

Living in Christ

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Vocations

Answering God's Call



Jenna M. Cooper
with Fr. Luke Sweeney and Joanna Dailey

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The Subcommittee on the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found that this catechetical high school text, copyright 2013, is in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and that it fulfills the requirements of Elective Course option D: “Responding to the Call of Jesus Christ” of the *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD
Censor Librorum
November 30, 2012

Imprimatur: † Most Rev. John M. Quinn, DD
Bishop of Winona
November 30, 2012

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The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Steven Ellair, editor; and Maura Thompson Hagarty, PhD, theological reviewer. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary’s Press.

The publisher also wishes to thank the following individuals who advised the publishing team or reviewed the work in progress:

Barbara Stanley, MA

Fr. David L. Toups, STD

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Printed in the United States of America

1155

ISBN 978-1-59982-150-4, paper

ISBN 978-1-59982-153-5, e-book

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Introduction

When you were a young child, you probably frequently heard the question, What do you want to be when you grow up? You have probably continued to answer that question—in one form or another—throughout your school years. Of course, as you have matured, your answer has become more introspective and based on a deeper understanding of your gifts, talents, and interests and of how God may be calling you to use them.

Still, for each of us, finding out who we are and what God is calling us to is an ongoing process of discovery, and as you contemplate life beyond high school, you are probably continuing to ponder important questions: Who am I? What gifts and talents have I been given? What might be my work in the world? What is God calling me to?

You are not alone in facing these questions. You are supported by all of the members of the Church as you figure out how to best respond to God's call in your life. Your faith, your gifts, and your vocation are essential to the life and mission of the Church. You should also be comforted to know that the Holy Spirit is with you, guiding you as you discern your vocation—how God is calling you to serve him and others in the world.

Your participation in the life of the Church will also help you to discern your vocation and achieve your God-given potential. Through daily prayer, reading Sacred Scripture, participating in the Sacraments, learning more about the Church's teachings, reading the accounts of the saints' lives, and seeking advice from caring people in your life, you will learn how to discover the desires of your heart in conversation with God.

As you continue your discernment, this book will help you to learn about the Christian vocation in general and about the vocational states of life: married life, ordained life, consecrated life, and single life. Our hope is that this book will become more than just an informational resource used in an academic course, and that, by learning and reflecting on the material presented here, you will have an opportunity to more deeply engage in the important process of discovering and understanding how God is calling you.

Blessings on your journey of discovery. May we all encourage one another along the way!

The Editors at Saint Mary's Press

Section 1

Living Our Christian Vocation

Part 1

We Are Called by God

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1), and from the beginning that Word has called to humankind. It is the Word of God that called to us finally and most clearly through the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ. This is truly Good News—that God is calling us, seeking us, and that we need only to hear and to respond. To respond is to find our life calling, our vocation.

Yet we, as individuals, are not alone in that response. In the first part of this book on vocations, we recall the lives of some who have gone before us, some who have heard God’s Word in the midst of their lives and have responded with all their hearts. In the Old Testament, we consider God’s call to Abraham, Samuel, Jeremiah, and David. In the New Testament, we examine God’s call to Mary, Nathanael, Peter, and Mary Magdalene. All heard, all responded, but each in a very different way.

This gives us hope. We do not all follow Christ in the same way. What is important is that we listen to the voice of the One who knows us, loves us, and asks only that we follow him along the path of life that will lead us to communion with him.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 1: What Is a Vocation? (page 9)
- Article 2: God’s Call in the Old Testament (page 14)
- Article 3: God’s Call in the New Testament (page 17)
- Article 4: The Foundation of the Christian Life (page 21)

Article

1 What Is a Vocation?

A **vocation** is a gift of grace that God gives to each one of us. The grace of a vocation is the living water of the Holy Spirit that flows from deep within us, giving us life and purpose. It is a personal call from God to embrace a certain way of life, a way of life that will enable us to use all our gifts and talents to serve him and one another. A vocation is a call from God, but it requires a response on our part. Both the call and the response are pure gift. We are assisted by God's grace in discerning and living our vocation.

To understand this gift of vocation, we need to think of it in the widest possible context. The word *vocation* has special meaning in the life of the Church. First and foremost, it refers to the foundational call from God, which is the call to holiness and communion with him. But it also refers to the different states of life through which we are called, in a particular way, to live out our foundational vocation. These vocational states of life include married life, consecrated life, and ordained life. Single life that involves a personal consecration or commitment to a permanent, celibate gift of self to God and one's neighbor is also a vocational state. We will look at each of these states of life in more detail throughout this book.

Although the term *vocation* is sometimes used for a career or a job (as in "vocational training"), it has a far deeper meaning in our life as Christians. The work we do every day (even if we do not consider it a career) is important. It too is a gift from God because it helps us to grow and to serve others. But careers, jobs, and everyday tasks are changeable and are usually part of a wider and deeper vocation, the fulfillment of which is eternal happiness with God in Heaven.

A vocation is a personal call from God that springs forth from deep within us. In order to begin to discover your vocation, it can be helpful to reflect on those things you value as important, meaningful, and life-giving.



vocation

A call from God to all members of the Church to embrace a life of holiness. Specifically, it refers to a call to live the holy life as an ordained minister, as a vowed religious (sister or brother), or in a Christian marriage. Single life that involves a personal consecration or commitment to a permanent, celibate gift of self to God and one's neighbor is also a vocational state.

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Tradition

This word (from the Latin, meaning “to hand on”) refers to the process of passing on the Gospel message. Tradition, which began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in Scripture, is handed down and lived out in the life of the Church, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Longing for God

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” This famous quotation from Saint Augustine of Hippo perfectly expresses the relationship of the human race to God. Humans are religious beings, which means they are made by and for God, “to live in communion with God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 45). Within the human heart is a place that only God can fill. From the moment of conception, we were knitted in our “mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13) with a desire for truth and happiness that only God can satisfy.

Does this mean that anything and anyone less than God is worthless? Of course not. Anything good or anyone we love is a gift from God. God’s gifts give us glimpses of him and help us to recognize his love for us. We must thank God for them. However, we must also realize that they will never satisfy us completely. Only God can satisfy the longings of the human heart.

All through the ages, the human race has recognized this longing and has attempted to fill it. From the earliest and most primitive tribes to the sophisticated musings of the Greeks and Romans, from the insights of Confucius to the religions of Hinduism and Islam, all civilizations have, in partial ways, tried to find their own pathways to God. These religions, even non-Christian ones, “attempt in different ways to overcome the restlessness of people’s hearts by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites” (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions [Nostra Aetate]*, 2).

Through Sacred Scripture and **Tradition**, we know that God himself has satisfied the human longing for communion with him in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Jesus is fulfilled all the longings of the human race, articulated most precisely in the history of the Jewish people, which is the history of our salvation as well: “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son (Hebrews 1:1–2).” That Son is Jesus Christ—our Way, our Truth, and our Life. The Church, which he founded, is our connection to him and to the way of life we are called to live as his followers.

Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) was an Austrian psychotherapist and writer of the bestselling book *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985). Frankl, who was Jewish, wrote about his experiences while a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II and chronicled his search for a meaningful existence, even in the midst of cruelty and deprivation.

What were Frankl's secrets to survival in the midst of hopelessness? He discovered two. The first secret was love: "I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved" (*Man's Search for Meaning*, pages 56–57). Frankl realized the second secret to survival as he observed other people in the concentration camp: "Spiritual life strengthened the prisoner, helped him adapt, and thereby improved his chances of survival" (123). He realized that the interior spiritual life was, for others as well as for himself, another key to endurance in the face of dire circumstances.

Released by American forces in 1945, Frankl discovered that his wife and parents had perished and that his only living relative was a sister who had escaped to Australia. He remarried and had one daughter. He continued his therapeutic work and was the recipient of several honorary doctorates from colleges and universities all over the world, including Catholic institutions.

What parallels can you see between Frankl's secrets to survival and the message of the Gospel?



The Universal Call to Holiness

Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—the Sacraments of Christian Initiation—are the foundation of the Christian life. Through these Sacraments we “live and move and have our being” (Acts of the Apostles 17:28) in Christ. As members of the Church, we are called to follow Jesus’ path—the path of love without measure, the path of holiness: “Therefore, all in the church . . . are called to holiness. . . . This holiness of the church is shown constantly in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful and so it must be; it is expressed in many ways by the individuals who, each in their own state of life, tend to the perfection of charity, and are thus a source of edification for others” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, 39).

The “perfection of charity” is the perfection of love. Through love we edify, or build up, others. Each loving action of ours is a building block, contributing to the building up of the Body of Christ, making the Church more loving, more compassionate, filling it with more light, more goodness, more joy. This is our universal vocation, our universal call: a call from God to each and every member of the Church. And really, can anything less be expected of those who call themselves the followers of Christ?

The Meaning of Life

Your grandparents may have, through the teaching of the *Baltimore Catechism*, memorized the meaning of life when they were only seven or eight years old, and, if so, they probably still remember it! The *Baltimore Catechism* presented this wisdom in a question-and-answer format:

Q. Why did God make you?

A. God made me to know him, love him, and serve him in this life, and to be happy with him forever in the next.

Of course, to be fully understood, this answer requires some explanation. Once we come to know and love God, the source of all happiness, we will want to serve him—to do what he wants us to do in this life. And how do we serve him? Jesus gives us the answer: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). We serve God by serving one another.

The answer from the *Baltimore Catechism* might seem to imply that happiness is for the next world only and not for this one. Happiness with God in Heaven is the goal of life, but knowing, loving, and serving God helps us to taste happiness here and now.

You will not learn this from television commercials. You will not see this on billboards or scrolling across a computer screen. In these places, it seems that we are often given the message that satisfaction, or happiness, comes solely from the accumulation of money and material objects. But this is far from Jesus' message. Jesus taught that happiness comes from living the **Beatitudes** (see Matthew 5:1–12) and from our relationship with God and others. You may want to test this out by asking people you know who respond to God's call by loving and serving others—people who work in soup kitchens, who help out in the parish, who teach religion classes, who are kind to others. Why do they do it? They'll probably tell you it's because it makes them happy, because it brings them closer to God.

But the questions remain: How can *you* find the happiness that God wants you to have? How is God calling *you* to know, love, and serve him? The next article offers some guidance by examining the call of God in Scripture. †



Beatitudes

The teachings of Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount in which he describes the actions and attitudes that should characterize Christians and by which one can discover genuine meaning and happiness.

Catholic Wisdom

You Are the Light

When Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) visited Saint Louis, Missouri, in January of 1999, he addressed a gathering of young people with these words: “You are ready for what Christ wants of you now. He wants you—all of you—to be the light of the world, as only young people can be light. It is time to let your light shine!” (“Address of John Paul II to the Young People at the Kiel Center,” 4). These words can speak to you as you think about how you will serve God and others through the vocation to which God calls you.

Article
2 God's Call in the
 Old Testament



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Each new day gives us another opportunity to listen to and respond to God's call in our life. What can you do to renew your commitment to follow God's will on a daily basis?

Spring, summer, fall, winter: There is a certain rhythm to life. One season follows another, yet no season, however many times we experience it, is exactly the same as the one that came before it. The seasons are familiar, yet always new.

Such is the call of God. It is familiar yet always new, calling us to new life, new possibilities, and new horizons. When we look to Scripture and study the accounts of people who have been called by God, we will find in them something familiar (for they are human, like us) yet also very new. Each time God calls, he reveals a new initiative, a new task, a new way to bring his people closer to him.

Let us consider a few of God's calls in the Old Testament. As we do, let us also ask: How has God called me in the past? How is he calling me now to prepare for the future?

The Call of Abraham

The Book of Deuteronomy contains a poignant description of Abraham (originally called Abram): "My father was a refugee Aramean" (Deuteronomy 26:5). Abraham, the father of the Jewish people and our father in faith, was a nomad who herded sheep, traveling from one part of the land to another. But Abraham's vocation, though it included shepherding, was something greater. When God spoke, Abraham listened:

The LORD said to Abram: "Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. . . . All the families of the earth will find blessing in you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham's response was immediate: "Abram went as the LORD directed him. . . . Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran" (Genesis 12:4). The rhythm is estab-

lished here: God calls, and we respond. This is what vocation is all about.

Have you ever been called to leave the land you knew to go to a new land? Some of you have, in real time and space. We are all, in some ways, constantly called to “a new land”—a new day, a new idea, a new way of looking at things, a new way of living. How is our call like Abraham’s? We too are called to be a blessing for others.

The Call of David

Samuel had feared that Saul’s kingship would not work out, and his fears proved well founded. God had allowed the people to have a king, but Saul had abused his privileges and disobeyed God’s instructions. Another king had to be found, and Samuel set out for the city of Bethlehem, as the Lord commanded him.

There he found Jesse and his sons. One by one they came before Samuel, and Samuel, under God’s instructions, rejected each one. As the Lord explained,

“God does not see as a mortal, who sees the appearance. The LORD looks into the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

After seeing the sons, Samuel asked Jesse if these were all. Jesse replied that his youngest son was out tending the sheep. Samuel asked to see him. The account continues: “He was ruddy, a youth with beautiful eyes, and good looking. The LORD said: There—anoint him, for this is the one! Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David” (1 Samuel 16:12–13).

Sometimes it takes an objective outsider to help us to know our calling and to recognize our gifts. Never discount the people who believe in you and encourage you to follow your call.



Do not say, “I am too young.”
 To whomever I send you, you shall go;
 whatever I command you, you shall speak.
 Do not be afraid of them,
 for I am with you to deliver you—oracle of the LORD.
 (1:6–8)

How are you like Jeremiah? Do you tend toward self-doubt? Do you feel unprepared for the future God has in store for you? The call of Jeremiah assures us that, no matter what our limitations, God will be with us to prepare us and to help us to answer his call. †

Article 3 God’s Call in the New Testament

The Old Testament gives us accounts of God’s call to various people and his saving work among many generations of ancient Israelites. It shows his covenant relationship with them. The New Testament announces the fulfillment of God’s Covenant with Israel, Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, sent by the Father to redeem us in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the fullness of God’s Revelation and the one in whom God established his covenant forever. Jesus came to bring salvation to all people. All of his life teaches us about God’s saving plan and helps us to understand God’s call to humanity.

Let us now explore some accounts of God’s calling in the New Testament, beginning with a young woman who was called and who responded in faith. This young woman lived in a small town of Galilee called Nazareth. Her name was Mary.

The Call of Mary

When she was a young woman, a virgin, Mary was engaged to a local carpenter named Joseph. Gabriel,

This fifteenth-century image of the Annunciation shows Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel. What can you learn from Mary’s response to Gabriel’s message that can be helpful as you continue to discover God’s call in your own life?

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God's messenger, was sent to her with a very important message: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus" (Luke 1:30–31).

The angel explains to Mary that she will conceive a son through the power of the Holy Spirit: "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. . . . for nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:35,37). And Mary's reply has rung like a clear crystal bell down through the ages: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

The human race stands in awe of this woman who cooperated with God in changing the course of history. After questioning the angel and hearing his response, Mary said yes to God's call to be the Mother of God.

Your questions too need not interfere with God's call. If you are faithful and trusting, asking questions and listening intently for answers can move you forward into a greater understanding of what God is asking of you and can lead you to answer yes, as Mary did.

Pray It!

Prayer to Our Lady of the Way

Life is a journey, and certainly Mary, the Mother of God, understands this journey. She who "kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51) surely pondered God's will throughout her own journey and can help us to do the same.

In Rome, the Church of the *Gesu* (the "home church" of the Jesuits) was built over a previous church dedicated to Our Lady under the title *Madonna della Strada*, meaning "Our Lady of the Way" or "Our Lady of the Road." The Jesuits adopted Our Lady of the Way as their patron. This is the traditional prayer to Our Lady of the Way:

Sweet Mary, our heavenly Mother,
 guide our steps on the often wild and rugged ways of life,
 and when life arrives at its end,
 be for us the door of heaven
 and show us the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
 Amen.

You may want to pray, "Our Lady of the Way, pray for me and guide me."

The Call of Nathanael

Nathanael's friend Philip introduced him to Jesus. As the Gospel of John relates, "Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth'" (John 1:45).

Nathanael was not immediately convinced. He had heard things about Nazareth, and apparently not all of them favorable. "But Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'" (John 1:46). Philip was persistent: "Come and see" (John 1:47).

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, he said: "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him" (John 1:47). Nathanael then challenges Jesus and asks, "How do you know me?" (1:48). Jesus tells Nathanael that, even before Philip found him, he had seen him under a fig tree. Immediately Nathanael becomes a believer: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (1:49). Jesus replies: "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this" (1:50). Jesus then tells of the future triumph of the Kingdom of God: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51).

Jesus knows us and loves us. He finds us where we are and calls us to where he wants us to be. He often calls us from small things to great, little by little, until we realize that, in continuing to follow his call, we are contributing to something amazing. This is hard to see at the beginning. Maybe Nathanael was just thrilled that Jesus noticed him! But Jesus had greater plans than Nathanael could imagine, and these began to take form when Nathanael decided to follow Jesus.

The Call of Peter

The first call of Peter was simple and straightforward. John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to Andrew, and Andrew brought his brother Peter along, saying, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41).

The second call was anything but simple. It was complicated. Maybe you recall the scene in which Jesus cooked breakfast on the beach after his Resurrection and all the disciples gathered around. You may also remember that Peter,

as Jesus had predicted, betrayed the Lord in the courtyard of the high priest. Three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus. But then Jesus appeared to all of them after his Resurrection and shared his peace and forgiveness with them—Peter included. But Jesus had something else in store for Peter.

The Call of Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was among the women from Galilee who accompanied Jesus and the Apostles in their traveling and preaching, providing financial support for them. In all four Gospels, she is among the first of the faithful witnesses of the Resurrected Lord Jesus, who entrusts her with the mission of proclaiming the Good News to the other disciples.

Early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene visits the tomb where Jesus was buried and sees that the stone has been removed. She immediately runs to Peter and the other “beloved disciple” and says, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him” (John 20:2). Peter and the other disciple look, find the tomb empty, and return home. But Mary cannot bear to leave. She stays outside the tomb, weeping. Then she turns and sees what she thought was the gardener. The “gardener” (who was really Jesus) says one word to her: “Mary!” She says one word to him: “Rabbouni!” (Teacher). Jesus gives her instructions: “Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (20:17). Mary Magdalene does just that. She announces to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” (20:18). And so to the early Church Mary Magdalene was known as the Apostle to the Apostles.

Under the law at the time, women were not allowed to be witnesses in any legal proceeding. Their word, no matter how true, was not considered valid. Yet here Jesus calls Mary Magdalene to be a witness to his Resurrection! Surely this is another instance of what the angel told the first woman disciple of Jesus, Mary of Nazareth: “Nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:37).



The dialogue between Jesus and Peter is symbolic. Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter answers three times, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” And each time Peter answers, Jesus calls him to care, concern, and responsibility: “Feed my sheep. . . . Tend my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep.” And finally Jesus invites him again: “Follow me” (John 21: 15–19).

The lambs and the sheep are the People of God, the Church. And for Peter, following Jesus will mean care, concern, and responsibility for all the people to whom he and the other Apostles will bring the Good News.

We, like Peter, are challenged to move beyond the often easier response that comes in the form of words. It is far easier to claim our love than to demonstrate it day in and day out. How are we living out our love for Jesus in the words and actions of our lives? †

Article 4 The Foundation of the Christian Life

All human beings are called. They are called to know, to love, and to serve God by virtue of the fact that they are human. By faith and by Baptism, we enter into the great family of God’s Church, bonded together by our unity in Christ. And Baptism, along with the other Sacraments of Christian Initiation, lays the foundation for every Christian’s life. Together, and with the help of God’s grace, all the members of the Church commit to striving to live according to God’s will.

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In Baptism we are called from darkness into light. How can you be light for the world?



Baptism

Baptism gives us the grace we need to be able to say yes to whatever call we may hear at any future point in our lives. We could hardly be faithful single people, spouses, parents, consecrated people, or priests if we were not faithful Christians first. It is impossible to show the love of Christ to others if we are not first seeking to follow him as fully as we can.

For those of us who were baptized as infants, our parents and godparents made our baptismal promises for us, accepting the call to discipleship in Christ on our behalf. But this does not make our baptismal call any less important. No matter the circumstances of our Baptism, God personally calls each and every one of us to discipleship and to membership in Christ's Body, the Church. Even if the first yes to Baptism was said by someone other than ourselves, we can still say yes in a real way through our daily striving to live in closer conformity to God's will by answering his call in our lives.

What Happens at Baptism?

During the Rite of Baptism, the candidate is immersed in water three times (or water is poured over the candidate's head three times) while a priest or deacon prays: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*Rite of Baptism*, 60). The action of being immersed in water and then arising out of the water calls

Live It!

Celebrate Your Baptism!

Through Baptism, God has made you a new creation as his adopted son or daughter and a member of Christ and has called you to participate in the mission of the Church. Do you know the date of your Baptism? Do you have a copy of your baptismal certificate?

One high school religion teacher, a married woman with children, keeps photos and mementos under the glass top of her desk at school. In the middle of the array she has placed her baptismal certificate. "That's what started everything," she says. "That is at the center of it all."

Reflect on ways to honor your Baptism and baptismal day. Write to the parish of your Baptism and ask for a copy of your baptismal certificate. Hang it in your room. If your family has kept your baptismal candle, you may want to light it on your baptismal day and pray the Lord's Prayer.

to mind Jesus' death, burial, and Resurrection and our own participation in Christ's **Paschal Mystery**.

In Baptism we die to sin and are reborn to a new life of grace. Baptism cleanses us from the stain of Original Sin and, for those receiving the Sacrament after the **age of reason**, frees us from any personal sins we may have committed prior to Baptism. As a result of this baptismal state of grace, we begin to have God's own life dwelling within us, and we become temples of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism also unites us with Christ in a special way and incorporates us into his Church. By this sacramental encounter with Christ, we are introduced to the intimacy of the inner life of God in the mystery of the Trinity, and we become the adoptive sons and daughters of God.

After the immersion in water, we are anointed with the **Sacred Chrism**. By this we are made sharers in Jesus Christ's identity as the Anointed One, and we are called to participate in his priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices.

Confirmation and the Eucharist

In addition to Baptism, we celebrate two other Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Confirmation and the Eucharist. Confirmation strengthens us in our faith and deepens the grace we received at Baptism. We are anointed with Sacred Chrism and receive the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, which marks us as sharing more completely in the mission of Christ.

Although young Catholics often receive First Holy Communion prior to Confirmation, the Eucharist is the culmination of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. In the Eucharist we consume Jesus' Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine. By doing so we take Christ into ourselves. Participation in the Eucharist deepens our baptismal call to communion with God, as the Eucharist leads us into a radical, profound union with Christ.

The Sacraments of Christian Initiation call us to holiness, but they also enable us to accept other calls God may have for us in the future. Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist draw us into a close identification with Jesus Christ, which helps us to hear God's voice. Furthermore, the grace we receive from the Sacraments is the foundation upon which our Christian lives and vocations are based. ✚



Paschal Mystery

The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

age of reason

The age at which a person can be morally responsible. This is generally regarded to be the age of seven.

Sacred Chrism

Perfumed olive oil that has been consecrated. It is used for anointing in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

How God Makes Us Holy

Grace, especially the grace given to us in the Sacraments, is God's way of making us holy. Grace is the gift of God's loving presence with us, which empowers us to respond to his call and to live always as his children. Grace is never earned; although none of us truly deserves grace, God freely chooses to bless us with this gift. We could never become holy by our own power. God, who is all-holy and all-good, shares that holiness and goodness with us through various kinds of grace:

- **Sanctifying grace** is the grace that heals our human nature wounded by sin and restores us to friendship with God by giving us a share in the divine life of the Trinity. It is a supernatural gift of God, infused into our souls by the Holy Spirit, that continues the work of making us holy.
- **Actual grace** is God's interventions and support for us in the everyday moments of our lives. Actual graces are important for conversion and for continuing growth in holiness.
- **Sacramental graces** are graces specific to each of the Seven Sacraments.
- **Charisms** are special graces of the Holy Spirit, given to individuals or communities, that help us to live out our commitment to a state in life and to carry out the responsibilities of that state. They help to build up the Body of Christ. *Charism* comes from a Greek word meaning "favor" or "gratuitous gift."



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Part Review

1. How is a vocation both a call from God and a response to God?
2. What does the *universal call to holiness* mean and what does it ask of us?
3. Why did God make you, and how can you serve him?
4. Name two significant people called by God in the Old Testament and describe the call of one of these in detail.
5. Name two significant people called by God in the New Testament and describe the call of one of these in detail.
6. Give an example of the way Baptism calls us to live our lives as followers of Christ.
7. What does the Holy Spirit, through the Sacrament of Confirmation, help us to do?

Part 2

We Respond to God's Call

You may be familiar with the saying in the sports world, “There is no *I* in *TEAM*.” This statement is intended to motivate team members to play not just for themselves but for the entire team. Though each of us has a distinct call from God, rooted in our baptismal call, and though each of us will make a personal decision concerning that call, we can note here that there is no *I* in *CHURCH* or *PEOPLE OF GOD*.

Whatever our call, we are bound together as disciples of Jesus Christ. Each and every member of the Church, from the Pope to the newest baptized baby, needs all the others to fulfill God's call. We are not called merely to live good lives and bring ourselves to Heaven; we are called to bring everyone else, the entire Church and, yes, the entire world, with us.

As the Church, and as the new People of God, we are united in Christ by the grace of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. As we follow Jesus as disciples, let us remember that we do not follow him alone.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 5: We Listen to Our Teacher (page 27)
- Article 6: We Respond in Discipleship (page 31)
- Article 7: We Respond as the People of God (page 34)

Article

5 We Listen to Our Teacher

We live in a culture that uses the word *love* for many different things, from the trivial to the profound. As Christians, and as followers of Jesus, we must identify love with charity, or *agape* (AH-gah-pay). The word *agape*, or unconditional love, is a Greek word used in Scripture and by the early Christians to describe both God's love and the kind of love Christians aim to share with one another.

True love involves self-giving. It is a serving love. It is a caring love that puts aside one's own immediate interest for the interest of another. It sets aside "my agenda" for yours. It goes around the block or around the world to love and to serve God and his people.

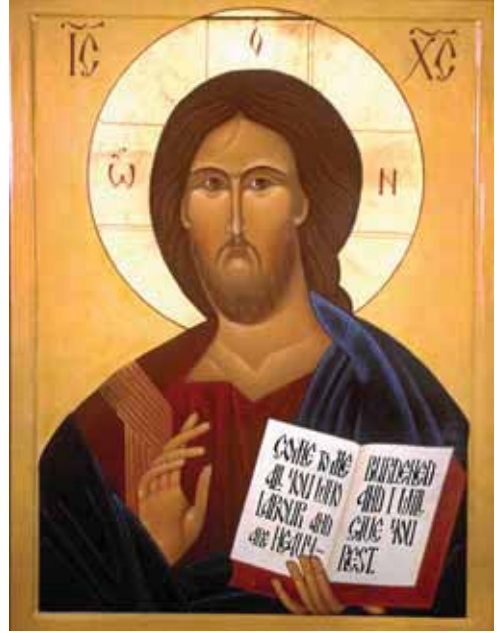
But how do we learn about the love God calls us to? How did the Apostles come to know and share God's love? They learned about it from Jesus, the only Son of God. And we can too.

Teacher of Love

By word and by example, Jesus taught us how to love. He was not the kind of teacher who said, "You do this, and I'll watch." He was the kind of teacher who did it first and then invited us to do the same. His self-sacrifice on the Cross was the greatest witness of God's love for us and of how we should love God and one another. Let us look at the Gospels to find other examples of Jesus' teaching about love.

The Gospel of John

In the Gospel of John, we find the new teaching of Jesus, the commandment to love: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35).



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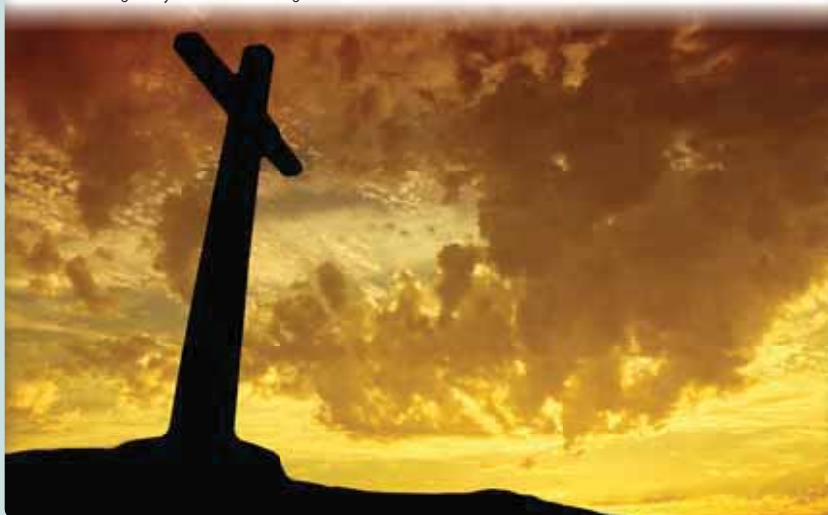
Part of our vocation as Christians is to share God's love with others. Jesus taught us how to love by his words and actions. Which accounts from Scripture can you recall that teach about our call to love?

Love and the Paschal Mystery

As an old saying has it, “The path of true love never runs smooth.” This reminds us that often love involves some kind of suffering. Jesus himself showed us the greatest example of God’s love for us in his sacrifice on the Cross. Through his suffering and death, Jesus taught the truth in love. That truth was rejected, and he paid with his life. This was not the end of his life, of course. Though he was raised from the dead and ascended to Heaven, he was not spared the painful consequences of his loving choices, and neither are we.

Because we live in Christ, we too are part of the Paschal Mystery. We accept suffering and sacrifice as inevitable parts of life and as necessary consequences that come with following Christ. But there is good news. The Gospel proclaims that suffering and death are not our ultimate end. They are only steps on our path toward Heaven and eternal life.

The Christian life calls for choices that promote truth, goodness, and justice, and sometimes those choices have consequences that cause us suffering or require sacrifice. Through the Eucharist our sacrifices, suffering, and entire lives are united to Christ’s. Through this union we participate in God’s saving work. Pope John Paul II reminds us that this is part of what it means to live a Christian life rooted in Gospel values: “But—I ask you—is it better to be resigned to a life without ideals . . . or rather, . . . to seek the truth, goodness, justice, working for a world that reflects the beauty of God, even at the cost of facing the trials it may involve?” (“Message of the Holy Father to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the XII World Youth Day,” 3). How would you answer?



We can love one another, not of our own power, but because God loved us first (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], 1823.)

One example of the love of Jesus is unique to the Gospel of John: the account of the washing of the feet at the Last Supper. Here Jesus instructs his disciples (and us as well): “You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow” (John 13:13–15). This model is a model of loving service, even of the lowliest kind.

The Gospel of Mark

In the Gospel of Mark, the first Gospel to be written, we find Jesus’ teaching on the Great Commandment. (It is also found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.) When a scribe asks him which commandment is the greatest, Jesus replies with the Shema, the traditional prayer of the Jews: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29–30). But surprisingly, Jesus also added this: “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31). Both of these commandments are found in the Old Testament, the first at Deuteronomy 6:4–5, and the second at Leviticus 19:18. The passage from Deuteronomy was well known to all Jews, but the Second Commandment was very obscure. When Jesus elevated it to the same status as the passage from Deuteronomy, he was presenting a new teaching and a new standard for love.

The Gospel of Matthew

In the Gospel of Matthew, we find the Sermon on the Mount, the great summary of Jesus’ teachings on every aspect of life. In the previous part, we spoke of “the perfection of charity” or perfect love. In the Gospel of Matthew, we find a description of that love in Jesus’ teaching on love of enemies. In Matthew 5:44–48, Jesus teaches:

Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.
. . . For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What a tall order this is! What great love Jesus is asking of his disciples! Here Jesus is asking us to love as God loves: unconditionally. This is how perfection is measured in Jesus' eyes. How close can we come?

The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke is well known for its collection of parables, and one of the most famous and well loved is that of the Good Samaritan. This parable, in Luke 10:29–37, tells of “love of enemies” in story form. The parable answers the question, “Who is my neighbor?” and the answer is found at the end: My neighbor is anyone in need of mercy, and I can be a neighbor only if I am merciful to others, including those whom I identify as “enemy” or “in the wrong group” or “not like me.”

Some early Christian writings identify the Good Samaritan with Jesus, who comes across the human race wounded and lying half-dead. Jesus then cares for us and heals us, to limitless expense, even at the expense of his own suffering and death. Jesus is the perfect neighbor, the one who always treats us with mercy. †

Live It!

Living Love

Love is not something we should save for special occasions. Love is something we can do every day. Try this. Designate a special jar or container, perhaps an empty coffee can. Decorate it if you like. Then, on small slips of paper, write as many loving actions as you can think of. Here are a few examples:

Smile.

When asked for help, say yes.

Help out at home.

“Bite your tongue” when tempted to say something mean.

Offer to help someone with homework.

Fill the container with ideas of loving actions you know you can do. Every day pull out one of your ideas and put it into practice. (Of course, God may have other good actions in store for you as well. Do those too!) Add more ideas as you can. You may find, as others have before you, that your life will have more meaning and more joy.

Article 6 We Respond in Discipleship

But how can we, as individuals, with all our strengths and weaknesses, truly keep the Great Commandment, to love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves? The challenge of living as a disciple of Christ might seem like trying to climb a large, steep mountain.

The word *disciple* comes from a Greek word meaning “learner.” A disciple of Jesus is one who has made the decision to learn from him. In our everyday lives, lots of people (real and virtual) tell us what to do, and these people come at us from every direction—in ads on TV and on the Internet, in music and songs, in texts, and through social media. If you have made the decision to be a disciple of Jesus, you can see through all these other messages, taking only what is good and true from them. “Learn from me,” Jesus says, “for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves” (Matthew 11:29).



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Respect and Love for Self

As disciples of Jesus, we need to have a healthy respect and love for ourselves. How can we love others if we do not love ourselves? Always remember that you are created in the image and likeness of God. God sees goodness and creativity in you. You may not see this all the time, but it is there. Others may not see it, but it is there. In making you, God gave a new gift to the world. You will not be able to give this gift to others, in any vocation, if you do not respect and love the gift of yourself that God made. But love for self does not mean indulging in selfish tendencies. It means taking care of ourselves in body, mind, heart, and soul.

It is important that we surround ourselves with people who support us in our discipleship. How do your friends encourage you as a follower of Christ?

Called to Be and to Make Disciples

When Jesus gathered followers to help him to proclaim and bring about the Kingdom, he did not call the most talented and powerful; rather, he chose ordinary fishermen (see Mark 1:16–20) and even a tax collector (see 2:13–17)—a person despised by most Israelites. God’s call comes to everyone, even (or perhaps especially) to those who think they may not be worthy.

Jesus sent out these disciples to preach the Kingdom and to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), calling all people to join the Church. This group of followers, his first disciples, became the Church, Jesus’ true family, and the seed and beginning of the Kingdom on earth. The Church is thus a sign, as well as the actual beginning, of that perfect peace and happiness that all of us desire: the Kingdom of God, mysteriously present in the world, which will be fully realized at the end of time.

All baptized believers are disciples and participate in the Church’s mission of calling others to become disciples of Christ. Think about how believers have been witnesses of the Gospel over the centuries. Think about what it means to be part of the Church, which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Think about the gifts you have to offer the Church. Pray about what it means to be part of the Church. Then go and be a disciple and an example and witness of faith to others.



Relationships with Others

Respect and love for self is important, because this is how we learn to respect and love others as well. We recognize the God-given dignity of all people and realize that everyone needs and deserves love and respect. This is the basis on which all relationships are built.

Whatever our individual vocation is, we live it out in relationship with others. And whatever our vocation, we are called to develop relationships with others that reflect the communion of the three Persons of the Trinity. No vocation, not even the vocation of a hermit in the deepest forest, is lived in isolation. We live in the midst of society, and we are called to transform our society by living our own particular vocation to the best of our ability. We answer God's call together with millions of others who are also called to enter the Kingdom. As disciples of Jesus, we are all called to the gift of self in love, and it is only through this gift that we find our true selves in God.

In human relationships we find the best and sometimes the worst of ourselves. We also find the best and sometimes the worst in others. What will our response be? Of course, gratitude and joy for the best, and, hopefully, forgiveness and understanding for the worst. But these responses take practice. Practice gratitude, joy, forgiveness, and understanding in little ways, and then, when something greater is asked of you, you will be able to meet the challenge. †

Catholic Wisdom

Take the Elevator!

At the time of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), the elevator was a new invention: “I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. . . . The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! . . . I had to remain *little* and become this more and more” (*Story of a Soul*, pages 207 and 208). Thérèse realized that Jesus accepted her efforts, loved her as she was, and would raise her himself.

Article 7 We Respond as the People of God

Do names matter? The great playwright William Shakespeare raises this issue as he sets the scene for a famous tragedy. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet asks: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Juliet is arguing that names have no meaning; she loves Romeo, the person, and it should not matter that he is a Montague and belongs to a family currently at war with her family, the Capulets. In response Romeo renounces the name of Montague—but of course this does not prevent the tragedy from moving forward. Names are not so easily shed.

What about the name *Church*? What does that name mean? Can we call it something else and still be talking about the same thing? It turns out that we can. We can because the Church is defined by three inseparable meanings: the entire community of believers God gathers throughout the world, the local church (the diocese), and the assembly of believers gathered for the liturgy.

But let’s go back to biblical times, to the use of the word *church* in the New Testament. The New Testament Greek word we translate as *church* is *ekklesia*. This word is related to the Greek verb *ek-ka-lein*, which means “to call out,” as to call together an assembly or convocation. This is what we fundamentally mean by *church*: the people God calls together from the ends of the earth to be in relationship with him. But we can call the Church by another name: the People of God. This name is scriptural in origin and stretches back to God’s plan from the beginning of time to

The Pope is the visible head of the Catholic Church and is responsible for ministering to Catholics throughout the world. We look to him in a unique way for guidance and inspiration on our common journey as disciples of Christ.

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call a people to himself. The People of God in the Old Testament were the Jews, and they still are today, for God never revokes his call. The universal Church is the new People of God, entered into by faith and Baptism, so that, in union with Christ, all people “may form one family and one People of God (*Ad Gentes*, 1)” (CCC, 804).

What does this mean for each individual vocation, or call, within this new People of God? It means that we are all in it together. We all support one another as we strive to live

We Are the Body of Christ

The Church's sacramental life unites us to Christ and provides us with the guidance and Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As the Body of Christ, which is another image for the Church, we, the members of the Church, give strength, hope, and support to one another in our common goal of becoming holy people. The Church provides us with opportunities for education, prayer, community, and service to the world. Christ has given the Church the gift of holiness. As members of the Church, we share in that gift, though we are sinners.

Answer God's call to grow in holiness. Take time away from the rush and noise of the world to meet Jesus in the silence of your heart. Then go out into the world and let Christ's holiness shine through you to bring his love to others. God offers you his forgiveness; let his gift touch the hearts of others through you. Let your moral living influence others to make the right choices. Let acts of humble and loving service show others they are not alone; they are loved by God.



out our personal call from God and contribute to the mission of the Church. We are not just individuals, living our individual lives. We hold one another up in prayer and in action. We are the people God has called together, a worldwide assembly—the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church!

We Respond in the Church

Within the Church there are four recognized states of life: committed single life, married life, ordained life (as a bishop, priest, or deacon), and consecrated life. Each of these states of life is rooted in the baptismal call to live as a son or daughter of the Father, in Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit. These states of life are the focus of this book.

Committed single life is one way to live out the baptismal call. It is a state of life that is not bound by public vows, but it is a recognized way that people may respond to God's call to serve others and the Church.

Married life is also based on the baptismal call to live in holiness. However, the Sacrament of Matrimony bestows the particular sacramental graces proper to Marriage, in order to help the married man and woman live out their vocation.

Pray It!

Pray the Lord's Prayer

Saint Thomas Aquinas called the Lord's Prayer "the most perfect prayer." The *Catechism* calls it "the quintessential prayer of the Church" (2776). If we pray it sincerely, we may see why.

We pray to *Our Father*. We are not alone. We are all the Father's children.

"Hallowed be thy name." *Hallowed* means "holy." Do we treat the name of God as holy, holding it in reverence? Or do we throw it around heedlessly?

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What is my call? How can I do God's will on earth? Help me to know, Father.

"Give us this day our daily bread." It is not my bread, but *our* bread. Help me to share with others in need.

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive . . ." Forgive me, Father, and help me to forgive as you do.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Saying no now will lead to a better future later. Help me to remember, Father.

"Amen."

The challenge of Marriage is to help one's spouse and children to become holy as well—that is, to help them to live the life of love that God intends for all of us to live.

Ordained life is another way one lives out the baptismal call. The ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons is essential to the organic structure and the good of the Church; without them we cannot speak of the Church. In addition, the Sacrament of Holy Orders bestows the particular sacramental graces proper to the ordained ministry, so that the deacon, priest, or bishop can fulfill his duties to all the People of God. No one has a right to ordination; it is a call from God. The desire for ordination must be submitted to the Church. In turn the Church will call a man to receive orders. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, like all the other Sacraments, is an unmerited gift.

Consecrated life also stems directly from the Sacrament of Baptism and its call to live in holiness. Although the taking of religious vows is not a Sacrament, the vows signify an intention to follow Christ more closely in a life totally dedicated to God. Religious vows help the Christian to pursue a life of perfect love in service to the Kingdom and witness the coming of the Kingdom both now and in the world to come.

All states of life enjoy an equal dignity within the Church. No one state is more important or more holy than another. Holiness does not depend on one particular state of life but on our relationship with God and the way we fulfill the call of our own state of life.

By fully embracing and living out our own personal vocation in whatever state of life we are called to, we contribute to the Church's mission, its vocation, of spreading the Good News of Christ. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ relies on the diversity of vocations within to continue to build the Church and to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God. †

Part Review

1. What does *agape* mean? Describe its characteristics.
2. Give an example of Jesus' teaching on love from each of the four Gospels.
3. What does the word *disciple* mean, and how can we be disciples of Jesus in our everyday lives?
4. Why is a properly understood "love for self" important in any vocation?
5. Why is relationship with others important in every state of life?
6. Why is "the People of God" a good description, or name, for the Church?

The Call of the Laity

The Church is mostly composed of the lay faithful, also called the laity. Laypeople can be either married or single. The laity are people who are not ordained or in a consecrated state of life. Some might think that the role of the laity is less important to the Church than these other vocations, but that is not the case at all! The laity are the people whose primary vocation is to make Christ present in every walk of human life. The laity help to make Christ known everywhere they go, including schools, hospitals, factories, offices, and most especially among their own friends and family.

Through Baptism laypeople are called to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. This means that they are called to holiness and a life centered in prayer and the Sacraments; they are called to proclaim Christ to others through their words and deeds; and they are called to exercise leadership in the Church when appropriate and to serve others, particularly those who are poor and suffering.

The lay life is an important vocation to consider, as it is through the faith, prayers, and good works of the laity that the Gospel can be spread most completely to every corner of the world. This section of your book ends with a specific look at the single life as one way laypeople live out their Christian vocation.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 8: Who Are the Lay Faithful? (page 40)
- Article 9: Called to Be Priest, Prophet, and King (page 43)
- Article 10: The Single Life (page 46)

Article

8 Who Are the Lay Faithful?

laity (the lay faithful, laypeople)

All members of the Church with the exception of those who are ordained as bishops, priests, or deacons. The laity share in Christ's role as priest, prophet, and king, witnessing to God's love and power in the world.

As a young person, you are part of the laity and are called to share the Good News with others. In what ways, big or small, are you a witness to God's love to your friends, classmates, family members, and people in your community?

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In a technical sense, the **laity** (also referred to as the lay faithful or laypeople) are baptized Catholics who have not received the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Even women religious and nonordained religious brothers are considered laypeople in this strict sense of the term. But in general, when you hear a reference to the laity, it is most likely a reference to those Catholics who are not ordained clergy and who also have not entered into a state of consecrated life formally recognized by the Church.

It is important to avoid defining the laity by who they are not (i.e., not ordained or not in consecrated life); rather, we should consider them for who they are—namely, full members of the Church who share their own specific role in spreading the Good News. Laypeople may be married or single, and only laypeople can enter into the Sacrament of Matrimony (this vocation is the focus of the next section). Because of this, marriage and family life are, for the most part, vocations unique to the lay faithful.

In terms of numbers, laypeople make up the vast majority of Catholics, and they live the Church's mission in their everyday lives as they interact with secular society. Through this interaction laypeople are called to become the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (see Matthew 5:13–14) with their very presence as Christians, bringing the message of Good News to the world.



In the World, but Not of the World

Laypeople are called to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. This might sound like nothing more than a tricky play on words, but it is actually the core of the vocation of the laity.

Laypeople are called to be *in* the world in the sense that it is their vocation to participate fully in the goodness of ordinary daily life. The laity are not called to live secluded lives like monks in monasteries, nor are they usually called to devote the majority of their time to the direct service of the Church in the same way priests and consecrated persons are.

The life of a lay Christian can involve interaction with the media, the marketplace, the local and national governments, and secular cultural establishments. The laity are fully engaged in the world, because their lives are engaged in every legitimate aspect of the human experience, not just those that are explicitly Church-related.

On the other hand, Christian laypeople are called to be not *of* the world, meaning that they are not meant to regard themselves simply as citizens of secular society. They should understand their lives in relation to their identity as adopted sons and daughters of God and in light of the truth as it is revealed by God and taught by the Church. Lay Christians understand that the most important things are not material

Pray It!

The Letter to Diognetus

This ancient letter is read every year during the Easter season as a part of the Liturgy of the Hours, the official public, daily prayer of the Catholic Church.

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. . . . And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. . . . They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. . . . As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. (*From a Letter to Diognetus*)

What might be some of the struggles with being *in* the world but not *of* the world? How could you bring these struggles to God in prayer?

but spiritual. Whereas “worldly” persons might have as their top priorities the accumulation of wealth, the attainment of bodily beauty, or the exclusive pursuit of pleasurable experiences, the highest priorities for lay Christians are love, honor, and service of God and neighbor.

Lay Ecclesial Ministry

The most appropriate **apostolate** for the laity is their work and Christian witness in the world in the sense that this is the most distinctive element of their vocation. However, at times individual laypeople can be called upon to serve the Church in a more direct manner. When this occurs the layperson is participating in what is called lay ecclesial ministry.

In the parish lay ecclesial ministry can be encompassed in such roles as parish catechetical leader, youth minister, school principal, and director of liturgy or music. In the larger structure of the Church, lay ecclesial ministry might also include a variety of leadership roles in a diocesan office. In a 2005 document on lay ecclesial ministry titled *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, the U.S. bishops note that lay ecclesial ministry is identified by four characteristics: authorization (from the hierarchy), leadership (in a particular area of ministry), close mutual collaboration (with bishops, priests, and deacons), and preparation and formation (appropriate to their responsibilities).

Though lay ecclesial ministers are valued for all the good work they do, it is important not to confuse lay ecclesial ministers with the ordained clergy. This is to ensure that the unique vocations of both the clergy and the laity are safeguarded from losing their distinctive characteristics. It is also so that the lay faithful do not lose sight of the importance and the power of the Sacraments, which in general can be administered by the clergy only.



Because lay Christians are called to be *in* the world but not *of* it, they are able to **evangelize** in a unique way. The laity can bear Christian witness within the many areas of society that are often inaccessible to those, such as the clergy, who have more “official” roles within the Church.

Lay Christians are also able to work to bring secular affairs into alignment with Christian values. For example, a Catholic politician can strive to enact laws that protect human life in all its stages, and a Catholic business owner can help to support families by paying fair salaries. The lay faithful can also glorify God by simply striving for excellence in whatever job they happen to have. A Catholic teacher glorifies God by being the best teacher he or she can be. A Catholic doctor glorifies God by being a good doctor. You can honor and praise God by being a diligent student and by studying and learning to the best of your ability. †

Article 9 Called to Be Priest, Prophet, and King

Through Baptism we are incorporated into Christ’s Body, the Church. Thus we come to a closer identification with Christ, especially by taking part in his sonship as the adopted children of God. All the baptized come to share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission. However, the lay faithful have their own necessary and special way of fulfilling these aspects of their baptismal vocation. One way laypeople



are supported in living out their call to be priest, prophet, and king is through participation in parish life.

The water of Baptism is a sign of new life. Water can be poured three times over the head, or the entire body can be immersed three times in a pool of water.

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apostolate

The Christian person’s activity that fulfills the apostolic nature of the whole Church when he or she works to extend the Kingdom of Christ to the entire world. If your school shares the wisdom of its founder, its namesake, or the charism of the religious order that founded it, it is important to learn about this person or order and his or her charism, because as a graduate you will likely want to incorporate this charism into your own apostolate.

evangelize

The action of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ through words and witness.



prophet

A person God chooses to speak his message of salvation. In the Bible, primarily a communicator of a divine message of repentance to the Chosen People, not necessarily a person who predicted the future.

Priest

By virtue of their Baptism, the laity are called to participate in the life of the Trinity by offering every aspect of their lives as a spiritual sacrifice with Christ to the Father, in union with the Holy Spirit. In this way they are fulfilling the priestly aspect of their vocation; that is, every action of their daily lives, no matter how mundane or seemingly insignificant, should be done as a gift to God. Every deed can be made into a praise of God if it is done out of love for him, and laypeople are called to make the constant praise of God, through their thoughts, words, and deeds, a major focus in their lives. Just as an ordained priest offers gifts to God in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the lay faithful are called to live in such a way that the gift of their lives is likewise offered for the glory of God. Laypeople also share in Christ's priestly mission by participating in the Church's life of prayer, by assisting in some specific ministries of the Church (such as that of lector, choir member, or altar server), and by living a vibrant sacramental life.

Prophet

By virtue of their Baptism, the laity are also called to share in Christ's prophetic mission. A **prophet** is one who speaks for God, conveying God's message to the people and making known the truth about who God is. Laypeople are called to a prophetic vocation in that they are called to serve as witnesses to the saving power of Christ to the world.

Laypeople speak for God and witness in this way by leading lives in accord with Christ's teaching and by demonstrating their firm belief in the mysteries of our faith. For the most part, the laity have the chance to bear a particularly fruitful witness in this regard, as they often encounter unbelievers or non-Christians in their daily life of work or study. Through their Christian way of life, the lay faithful have the chance to introduce Christ to those who may never have had a genuine encounter with Christ or the opportunity to know his Church. They might also collaborate with the hierarchy in specific ministries in their parish or diocese, such as that of catechist or religion teacher.

King

The laity are also called to share in Christ's kingly office through service to others. We can understand this best when we recall that Christ was a servant leader. As the Gospel of Matthew tells us, "[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28). The laity are likewise called to be servant leaders. Servant leadership starts with cultivating self-discipline and consistently choosing what is good and right. It continues with committing to follow God's call with all one's strength and soul. And it includes service to others: family, school, workplace, community, and the larger world. Laypeople are especially called to serve those most in need because, as Christ said, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). The laity can also share in Christ's kingly mission by taking on appropriate lay leadership roles in the parish such as membership on parish committees that assist the parish priest. Lay theologians sometimes also serve the hierarchy as consultants in councils and synods.

Serving others is a key part of our baptismal call. How are you of service to other people in your school, parish, or local community?

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Parish Life

A layperson typically lives out his or her baptismal vocation as member of a parish. A parish is a distinct, stable community within a diocese, typically cared for by one or more priests appointed by the bishop.

Live It!

Get Involved!

Think about what you might do to live out your own baptismal vocation within your parish. How can you get involved? No matter what your interests or personality, it is likely that there is some way for you to participate actively in the life of your parish.

For example, does your parish have a youth group you could join? Or maybe you would be interested in serving at Mass as a reader, an altar server, an usher, or a member of the choir. Many parishes have multiple service and outreach opportunities or groups that focus on particular issues of peace and justice. You might also consider volunteering to teach or assist a religious education class for the children of your parish. Whatever your particular interests, your parish will benefit from your involvement, and you may get further insight into the vocation to which God is calling you.

For laypeople the parish is their spiritual home. Members of a parish celebrate the Eucharist together on Sunday and Holy Days, and parishes are places where many of the other Sacraments are celebrated as well. Coming together as a community strengthens one's faith, and the formation of deep friendships with other parishioners can be the source of great support throughout one's life. Parishes often have a variety of groups that parishioners can participate in, such as Bible-study groups and prayer groups. Other groups focus on living one's faith through charitable outreach and justice issues.

A parish community is also responsible for the faith formation of its members. This includes Sacrament preparation for engaged couples about to marry, for the parents of infants to be baptized, for those who will celebrate First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and for adults who are becoming Catholic. Parish faith formation efforts also include programs of catechesis, or religious education, for both children and adults. These programs are designed to help people to learn the truths of faith and live as disciples. A parish community also celebrates special events together and usually maintains its own traditions, such as an annual parish picnic or a feast-day festival.

The parish is the basic structural unit of the universal Church. The parishes of a particular geographic region make up a diocese, which is guided by a bishop. In their relationship to the local parish, laypeople participate in the life of the universal, world-wide Catholic Church. †

Article 10 The Single Life

Is the single life of a layperson its own vocation? In one sense, the answer would have to be no. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not include lay single life as one of the possible vocational states in life (see 873). And it is true that the lay single life lacks many of the elements that are normally considered a part of a vocation. For example, nobody chooses to enter into the single state of life, as we all start our lives as single people. Unlike marriage, consecrated life, or the priesthood, there are no particular steps to take in order to become single; rather, the opposite is true—we remain