

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VOCATIONS

1. *What does the Church really teach about vocations?*

The Church first and foremost communicates the generosity of God's call to all people. Consider what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Scripture, and Council documents have to say:

- God invited our first parents into “intimate communion” (CCC 54). *Dwelling in God and enjoying the inner life of the Holy Trinity has been our eternal vocation from the beginning!*
- By grace of baptism, we are “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). *Our vocation is to participate the life of our risen Lord, lovingly for the sake of the world.*
- Each baptized person is uniquely called by Christ Jesus to the fullness of holiness “by which the Father himself is perfect” (*Lumen Gentium* 11:3).
- Claimed by Christ Jesus and graced by his love, we are anointed to “proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world” (CCC 3)—*from one generation to the next, by bold profession of faith, by Christian daily life, and by active liturgical celebration.*

Everyone—*everyone*—is invited to enter the reign of God through the redemptive act of Christ Jesus. God's generous calling evokes and compels our generous and loving response.

2. *I do not intend to work for the Church, so why would “vocation discernment” apply to me?*

Only a very small percentage of people work directly for the Church. The rest of us are chosen to be Christ's presence in the world—in the workplace, neighborhood, community—working like good yeast, like light, bearing hope and mercy and Christ's healing presence. No one else can accomplish what God has in mind for *you!*

3. *What does the word “vocation” mean? Where does it come from?*

“Vocation” is rooted in the Latin word *vocatio*, or calling; *vocare* means “to call,” and that word comes from the word *vox*, or voice. So “vocation” means to hear the voice of God. And what does God speak?

First, God speaks *the name* of every living being, and it comes into being (see Genesis 1). We are willed and desired into this world, unique and beloved images of God.

Second, God speaks *an invitation*, through infinitely various expressions of Christian lifestyle and ministry or mission, to participate in the life of God for all eternity.

So vocation never starts with “me” but with God. Vocation is never about my choosing but about *God's* choosing, my being chosen *by God*, and *for God's* wondrous and loving plan to unite all of humankind and all of creation in the eternal divine embrace.

4. *I live an ordinary life that works just fine, so why would “vocation discernment” apply to me?*

No life is “ordinary” in the reign of God. If our Christian communities really understood how extraordinarily we all have been graced in the Holy Spirit, entire cultures would be healed and transformed.

5. *I am divorced/widowed/old/confined to a wheelchair/dealing with issues/not too connected to the Church/from a different culture/etc., etc., etc., so “vocation discernment” seems irrelevant to my circumstances.*

If you have been wounded, misunderstood, marginalized, or alienated by the Church, we humbly ask how we can hasten the healing and lead you to a fresh discovery of God's calling in your life. It's not too late!

6. *My real concern is my career/my need to make a living/job security/retirement savings/college tuition for my children/having a real job in the real world/etc., etc., etc., so why should I add “vocation discernment” to my list of things to do?*

As relationship with God takes its rightful place at the center of your life, the obligations of life amazingly awaken with new meaning. Discerning God's purpose for your life changes everything.

7. How will I know I have a vocation?

It's a rare person who knows early on the Christian lifestyle and ministry or mission to which God is calling them. You probably won't wake up one morning and receive a divine download on the direction for your life.

Nor is God's plan for your life a guessing game, where God knows and you get to figure it out. God is everlastingly *for us* (Rom 8:31) and *for our fulfillment and happiness*—which unfolds over time, as we move with great trust “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18).

You will begin to sense the shape of your vocation through:

- **active engagement** in your life as a baptized Christ-centered man or woman;
- **prayerful reflection** on the circumstances of your life;
- a **regular prayer life** and reflection on the Scriptures;
- **conversation** with a trusted mentor, spiritual director, or vocational guide;
- **participation** in the life of the Christian community;
- **experimenting** with possible options for the work God has in mind for you;
- **more prayerful reflection**; and
- **taking the next logical step**, which may be prayer, research, or more action.

AWAKENING VOCATIONS offers a **theology of vocation** that helps you to make sense of vocation for your life, and a **process of discernment** that helps you to look at the vocational lifestyle (single, married, celibate) and the ministry or mission for which God has uniquely gifted you and anoints you to fulfill.

8. If I'm not going to be a priest or religious, do I have anything to discern?

Yes, you do! Christian married life is a rich and vital vocational lifestyle for those who are called to it. “Falling in love” is no proof that you are called to that Christian vocational lifestyle. And since by baptism you participate in God's redemptive work, the kind of work you do and where you do it are all part of God's plan.

9. Don't real vocations require a greater degree of holiness than most people have?

None of us can slide by with being “just a little bit holy.” God has a claim on the whole of your life! Participation in God's life is the very essence of holiness and your path to achieving holiness. Real holiness bears the fruit of real joy.

10. What if God calls me to something that really repels me, or asks more of me than I can give, or that I have no talent for? What if I can't measure up to what God wants of me?

God does not play jokes with your life. God does not gift you with talents and a desire for one thing, and then “assign” you to something entirely different. Jesus himself says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

If you really do not want to be a medical missionary nun in a foreign land, chances are good that you are not even gifted for that way of life and that work. So wipe out that worry. Or, it may be that you are gifted in that way, and some resistance is holding you back. That's why it's important to experiment, prayerfully reflect, discern with the help of the Christian community, and do the next obvious thing.

Or perhaps you feel called to ordained ministry but can't imagine not “having someone to love.” You may be called to Christian married life. Or God may desire to open your life to a depth of love that goes far beyond “having some one to love,” gifting you with a celibate love for the One and therefore for the many.

11. Is a vocation “forever”?

Your vocation to life in Christ, and to eternal life in the Holy Trinity, is forever. It's easy, though, to get caught in the notion that the things you do or the way you do them will be forever. One beauty of God's calling is that it continues to unfold and deepen and take a unique shape that reflects and also inspires the circumstances and understandings of your life.

The decisive moment in your discernment comes when you realize that at the core of your being you are **incapable of not being or doing what God is calling you to be or to do**. As your Christian faith matures, God's calling will take hold in a way that you could not have imagined at the outset. God takes your lifelong commitment seriously. That's why it's so important to discern God's calling for your life with the wisdom and support of the Christian community.

12. What if I'm in my 50s or 60s or 70s and have never felt like I had a vocation? Did I miss something? Or could it be that I have been living my vocation but could never name it?

If you have felt fulfilled in doing something that felt like “a work of love” in the world, chances are good you were fulfilling your calling but just never had a name for it. If you have gone through life feeling like you had to tolerate your work, or that it was “draining the life out of you,” it may be time now to prayerfully reflect on your life and circumstances, follow your hunch, do some

research, and make a decision to listen for God's calling, experiment, discern, and commit to acting boldly and generously, as Christ did, for the sake of the world.

13. *What does parish-based vocational discernment actually do for me?*

Parish-based vocational discernment, available through AWAKENING VOCATIONS, gives you tools for mature Christian life and a way to actively share in the Church's mission to enable every person to encounter Christ. Awakening vocations in the parish is a work of God's love right here, easily accessible to you.

14. *Do I have to commit to a long-term process or share in a small group?*

God is interested in getting on with the work of salvation. So discernment is not a long-term guessing game but a way to awaken to the signs and opportunities all around you. Your parish's AWAKENING VOCATIONS certified vocational guides work with your schedule to keep the process in motion. Most discernment is one-to-one, with the option of small groups forming as vocational interests emerge.

15. *What does parish-based vocational guidance cost?*

Freewill offerings are always welcome to support your parish in the cost of formation for members of the parish's vocational guidance team.

For more information, please contact AWAKENING VOCATIONS in any way convenient to you.

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