

## Vocation in the Catholic Church

"Then He said to His disciples. "The harvest is ready but the laborers are few. Ask the harvest master to send out laborers to gather his harvest."

Mt. 9:37-38



Many influences come together to bring it about that a woman or a man decides to become more fully involved in the ministerial life of the church. This personal commitment can be temporary or permanent, partial or complete. Whatever form this calling may take, a Catholic believes that the Holy Spirit is the source of every authentic vocation. The instruments, the human means, of His work often include the living example of persons in a given church ministry. There is also the home, the classroom, the hospital, retreat houses, religious experience, reading, friends, prayer...the Bible itself. All of these, and other things also, contribute to a church vocation.

The full and permanent commitment involved in the religious life and priesthood has long had its place in Catholic tradition. Yet these callings are by no means the only vocation: in the best sense all Christians are called to a vocation in the community. Marriage itself, for example, is certainly a vocation. We list here not simply priesthood and religious life but other possibilities for ministry in the Church. And there are others not listed here, such as sodalities, covenant communities, etc. Information about these can be secured from local pastors or chanceries, or from the National Religious Vocation Conference.

It is the Spirit that the Father has sent through Christ that is at the center of a church vocation, just as Christ Himself is the head of the Church. Hence this kind of vocation, while it is certainly a matter of professional guidance and consultation on a "career" level, is also far more than that. Here the assistance of a competent spiritual director is invaluable. The work of the Spirit must be discerned. This discernment means, among other things, evaluating the qualities of a person who wishes to follow such a vocation.

The general qualifications for priesthood and the religious life (and similarly for other church-related occupations) include an appropriate level of spiritual life, emotional and physical health, and a level of intelligence and academic accomplishment consistent with the kind of life one seeks. One may

enter some form of training as early as first-year high school or as late as "mid" or even later life. Most commonly, however, a man or woman enters a formation program after high school or college. The length of training varies depending upon when one enters a program, the extent of his or her background, and the specific traditions of a given community or diocese. Generally, for example, it takes the same amount of preparation to become a diocesan priest as for any other professional person: four years after college, or eight years after high school. Formal entrance into a seminary or community is often preceded by participation in an associate or affiliate program.

There is no obligation created by seeking the counsel of a trusted, knowledgeable advisor – and it is most important to do so.

A Catholic might wish to serve the Church, the people of God, in a specific, professional manner. This could be done as a diocesan priest, permanent deacon, religious brother, religious priest, religious sister, as a lay person employed in a Church ministry or engaged in volunteer work, as a member of a secular institute or by participation in any number of Church organizations.

## **Diocesan Priest**

A diocesan priest ordinarily serves the people of God in a given area – a diocese – as a parish priest.



And yet diocesan priests are also involved in administration, campus ministry, hospital and prison chaplaincy, teaching and sometimes at foreign missions. Beneath the visible surface of these ministries lies an abiding prayerful relationship with the Lord for whose sake and for whose people he ministers.

Information about the diocesan priesthood can be obtained from any diocesan priest, by contacting one or more of the diocesan vocation directors listed in the Diocesan Vocation Offices section of this book or by contacting:

The National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD)

440 West Neck Road

Huntington, NY 11743

Phone: (631) 645-8210

Fax: (631) 812-0249

E-Mail: [office@ncdvd.org](mailto:office@ncdvd.org)

Web: <http://www.ncdvd.org/>

## **Permanent Deacon**

Recently the Catholic Church restored the order of permanent diaconate. A deacon is a man 35 years of age or older, married or single, who serves the people of God in the ordained diaconal ministry. His ministry is liturgical (preaching), sacramental (except the Eucharist and Penance), pastoral and social. Inquiry about deacons' training programs can be made at the local diocesan chancery office or by contacting one of the following:



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations  
3211 4th St. NE  
Washington DC 20017  
Phone: (202) 541-3033  
E-Mail: [clergy@uscgb.org](mailto:clergy@uscgb.org)  
Web: <http://www.usccb.org>

National Association of Diaconate Directors  
7625 North High Street  
Columbus, OH 43235  
Phone: (614) 985-2276  
E-Mail: [naddinfo@nadd.org](mailto:naddinfo@nadd.org)  
Web: [www.nadd.org](http://www.nadd.org)

## **Religious Brother**



As a male religious, a brother is a lay Christian who commits himself to Christ and the Christian community by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Not only is he in service to the community, he himself lives in a religious community that centers his life. It is from this root and from his own interior life that he is able to meet the needs of the Church in ministries such as teaching, social work, technical occupations, etc. The ministries of religious brothers are varied and reflect the traditions of a given community.

There are many communities of religious brothers as well as communities of priests and brothers. Often a man applies to a community with which he is familiar. Information about the brotherhood may be obtained by writing to one or more vocation directors listed in the Religious Communities for Men section of this book or by contacting:

The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)  
5420 S. Cornell Ave., Suite #207  
Chicago, IL 60615-5604  
Phone: (773) 363-5454  
E-Mail: [nrvc@nrvc.net](mailto:nrvc@nrvc.net)  
Web: [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net)

The Religious Brothers Conference provides advocacy for the identity and the vocation of brothers; acts as a professional and ministerial resource to its member communities and offers direct services to individual brothers. Contact:

Br. Herman Johnson, FMS  
President  
5401 S. Cornell Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60615-5604  
Phone: (773) 595-4023  
Fax: (773) 595-4087  
E-Mail: [rbc@ctu.edu](mailto:rbc@ctu.edu)  
Web: <http://www.todaysbrother.org>

## **Religious Priest**

Some religious communities are "clerical": they include priests. What was said immediately before applies equally to priests living in religious communities. The religious priest takes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the spirit of his own congregation. Being a priest he is a minister, for the Church, of the sacraments. His work generally depends upon the ministry appropriate to his community and may include teaching, overseas ministry, social work, pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, etc. A person who feels called to this life may contact any member of a community with which he is familiar, or one or more vocation directors listed in the Religious Communities for Men section of this site, or:



The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)  
5420 S. Cornell Ave., Suite #207  
Chicago, IL 60615-5604  
Phone: (773) 363-5454  
E-Mail: [nrvc@nrvc.net](mailto:nrvc@nrvc.net)  
Web: [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net)

## **Woman Religious**



A woman religious is a lay person who commits herself to Christ and to the Church by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She lives in a religious community that follows a constantly renewed tradition, patterned on the life and teaching of the founder of the community. The work she generally does will depend upon the particular community as influenced by the needs of the Church and its people, and includes such ministries as pastoral; social service; education (in many forms and ways); hospital/medical; youth/campus; missionary; retreats/ conferences/ spiritual direction; peace and justice; evangelization/faith formation; creative expression through music, the arts, etc.; work with the poor/elderly/broken/ oppressed and distressed and so on.

The role of women in the Church is constantly developing and expanding. A significant part of that renewal is occurring within the faith communities of woman religious. Prayer and work are part of the tradition of all communities yet some are primarily contemplative while others are more active. Information about the vocation of a woman religious can be secured by contacting one or more of the vocation directors listed in the Religious Communities for Women section of this book or by contacting:

Women who wish to enter the religious life as a second-career vocation can contact the individual communities in which they are interested. (See listings in the Religious Communities for Women section of this site.) Even if a community has an upper age limit, they will sometimes consider older vocations on an individual basis, after mutual discernment of candidate and congregation. It never hurts to contact them if you feel strongly attracted to that community.

The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)

5420 S. Cornell Ave., Suite #207

Chicago, IL 60615-5604

Phone: (773) 363-5454

E-Mail: [nrvc@nrvc.net](mailto:nrvc@nrvc.net)

Web: [www.nrvc.net](http://www.nrvc.net)

## **Second Career Vocations**

Second-career vocations are not a new trend in the Catholic Church; for instance, all the apostles were men who had previous careers before they answered the calling of Jesus Christ. Today, people from all walks of life, including retired men and women, leave successful careers as nurses, lawyers, engineers, teachers, secretaries, etc. to join or affiliate themselves with a religious community. They become priests, brothers, sisters or lay ministers with contemplative, evangelical or apostolic communities. These men and women bring a wealth of talent to religious communities whether it be management know-how, a professional background, technical skill, etc. Most religious communities

listed in this publication have their own age restrictions on accepting second-career vocations. There is no set age limit; each community should be contacted to find out what age restrictions apply. This also applies to men who are interested in becoming diocesan priests. All diocesan vocation directors are listed in this publication and should be contacted directly.

Seminary programs structured to meet the needs of the second-career priestly candidate provide a unique seminary environment with a supportive peer community and experienced faculty. These seminaries are:

Sacred Heart School of Theology  
7335 South Highway 100, P.O. Box 429  
Hales Corners, WI 53130  
Phone: (414) 529-6984  
E-Mail: [tknoebel@shst.edu](mailto:tknoebel@shst.edu)  
Web: [www.shst.edu](http://www.shst.edu)

Holy Apostles College and Seminary  
33 Prospect Hill Rd.  
Cromwell, CT 06416-2027  
Phone: (860) 632-3010  
Fax: (860) 632-3030  
E-Mail: [rector@holyapostles.edu](mailto:rector@holyapostles.edu)  
Web: [www.holyapostles.edu](http://www.holyapostles.edu)

Blessed Pope John XXIII National Seminary  
558 South Ave.  
Weston, MA 02493-2699  
Phone: (781) 899-5500  
Fax: (781) 899-9057  
E-Mail: [seminary@blessedjohnxxiii.edu](mailto:seminary@blessedjohnxxiii.edu)  
Web: [www.blessedjohnxxiii.edu/](http://www.blessedjohnxxiii.edu/)

## **Volunteer Lay Ministries**

The laity has a significant role in our Church today, being identified as the principle bearers of the Church's social message to civil society. We are all called to social ministry to fulfill our baptismal responsibility. As John Paul II stated, "The call is addressed to everyone." Lay people are called by the Lord to a mission on behalf of the Church and the world. "You go into my vineyard too!" This represents the unity within our Church. The union between Christ and the disciples who were called to bear their own fruit in the world continues in the modern-day disciples called lay volunteers. Many of our laity – young, old, married and single – fully respond to their call as Catholics. This growing number of people are leaving their jobs, money, security, and material possessions to serve

for one, two or three years as lay missionaries to our needy world. Daily, they are putting their faith into action. These lay mission volunteers can be found across our own country in parishes, schools, social agencies, and hospitals. They are working with those in need in our nation's rural and urban areas. They can be found in soup kitchens and child-care centers. No area is without their presence. They can be found in churches in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, Latin and Central America. Whether teachers, construction workers, home-care aides, or accountants (and the list goes on), these lay people in mission are apostles of hope.



Challenged by Our Holy Father, these lay volunteers know that to say “CHURCH” is to say “MISSION!” Information about volunteer mission work may be obtained by contacting one or more organizations listed in the section that follows or by contacting:

Catholic Volunteer Network  
6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 820  
Takoma Park, MD 20912-4423  
Phone: (800) 543-5046, (301) 270-0900  
Fax: (301) 270-0901  
E-mail: [info@catholicvolunteernetwork.org](mailto:info@catholicvolunteernetwork.org)  
Web: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org)

#### Lay Person

(Church-Related Career)

Examples of this vocation would include service as a director of religious education, campus minister, hospital chaplain, prison minister, pastoral associate, pastoral administrator or teacher. Such a person might be married or single. Someone specifically interested in these kinds of ministries should contact the local diocesan chancery and ask for the diocesan official responsible for the given area of interest. One also might contact Catholic colleges or schools of theology where there are programs in ministry.

#### Lay Person

(Associates)



Associates are men and women who want to enrich their Christian life by an affiliation with a religious community of priests, brothers or sisters.

Their occupations vary –each continues to carry out the usual duties of their state of life in whatever their chosen job or profession. Associates may be married, single or widowed. Solemn promises (vows) – usually of commitment – are made with some religious communities. Associates, also known as co-members, oblates, co-disciples, agregés (companions on the road), etc., choose a particular religious community based on their

identification with that community's unique charism, values and mission. By sharing in the spiritual

life, prayers and apostolic works of the religious community, associates have the opportunity for personal growth, the sharing of their own gifts and the mutual support of a faith community. Click on the Associates, Oblates, Secular Institutes and Other Communities Option on this site to find a religious community with which to affiliate. And/or contact:

North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR)  
5900 Delhi Road  
Mount St. Joseph, OH 45051  
Phone: (253) 256-2227  
E-mail: [info@nacar.org](mailto:info@nacar.org)  
Web: [www.nacar.org](http://www.nacar.org)

NACAR is the clearinghouse for all US and Canadian Associates and provides identification and exploration of issues concerning Associate life; assistance in policy and guideline development for Associate groups; networking, mutual support, workshops, annual conferences; and visioning for the future.

#### Lay Person (Volunteer Service)

Usually this service extends for a year or two in a mission of the Church either in the U.S. or overseas. In this ever-expanding group, opportunities are available for people to render service in numerous areas of Church activity. Religious communities affirm that lay extensions actually intensify their charism of service. People representing every type of service are incorporating positions for lay volunteers into the work they give in the Church. Young, old, married and single are responding to this challenge. The benefits often include stipend, room and board, health insurance and some travel allotment.



The personal rewards for a lay volunteer begin with the immeasurable gratitude expressed by those who are served. The blessings continue in ways bestowed by the Spirit and unique to each person. Click on the Lay Missionary option on this site to discover which volunteer mission work holds the most promise for you. And/or contact:

Catholic Volunteer Network  
Jim Lindsay, Executive Director  
6930 Carroll Ave., Ste. 820  
Takoma Park, MD 20912-4423  
Phone: (800) 543-5046, (301) 270-0900, ext. 18  
Fax: (301) 270-0901  
E-mail: [jlindsay@catholicvolunteernetwork.org](mailto:jlindsay@catholicvolunteernetwork.org), [info@catholicvolunteernetwork.org](mailto:info@catholicvolunteernetwork.org)  
Web: [www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org](http://www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org)



## Secular Institutes

Over 60,000 Catholic lay men, lay women and secular clergy belong to over 160 canonically erected secular institutes throughout the world. The vocation of a single consecrated secular is a vocation in, and of, the world. Members take vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, but do not wear distinctive attire or live in community as do members of religious orders. Generally, members live alone or with their families and hold regular jobs. They come together for periodic meetings, retreats and spiritual renewal. For information about secular institutes, contact one or more of the institutes listed elsewhere in this book or write to:

### United States Conference of Secular Institutes

Beatrice Caron, President

38 Locke St

Saco, ME 04072-2831

Phone: (207) 284-8966

E-mail: [norbea@zwi.net](mailto:norbea@zwi.net)

Web: [www.secularinstitutes.org](http://www.secularinstitutes.org)

### USA Council of Serra International

The mission of the USA Council of Serra International is to foster vocations to the ministerial priesthood and vowed religious life in the United States through prayer, awareness, affirmation and support and through this ministry enrich and develop its members' common Catholic faith.

### The USA Council of Serra International

65 E. Wacker Place, Suite 802

Chicago, IL 60601-7238

Phone: (888) 777-6681

Fax: (888) 777-6803

E-mail: [serraus@serraus.org](mailto:serraus@serraus.org)

Web: [www.serraus.org](http://www.serraus.org)

Note: Although these listings were carefully compiled, The Catholic News Publishing Company neither endorses or recommends the organizations on this site. Prospective volunteers and/or lay members should carefully screen organizations to which they intend to apply.

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