

This contains the answers to some common questions that people ask with regard to vocations in the Catholic Church.

1. *What do you do all day?*
2. *How important is prayer in your life?*
3. *Is prayer always easy for you?*
4. *Do you get time off, and what do you do in that time?*
5. *What is the difference between a diocesan priest and a religious priest?*
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shares in experiences of prayer and community life with the congregation in which he or she is interested.

Candidate: A more formal relationship with the community occurs when a person becomes a candidate. At this time they live with the community while continuing their education or work experience.

This period enables the candidate to observe and participate in religious life from the inside. It also gives the community an opportunity to see if the candidate shows promise of living the life of the community. A person may be a candidate for one or two years.

Novice: The novitiate is the next stage of formation. This is a special one-to-two-year period which marks the person's official entrance into the community. Novices spend time in study and prayer, learning more about themselves, the community, and their relationship with the Lord. At the end of the novitiate, they prepare for temporary promises or vows.

Vows: Promises of poverty, celibacy and obedience may be taken for one, two, or three years, depending upon the decision of the individual person. These promises are renewable up to nine years. Final vows could be made after three years of temporary promises.

A man studying for religious priesthood also has seminary training, where his time is spent studying theology, the Bible, the teachings of the church, and the skills he will need to be a priest.

What impact does one's sexual orientation or lifestyle have on becoming a priest or religious?

Religious orders and dioceses are seeking people who have a strong sense of self as a man or woman and understand one's own emotional needs. Candidates to religious life or the priesthood should also have the gifts and talents to live celibately. They should understand what are appropriate expressions of love in celibate context. Living a celibate life requires abstinence from sexual activity.

Dioceses and religious communities, in working with candidates, look for behavioral evidence that celibacy is a possible lifestyle for a person.

What is a religious vow?

A vow is a solemn promise made freely as an individual gives his or her life to God. Many communities make vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience, but other communities have other vows.

What vows do diocesan priests make?

Diocesan priests make no vows. For ordination, they freely make promises of celibacy and obedience to their bishop.

These Frequently Asked Questions have been prepared by Father John Regan, Vocation Director for the Diocese of Joliet.

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*Frequently Asked
Questions
about . . .*

Vocations



What do you do all day?

What a priest, brother or sister does with his or her day is so varied and complex that only a sampling can be given here. Prayer, work and leisure are all necessary for a healthy life. We try to make sure we have a balance of all these, but we don't always succeed.

In the area of work or ministry, many of us have one main occupation, such as teaching, parish ministry, social work, or hospital work, all of which have somewhat regular hours and predictable demands. The unpredictable are also interesting and challenging. They center around meeting the needs of people: the sick, old, angry, hurt, hungry, imprisoned, excited, happy. We share with them our understanding, encouragement and support. We rejoice, cry, feel with them.

Those of us who are contemplatives spend our day at prayer and some kind of labor to sustain us.

How important is prayer in your life?

Because we have chosen a way of life which says by its very nature that God is most important, prayer has a central role in our lives. Prayer is communication with the Lord whom we love and is as necessary for us as communication is for any two persons who expect their relationship to continue. Can you imagine having a best friend (or husband or wife) to whom you never spoke?

Since prayer is so important, most priests and religious spend approximately two hours a day in prayer, part of that time with others, at Mass and in common oral prayer, part alone, in reading and quiet attentiveness. Probably the main benefit of prayer is that it makes us more sensitive to God's activity in the people, events and circumstances of daily life.

Is prayer always easy for you?

Definitely not! There are lots of times when we don't feel like doing other things that are basically important to us; for example, the athlete doesn't always feel like practicing, a student doesn't always feel like studying, the wage earner doesn't always feel like working, etc. However, in all the cases mentioned, because the activity in which we participate is important, we act on motives deeper than feelings, and do what we know needs to be done.

Do you get time off, and what do you do in that time?

We have approximately the same amount of leisure time as most adults. In this time, we are free to do whatever is legal, moral and reasonable for adults in our situation. Obviously, because priests, brothers and sisters are unique individuals, we won't all choose the same types of recreation, and none of us chooses the same activity every time. Some of the more common choices are sports, movies, TV, reading, sharing with friends and enjoying the outdoors.

What is the difference between a diocesan priest and a religious priest?

A diocesan priest ordinarily serves the church within a well-defined area (a diocese). He serves the people as a parish priest,

but may also be involved in other forms of ministry: teaching, chaplain in hospitals, prisons, campus ministry, etc. A religious priest, on the other hand, is a member of a community which goes beyond the geographical limits of any diocese.

A religious priest seeks to live a vowed life within a community of men for mutual support and accomplishment of some work. There is an emphasis in the community on shared ideals, prayer and commitment to Christ. Religious priests work in a wide variety of ministries.

What kinds of ministry do sisters do?

The choice of ministry for the woman religious arises from the founding purpose of the community, a prayerful discernment of her own gifts, and an assessment within her community of the signs of the times. A woman religious and her community together look at the needs of the church and society to determine where best to place their energies.

The way a particular sister spends her day depends on the kind of community to which she belongs. Contemplative nuns often do work to sustain their community in food and shelter such as gardening, baking and handiwork. Active communities are involved in a myriad of ministries, usually with an emphasis on service such as education, social work, parish pastoral work, etc.

How do congregations or orders differ from one another?

Most groups of religious were founded at a time in history when travel and communication were very limited. Many congregations were founded at the same time for the same purpose, but at different places by people who didn't know each other.

Founders had a specific spirit or charism they wanted to develop in their community (such as hospitality, simplicity or unity). The charism, the specific ministries of the community, and a varying emphasis on prayer and community life are the basic differences among religious communities. All are alike in that their primary concern is to spread the Gospel message of Jesus.

Why do some priests and religious dress in clerical garb or habits and others don't?

Those who maintain habits or clerical garb today do so for various reasons. One of the primary reasons is that religious dress is a sign. The garb is an instantly recognized symbol of faith in God and commitment to Christianity.

Another frequent rationale for religious garb is that it is simple dress and therefore a way to live out the vow of poverty. A sister, brother, or priest who wears religious garb can own just two or three changes of dress and be free of the expense that may be involved in a more extensive contemporary wardrobe. Other communities say the habit is an important sign of penitence for them.

Some communities have opted to wear street clothes, saying that the most valid sign of Christian faith is lifestyle, rather than garb. They contend that religious dress creates an undesirable barrier between them and laity with whom they work. Some Catholics and non-Catholics distance themselves from people in traditional religious dress.

Furthermore, those who have discontinued wearing habits often say the original reason for it was to wear the dress of the common people; therefore street clothes are the common people's clothes nowadays.

Some religious say they serve "home missions." What does this mean?

"Home missions" refers to territory within the United States with a very minimal Catholic presence. For example, the state of Alaska and areas of the rural South are often considered home mission territory. The Catholic Extension Society and some religious communities (such as Glenmary Home Missioners) are dedicated to serving in home missions.

What is the difference between a brother and a priest?

A brother is a layman who commits himself to Christ by the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience, who lives in religious community, and who works in nearly any job: teacher, cook, lawyer, etc. Brothers are not sacramental ministers.

How long does it take to become a diocesan priest?

It takes four years after college or eight years after high school, the same as for many professions.

How old do you have to be before you enter the seminary?

There is no certain age to start preparing for the priesthood. Some people go to high school seminaries, others enter the seminary after high school, after college, or after they have been working for years.

How does one become a member of a religious community?

The formation program involves several stages. While these vary from community to community in name, length of time, and format, the following outline gives a general view of formation programs.

Contact: A person of high school or college age or older who is interested in religious life but still searching for the answer to the question, "What does God want of me?" could join a program of "contact" with a religious community. This is usually a very flexible program whereby the person meets with a priest, brother or sister on a monthly basis and

