



The sheep follow the Good Shepherd, because they hear and recognize his voice. (cf John 10:4)

Highlights from the Pope's Letter

for 2018 World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Pope Francis, in his letter for today, points out that when Jesus returned after his time of prayer and struggle in the desert, he did three things before he began his mission. He *listened* to the word, *discerned* the content of the mission entrusted to him by the Father, and proclaimed that he came to accomplish it *today* (Lk 4:16-21).

This model—listen, discern, live—can be followed by all of us as we try live out our vocation. Here are some insights from the Holy Father:

LISTEN | God comes silently and discretely, without imposing on our freedom. Thus it can happen that his voice is drowned out by the many worries and concerns that fill our minds and hearts. We need to learn to silence the noise around us to listen.

DISCERN | We have to resist the temptations of ideology and negativity, and to discover, in our relationship with the Lord, the places, the means, and situations through which he calls us. Discernment requires attentiveness, not distraction!

LIVE | Our vocation is lived *today!* The Christian mission is now! Each one of us is called—whether to the lay life in marriage, to the priestly life in the ordained ministry, or to a life of special consecration—in order to become a witness of the Lord, here and now.

Photo above: Fr. Chris Martin processes with the Eucharist at a Steubenville Youth Conference. Fr. Martin is the president of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors.



Prayed to the Priesthood



About seven years ago in upstate New York, Sue O'Neal met a young man in her parish named Francis Vivacqua.

Seeing something in him, she asked him if he had ever considered the priesthood. It was a "wow" moment for the young man, setting him on a long path to figuring out his true call in life.

Remarkably, every single day since their encounter, Sue prayed a Divine Mercy Chaplet for Francis. Years after she began praying, he entered the seminary. In 2016, Francis was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Albany. Sue continues to pray for him daily.

Photo: Sue, Fr. Francis, and Sue's husband, Norman

3,405

The number of graduate-level seminarians in the U.S. in 2017. About 2,200 additional seminarians are studying at the college level.



Steps to a Vocation

How men were involved before seminary

A 2017 survey of newly ordained priests showed that most were regularly involved in their parishes. Here's what they did:

altar servers	75%
lectors	52%
extraordinary ministers	43%
youth/campus ministry	35%
catechists	34%
confirmation sponsors	32%

A Financial Wall

Overcoming barriers to a vocation

An estimated 10,000 individuals are discerning a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the US annually. However, one study showed that as many as 40% are blocked from pursuing their call due to student loans.

Most religious communities cannot assume any debt, and most dioceses allow only a limited amount of debt before accepting a candidate.

A Catholic organization called the Labouré Society helps men and women resolve education loans in order to enter the seminary, convent, or monastery. The organization brings together groups of aspirants, trains them to fund raise, then sends them out across the U.S. to tell their vocation stories. Nearly 250 young men and women have been able enter formation with the help of Labouré.

Is your vocation blocked by debt? Or do you want to help someone who feels called? Visit labouresociety.org.

LABOURÉ

Why do Seminarians Need our Prayers?

Because formation to become a priest is extremely hard work! Some have likened it to getting a master's degree while having a full-time job. The man's "job," in this case, though, is forming his heart and mind to be like Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Prayer and study are priorities, but recreation and down time are also important—as is spending time with a good spiritual director. A typical day at the seminary may look like this:



- 6:30 am Rise
- 7:15 am Morning Prayer
- 7:30 am Holy Mass
- 8:00 am Breakfast
- Classes and study time
- Noon Lunch
- Afternoon classes and study
- Sports and exercise
- 5:00 pm Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- 6:00 pm Evening Prayer
- 6:15 pm Benediction
- 6:30 pm Supper
- 7:30 pm Music practice, formation conferences, or personal and study time
- 11:00 pm Retire

An Uncommon Sight

Um, sister, is that eye shadow?

Here's one of the only times you'll see a religious sister wearing makeup—preparing for a TV show! Recently Sister Clare Matthiass, CFR, appeared on EWTN to talk about her book *Discerning Religious Life*. The book has been a hit among young Catholic women looking for solid advice on figuring out their vocations. Particularly popular is the chapter "The Six Month Discernment Challenge," in which sister advises (among other things), "Don't date and discern at the same time!" 206 pp. www.vianneyvocations.com

