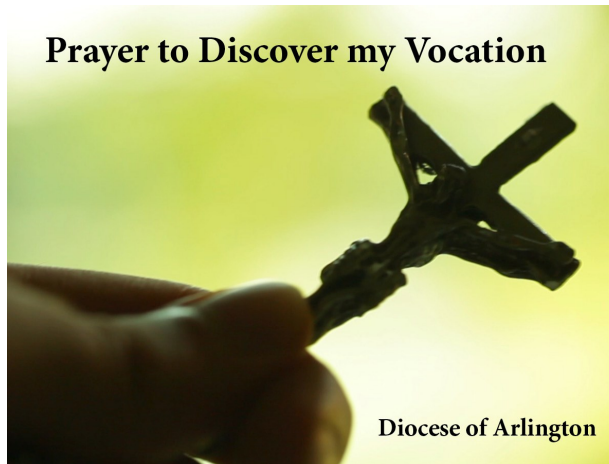
Heavenly Father, if I am called to the vocation of Holy Matrimony, lead me to my future spouse. Keep us holy and pure that we may grow in love for You and each other.

Lord, if I am called to another vocation in the Church, give me the courage to say “yes”. Help me to be a faithful instrument of Your grace for the souls entrusted to my care.

Please place holy people in my life to assist on this path of discovering my vocation that I may become an effective witness of Your love to the world.

I ask this through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, and in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Prayer to Discover my Vocation**



Diocese of Arlington

## Children's Prayer for Vocations

*Recommended for Grades K-4*

Jesus, I know that You love me.

Teach me how to talk to You,

how to listen to You,

and how to follow You.

Bless religious sisters, brothers, and priests.

Bless my family.

Keep all of us close to Your heart.

Amen.



## Diocese of Arlington Vocations Prayer

Heavenly Father, Lord of the harvest,  
call forth vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life  
from our diocese and our families.

Inspire men to imitate Christ the Eternal High Priest  
in sacrificial service to Your Church.

Move the hearts of men and women  
to offer themselves wholly to You  
in poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Send them as laborers for Your harvest.

Inspire the faithful to support them with prayer and sacrifice.

Raise up holy families who foster openness to Your call.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

*Mary Immaculate, pray for us*  
*St. Thomas More, pray for us*  
*St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us.*

For more information and resources to help you  
foster vocations in your classroom, please contact:

**Office of Vocations**  
**Diocese of Arlington**  
200 North Glebe Road, Suite 901  
Arlington, VA 22203

(703) 841-2514  
vocations@arlingtondiocese.org  
[www.ArlingtonVocations.org](http://www.ArlingtonVocations.org)

