



The Labouré Society

DISCERNMENT

A vocation is not: The discerner's decision alone. Individual discernment takes place in communion with the larger Church -dioceses for diocesan priests and religious communities for religious members. A vocation to these entities is only known when vows and ordinations are made. Formation is truly a time of discernment to ascertain one's vocation when undertaken with a spirit of openness.

A vocation is not: The 'left-over' option if someone thinks they are called to marriage, but haven't met the right person, yet. The demands of priesthood and religious life require the call! This is why many bright, attractive, 'marriable' people are priests or religious. Whatever vocation one believes they are called to requires the appropriate actions and efforts to enter into it.

A vocation is not: The time to be healing from a romantic relationship. If someone was not able to discern prior to a serious dating relationship/marriage preparation (discerning a priestly or religious vocation beforehand should be the goal for men and women) taking time to transition is healthy and recommended. Several months to adjust to a serious relationship ending should elapse before applying or entering formation.

A vocation is not: A place of retreat or perfection. Some people can view the monastic life as an escape -especially in secular society. Although a life of solitude, contemplation, and prayer is more pronounced and has a special peace -even monastics have to work with those with whom they share an enclosure. It can be tough and often is. Priests and religious may be answering a call and working towards virtue, but they are not perfect. Our human flaws will be evident even in a group of holy, god-loving, people. No matter where we live and what vocation we have, we each need to work at living well and loving others according to God's direction.

A vocation is not: A glamorous existence. While the beauty of a life intensely lived with God is real, the epic nature of some media can lead discerners to believe a religious or priestly vocation is one life or death moment after another with eternal consequences. The reality is that vocations are full of the hum-drum tediousness of every way of life -paperwork, household chores, meetings, difficulties, and disagreements. Every vocation will have challenges, monotony, and hard work. Those seeking adulation, respect, a change in social status, or power over others, are not entering the priesthood or religious life with the proper motivation. Similarly, the signs and symbols of priesthood and religious life (cassocks, habits, e.g.) are a beautiful witness to the world today. However, they are a small symbol in comparison to the love a priest and religious has inside. A desire to bear a counter-cultural witness through garb, does not sustain a vocation. Every priest and religious is called to serve as Christ himself said he was called to serve.

What a vocation to priesthood or religious life is: Practically, priesthood and religious life is a path to love God in a distinct way; with more time for structured and specific prayers and religious activities. It is an opportunity to share God as one's primary 'work' with others, every day. An invitation to be in this relationship with God (and the Church) through the assessments of one's desires, gifts, talents, inclinations, character and disposition, and the indication of the fruits of the spirit. Priesthood and religious life are profound opportunities to live in community with a variety of people as well as to serve a variety of people. Both require the 'renunciation' of certain freedoms to follow a particular way of life as determined by the Church, bishop, and/or religious community. Priesthood and religious life are serious commitments to love God, and the people of God, as God loves in humility, charity, generosity, and sincerity.