



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

Roman Catholic Diocese of Peterborough • Vocations Office

What is this booklet?

Everyone has a vocation – a calling in life. First and foremost, every Christian is called to holiness. This holiness comes from knowing, loving and serving God. Moreover, each of us is called to holiness in a particular state in life: the married life, in which a man and woman commit themselves to each other and to God in the Sacrament of Marriage; the committed single life in which a person chooses to remain single in order to devote themselves to a particular life work or career pathway; the ordained ministry in which a man is called by the Church to be a deacon, priest or bishop; or the religious life in which a woman or man chooses to live following the evangelical counsels or vows in a religious community. In this booklet, 'Vocation' refers to these four states of life. Vocations to religious life and to ordained ministry need to be nurtured by the Christian community and teachers are an integral part of this community. Students send out signals about what they are considering for their future 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 and religious life in particular.



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 conducted by USCCB has 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 enter 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:

Elementary 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

Promoting Vocations

How you promote vocations is as varying as each individual teacher and student, but the **SPARKS** acronym and a list of some important personal characteristics may help you to develop a good plan.

Spot the signals, using the characteristics listed in this guide.

Pray for the ability to see your students as God sees them.

Pray specifically for those students who have qualities of potential Church leaders.

Accent discovery. Encourage students to explore opportunities to help others at school, at home, in the Church, or in the community, either individually or through involvement in service projects such as working in a meal program, a pro-life activity, or holding a clothing drive.

Reach out. Even amidst the time constraints of curriculum requirements and your schedule outside the classroom, be open to conversation about vocations. If you notice a student with gifts applicable to ministry, ask if the student has ever thought about ordination or religious life. With a student's permission, talk to his or her parents about your observations.

KeeP communicating. Develop a list of people who are willing to answer your students' questions about the priesthood or religious life. Make vocations a part of a career day in your school or classroom by inviting one or more speakers (ordained, religious, seminarians, novices, etc.) to talk about vocations. Have up-to-date vocations resources visible in your classroom and handouts or brochures readily available.

Support the process. Foster a classroom environment in which the call to ministry is respected-where it is okay to consider a religious vocation. Integrate vocations into your other lesson plans. For example, use priests or sisters in math story problems. In language arts, use vocation questions as journal topics.

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 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 vigour 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 labourers 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 every day... 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. www.ptbovocations.com, Imagine Sisters, Vianney Vocations and many more.)
7. Share a vocation story... and tell it like you would a love story (see Columbia magazine).
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 persons who are not ordained as bishops, 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 through others' 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

Daily Prayer to Discover My Vocation

*Recommended for
Grade 7 and higher*

Heavenly Father, if it be Your holy will that I am called to the vocation of marriage, please protect my future spouse. Keep them holy and pure so that when in Your Divine providence You bring us together, we may discover and foster the love You have always intended for us to share, even from the beginning of time. Then, through our marriage, may we faithfully witness that love to the world each and every day of our lives.

But Lord, if it be Your will that I am called to another vocation in the Church, then place holy people in my life to assist me along this path, not telling me what I should do, but guiding and encouraging me every step of the way, so that I may become the faithful instrument of Your grace for the souls You have entrusted to my care.

I ask this through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, and in the name of Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. Amen.

Children's Prayer for Vocations

Recommended for Grades K-6

Jesus, I know that You love me.

I love You very much.

In Baptism, You made me a child of God
and called me to be close to You always.

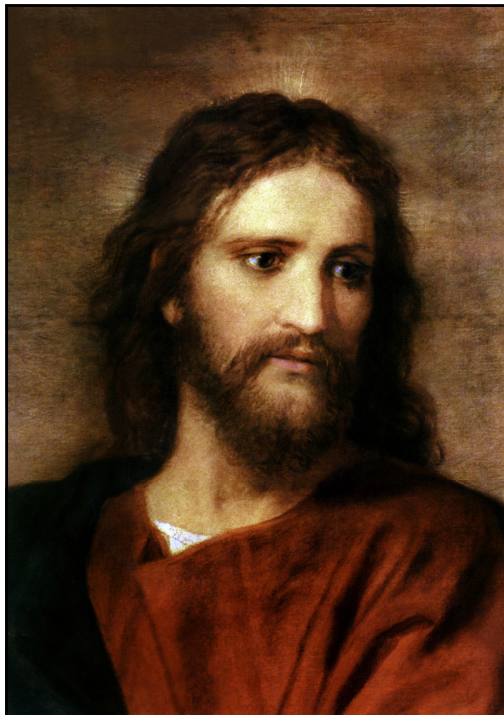
Teach me how to talk to You,

how to listen to You,

and how to follow You.

May everything I do lead me to You.

Bless religious sisters and brothers and priests,
who follow You with their whole lives.



Prayer for Vocations

Lord Jesus Christ, You call each of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless your Church by raising up dedicated and generous men and women from our families and parishes who will serve your people as priests and deacons, as religious sisters and brothers.

Open the hearts and minds of those you have called, so that a new flowering of religious vocation may show forth the fidelity of your love and make you known as the light of the world and the hope of eternal life. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Joseph

O Great St. Joseph, you were completely obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and accepted God's mysterious plan for your life.

Through your intercession obtain God's grace for all those who called to be priests and deacons, religious sisters and brothers and help them embrace their vocation with joy, courage and determination. Pray for them that they may give their lives to Christ wholeheartedly as you did, and be with them as they persevere to the end through all of life's joys and sorrows.

St. Joseph, bring all those called, especially the young, to a deeper knowledge of Christ and his Holy Mother, so that they may more easily reflect in their vocation the self-giving of Jesus and Mary. Share with them your care for the Church whose universal patron you are, so that they may share with you one day your glory in heaven.

O Great St. Joseph, pray for the Church, pray for Canada, pray for our families, and for our youth, pray for vocations and pray at last for me. Amen.

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

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