



How do you become a priest?

First, you must apply to the Diocese. This requires an application, essays, letters of recommendation, and interviews. After being accepted as a candidate by a diocese, a man who wants to become a priest will go to the seminary. In the seminary, he will receive preparation for priesthood, which includes human, spiritual, academic, and pastoral formation. If he enters right after graduating high school, he'll work toward an undergraduate degree in Philosophy before continuing in the graduate program in Theology. Seminary training and discernment ranges from six to nine years, depending on one's educational background, before a man is ordained a priest. But do not let this discourage you. God always gives us the grace to carry out what he asks us to do.

Is all that education necessary?

The Catholic faith is very real and very deep. The reason for so much study is so that a priest can grasp the riches of our tradition and make them available to all God's people. A priest is called to help the most educated as well as the least educated to find and follow Jesus.

What qualities does the Church look for in a candidate for priesthood?

A good candidate is a practicing, believing Catholic. He attends Mass at least weekly, prays every day, obeys the commandments, and tries to serve others. He must be mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy. He must be open to the will of God and willing to learn and grow.

If I am attracted to the priesthood, does that mean God is calling me to be a priest?

Possibly, but not necessarily. A man must pray a great deal, listen with both heart and soul to know what God wants him to do. If you feel some attraction at this point, you should continue to pray, go to Mass, and live a Christian life. Get involved in roles of service in your parish. Also, go talk with your parish priest or with the vocation director. Try to come to discernment retreats and discernment nights. The vocation director can help you determine if God is calling you to the priesthood.

If I decide to go to the seminary to "give it a try," am I committed for life?

No, you are not. Most would agree that the best way to really know if you have a vocation to priesthood is to go to the seminary and try. It will become more and more clear to you once you are in an environment where everyone is discerning the priesthood. There is no obligation to stay in the seminary if you discover that priesthood is not for you. Some go to the seminary and eventually become priests, while others discover different ways to serve the Lord.



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Consider the Priesthood

Called to Serve

Each baptized Christian is called by God to do something special, to become something special. Our call, or vocation, is to become more Christ-like. Each person is gifted with special graces, special talents that will help that person to be of service to others. Service is the vocation that is common to all Christians.

Each person is called to live that life of service through a particular lifestyle. God calls some men to be single or husbands and fathers. Others are called to be religious brothers or priests. The questions and answers in this brochure will help you to know more about priesthood. Prayer, reflection, and talking with others will help you to best discern how you are called to serve the Lord.

What is a 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 take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (also known as the three evangelical counsels).

A priest is also privileged to bring Christ to people in the Sacraments: he gives the life of Christ to people in Baptism; he offers the sacrifice of the Mass; he forgives their sins in Reconciliation; he anoints the sick; he officiates at weddings. In general, the priest brings Jesus Christ to people and he brings people to Christ.

What exactly is a "vocation"?

A vocation is a call from God to do something specifically for God and for his Kingdom. The primary vocation of every person is to be holy. It is the divine calling to love and serve God, to obey his commandments, and to cooperate with Christ in the work of redemption by loving and serving others. Everyone is called to live the vocation of holiness, but everyone lives it in a special and unique way according to the plan of God.

What vocations are there?

Many people are called to the vocation of marriage, while others may be called to the vocation of priesthood, to the religious life as a brother, or to the diaconate. Christ also calls some to serve him in the single life. Remember: It is normal to desire marriage and family. Just because you have this desire does not exclude the possibility that you might have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

How do I know what God is calling me to do?

You must pray every day, asking God to reveal his plan for you. Do not ask yourself, "What do I want to do with my life?" Rather, you should be asking: "Jesus, what do you want me to do?" And listen for the answer. Listen with your heart, not just your head. The Church must also be involved in the discernment process. Listen to what other people see in you. Your bishop is the one who will ultimately decide who is and who is not called to be a diocesan priest in his diocese. He is assisted in this by the vocations office and the seminary staff.

I may not be holy enough to be a priest.

Holiness (to be like Jesus) is a lifetime endeavor for every person in every vocation. Don't worry if you don't see yourself as very holy right now. God will form you slowly, day by day and week by week, so that you will be ready to be his instrument when the time comes. But for now, use the Sacrament of Penance regularly. Read the Bible, repent of your sins, receive the Sacraments, and pray every day. You will be surprised at how Christ-like you can become.



Answers to Common Questions and Concerns about Priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church

Why can't priests get married?

Roman Catholic priests do not get married so as to dedicate themselves completely to Jesus and to His people. The sacrifice of celibacy is a sign to the world that only Jesus can give us the happiness that we all crave. Giving up something as important as marriage and family is a powerful sign to the world that Jesus Christ is real. He is worth living for and sacrificing for. No, it's not easy, but neither is marriage. The fact is, every vocation requires great personal sacrifice. And there is great joy in sacrifice when it is done for Jesus and for others.

Will I be lonely as a priest?

Loneliness is a part of every vocation, at one time or another. It is part of the human condition. Married people get lonely at times, even though their spouses and children surround them. One of the joys of priesthood is being involved with people at the most profound moments of their lives. Loneliness can be a part of the life of a priest, too, but when we do experience loneliness, Jesus can fill that void, as he does for people in every vocation.

Are priests happy in their vocations?

Most priests are extremely happy in their vocations. The life of a priest is a very rewarding life, both in this world and in the next. The media often gives an incorrect impression of priests, that they are largely unhappy, frustrated and angry. This is simply not true. In fact, research shows that priests are much happier in their jobs than the general population.

What do priests do for fun and recreation?

A priest can do anything he wants for recreation, as long as it is consistent with the Christian life. Many priests play golf, basketball, tennis, or other sports. They also enjoy music, movies, and reading. Some like to watch football, fish, travel, and spend time with their friends and family.

Do priests get paid?

Diocesan priests receive a small salary, which enables them to buy their necessities, to buy and maintain a car, to take a vacation, and to do normal recreational activities. Also, priests are given free room and board by the church for which they work, so their expenses are minimal.