

Becoming a Religious Sister, Brother, or Priest



WHAT IF

Let's say you believe God is calling you to a religious vocation. Maybe you read a story or meet a religious person that sparks your interest. There is a little voice inside of you asking, "Could Jesus Christ be inviting me to follow Him in this way?" You would want to find out for certain whether Jesus was calling you, as well as what steps were necessary to become a religious sister, brother, or priest. There are many different religious communities, and each one has a process for joining.

FINDING THE ORDER THAT FITS YOU

There are many ways to find information on different religious communities. You can ask someone who knows about the religious life: maybe a friend, family member, religious education teacher, priest or a religious sister or brother in your parish. You can look for more information on the internet or in magazines such as *Vision* or *Religious Ministries*. Religious communities also have "open house" days or weekend retreats where people can visit and learn more about the vocation firsthand. Opportunities for visiting religious communities or participating in retreats are often advertised in parish bulletins, the local diocesan newspaper, or on posters and fliers found in your Church. Most religious communities have websites which describe the community, provide information about upcoming events, and list the Vocation Director's name, phone number and e-mail address. Each religious order and diocese has a **Vocation Director**. Vocation Directors help women and men to determine if God is calling them to the religious life and if a particular order is the right fit for them.

TRY IT OUT!

When God calls a person to a certain religious order or community, He will find a way to guide them to the place where they belong. When a person feels drawn to a certain religious community, they contact the Vocation Director to learn more

How do you
know what fits
you if you don't
try it out?

about it. Together they can arrange a visit to get to know the community. The community can get to know them too. In this way, the religious community determines if the person is a right "fit" for them. If both agree there is a fit, then the person may move into the community for a short trial period. It is hard to know if you are meant for that kind of



Vision Magazine:

www.visionguide.info

Religious Ministries:

www.religiousministries.com

life unless you try it out for a short time. While living in the community, visitors experience a balanced lifestyle dedicated to God with time for prayer, community life, recreation, and apostolic work. It is a joyful, happy lifestyle for those who are called to be in a religious community, but the only way to find out if you might be called to this lifestyle is to try it out.

FORMATION

There is a special process for those who want to become religious sisters and brothers which is called **formation**. Each religious community has their own formation program to train the women and men to be sisters and brothers. At the beginning of the program, there is a period of time during which a person visits the community to discover if they are called to join. During this time, a woman is called a postulant and a man is called a candidate.

If they decide to continue in the formation program, there follows the **novitiate** which lasts between one and two years, in which a man or woman becomes a **novice**. At this point, they are given the title of “sister” or “brother.” During the novitiate, a novice learns more about the charism of the community by participating in community life and apostolic service.

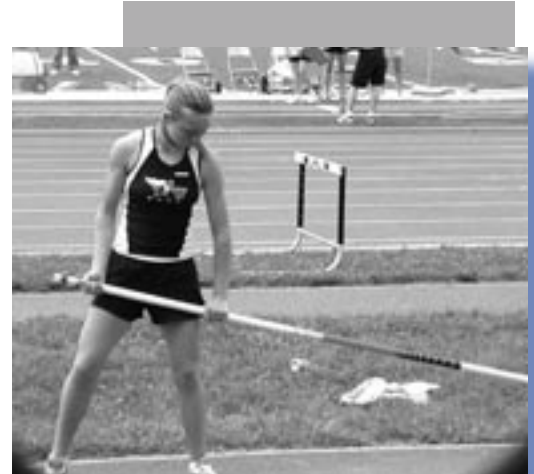
After the novitiate, if the novice decides to stay, they make **temporary vows** of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows are called “temporary” because they last only one year while the person continues training. At the end of each year, if they choose to remain part of the community, they renew their temporary vows. During this time they continue living and working as part of the community. They do this for several years until they are sure that they are definitely called to this vocation.

Formation

is the process of training and spiritual development that takes place during the early months or years of joining a religious order.

After having determined over the years that a religious community is the right fit for them, a sister or brother professes their **final vows** of poverty, chastity and obedience, which they promise to keep for the rest of their lives. Their years of preparation and discernment allow them to be absolutely sure that this is truly the vocation God is calling them to.

Likewise, during this period, the religious community discerns whether God is calling a person to join their community. If so, they extend an invitation for a sister or brother to make their final vows, and the person becomes a permanent member of the community.



St. Paul describes every Christian's life as a challenge that requires training in order to live it well: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"

(2 Timothy 4:7).

PRIESTS IN A RELIGIOUS ORDER

Men who want to be religious priests begin seminary training during the first years living in the community. They take temporary vows, then final vows. Once they are permanent members of the religious community, they can then be ordained priests. A religious priest is a member of his community just like the brothers. They all live and work in community sharing the same charism, but only the religious priest celebrates the sacraments.

There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world.

– Pope Benedict XVI¹⁹



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

1. What are some ways that God can show a person that they are called to be a religious sister, brother, or priest?
2. How could someone who is called to religious life discover which religious community is the right fit for them?
- 3 Religious men and women make temporary vows for several years before making their final vows. Do you think this helps them to make a lifelong commitment to a religious community? What motivates people to make a lifelong commitment?

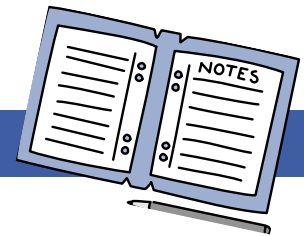
VOCABULARY

Vocation Director
Formation
Novitiate
Novice
Temporary Vows
Final Vows

Write about it!

Journal options:

- Prepare one question that you want to ask the religious sister who will be speaking to your class.
- Imagine that you feel drawn to join a religious community. Use a *Vision* magazine (www.visionguide.org), or other vocation publication, to find three religious communities that seem interesting. Write a paragraph for each one explaining the reason why you think that the religious order might be a “good fit” for you. (For example: “This religious order teaches in schools and I want to be a teacher.” “This religious order works overseas and I love to travel.” “They are missionaries and I am excited by my faith and want to share it with others.”)



Witness of a Religious Sister/Adopt a Sister

INTRODUCTION

We have learned that there are different ways of living a vocation to the religious life. Today we welcome a sister who is dedicated to God in this way, who will tell us how she discovered her call, and what her life is like now. You may have already prepared questions for the end of the talk, but if you think of others you may ask them as well.

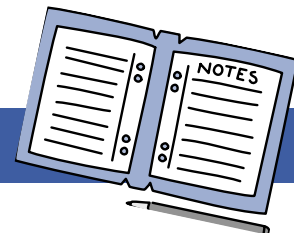


LET'S PRAY ABOUT IT!

Adopt a Sister Prayer

SUMMARY

Hearing the story of this sister shows us that religious sisters were once students too, who did the same things you do. One day, she decided to say "Yes" to Christ's invitation and to dedicate her life to Him. Think of the good things she has done since the day that she decided to follow her vocation. Let us remember to pray for her, and all those who share her vocation. Let us also pray that God will show each of us our own vocation and give us the ability to say "Yes" like she did.



Write about it!

Journal options:

- What is one thing you found interesting about the speaker's presentation and why? What was one thing that you could relate to in her talk?
- After meeting this sister, would you be more likely to encourage a friend who wanted to become a sister? What are the good points you can tell her about this vocation?
- Try to imagine what the world would have been like if this sister decided not to follow her vocation. What good things would never have happened?