



VOCATION
GIFT AND MISSION

*THE STUDY GUIDE
FOR ADULTS*

THE EPISCOPAL TEACHING SERIES
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VOCATION: GIFT AND MISSION
Study Guide for Adults

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This study guide has been developed in conjunction with the Pastoral Letter *Vocation: Gift and Mission*, given on Vocation Sunday, May 7, 2006, and has been written to facilitate discussions on the various vocations present in our Church and to foster prayer centered on the mystery of vocation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Fr. David P. Long, STL, JCL, the Vice Chancellor of the Diocese of Paterson, for helping in the development and preparation of this study guide, and for bringing the guide to print.

This study guide, geared specifically for adult sharing groups, should be used to provoke further thought on the topic of vocations in our Church, as a means for further discussion into the vocation of the Church, as a tool for the further development and growth of all of our vocations as people called by God, and as incentive to personal and communal conversation with God.

The questions included in this guide are starting points. The answers developed should not be seen as definitive statements on the issue. Perhaps as your own conversations continue, different questions will arise that speak to your time, your parish or community, your personal circumstances and faith journey. I invite you to remain open to the places where the Spirit may lead you in these conversations, and to remain open to the call God may be giving you and members of your group in these moments. I also invite you to bring these questions to your personal prayer, to see where God may be asking you to respond to His call in your life.

It is my sincere hope that the Pastoral Letter *Vocation: Gift and Mission* and this adult study guide, as well as the complementary study guide geared towards the youth of our diocese, will be discussed not only among families, but also in parish religious education sessions, with students in our elementary schools, high schools and colleges, as well as all faith formation groups throughout this local Church of Paterson.

Through these discussions and through our fervent prayer, may the gift and mission of our individual vocation be recognized and strengthened. May we strive to follow the words of the Savior:

*“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*

(Matthew 28:19-20)

+ Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli,

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Bishop of Paterson

I. A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON VOCATION

A. THE VOCATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

*“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”
At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1: 16-18)”*

Jesus calls me to be his disciple, a person who follows him on a lifelong journey. To be a disciple also means we must use all of the gifts God has given us.

The call to be a Christian is a gift given by God. What does it mean for me to follow Jesus in my life? What gifts do you possess that you can use to deepen your own relationship with God?

All of us, no matter what our place in life, have been called by God to be a disciple, a person who follows Jesus on a lifelong journey. Our abilities, our talents, our gifts, all of what we are, must be used to deepen our relationship with God, and to bring others to that same deep relationship. That is our fundamental vocation as a Christian, and that vocation holds a number of truths.

What gifts do you underestimate and under-use?

The call to be a Christian is the call to intimacy. How do you find yourself in an intimate friendship with God? How good a friend are you to others, and how do these friendships reflect your relationship with God?

The call to be a Christian is committing oneself to heroism and self-sacrifice for the good of others. Heroes are not only found in the movies and literature, but in our everyday lives, such as the single parent struggling to support their family, or the widower facing a new, unknown life without their spouse.

How do you practice charity and self-sacrifice in your life, and how do you support those around you struggling heroically in their lives?

The call to be a Christian requires an immediate response. What are you doing here and now, in your work, in your parish and your community, to show that you have responded to the call of discipleship? Is this response enough for others to recognize you as a Christian?

B. THE CALL TO BE HOLY

“All have the same vocation to perfection, possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.” (Lumen Gentium, 32)

Holiness is not just a word reserved for saints and martyrs, something that we think is out of our grasp. All of us have been called to holiness, to a radical conversion that attaches us to God and sanctifies our lives. All of us have been called to be saints.

How have you lived out the call to holiness and sainthood in your own life? What gifts can you use to become holier?

C. THE VOCATION OF APOSTLESHIP

“Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

The vocation to apostleship means to proclaim the message of the Gospel in our lives, sometimes even using words. To be an apostle means to share the words of Jesus, to share in the deeds of Jesus, to share the mission of Jesus.

Do you see the vocation of apostle at work in the Church today? Why or why not, and where or where not? Whom do you identify as an apostle? How can you help in the mission of apostleship so needed in the Church and the world?

D. THE VOCATION OF APOSTLE AS GROUNDED IN PRAYER

“Now it happened in those days that Jesus went to the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked twelve out of the; he called them apostles.” (Luke 6:12-13)

Prayer is a crucial element in the life of the Church and the people called as members of the Church. Many times, however, prayer becomes something neglected and forgotten. We try to catch up on our prayer when we have more time, more space, more freedom.

Prayer is the place where God touches our hearts in a deep and intimate way, and is the place where we can open ourselves to the providence and will of God at work in our lives.

How you would describe your prayer life? What are the parts of your prayer life that you want to keep? What parts do you want to strengthen?

II. A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON VOCATION

A. VOCATION TO LIFE IN CHRIST

“I am the vine, you are the branches.” (John 15:15)

Each of us has been called by God to be a unique creation, joined to Christ the Vine and joined to one another as branches of that same Vine. We live in the mystery of communion that is Church, sharing in the life of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, though, each of us fails to recognize how our vocation as a branch of the One Vine could affect those around us. We may see ourselves as unique, and therefore separate. Our individual gifts become lost in our individuality.

How have you been helpful in bringing other people to recognize their gifts, their talents and their treasures? How have you hindered the development of gifts in others, and in yourself?

B. VOCATION IN THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION

“There are many gifts, but it is always the same spirit; there are many different forms of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

The Church reflects the mystery of the Trinity, and is the sacrament of communion. As Church, we reflect the giving and receiving, the loving and being loved that is the dynamic life of the Trinity. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is given to us from above...from the Father of all light.” (James 1:17)

Each of us has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, enabling in us special talents, charisms and activities that are used for the common good of the Church and where our vocation takes shape. Each person is unique, each vocation is unique, but all are called to increase the good of the whole Church.

How do you see your gifts and talents, unique and special to you, being utilized for the sake of the good of society and for the building-up of the Church? Do you see your gifts as useful at all? Why or why not?

III. VOCATION AT THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH

A. THE CHURCH AS HIERARCHY

“To some [Christ’s] gift was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; to knit God’s holy people together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

From its very beginnings, the Church has been a missionary Church, the universal sacrament of salvation (Ad Gentes, 1) whose mission is to make all God’s children share in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To accomplish this mission, the Church has been established as an ordered Church, with some members of the community, the apostles, serving as the foundation of the Church. The apostles taught, administered, watched, confirmed and took care of their communities, and appointed successors to their role so that the apostolic tradition would be preserved.

How do you see the apostolic tradition alive in the Church today? How is the missionary activity of the Church accomplished in your parish, in your diocese?

B. THE DIVERSITY OF VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

1. THE LAITY

The laity describes those members of the Church who are not in Holy Orders or do not belong to a religious state. However, we cannot forget that the laity has an important role in the mission of the Church.

Through Baptism and Confirmation, the laity are called to be “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16) by sanctifying themselves in marriage or in a life of celibacy, by raising a family or by living a profession, in fact through all the works of human society.

*“Spouses remind the Church of ‘what happened on the Cross; they are ... witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers.’”
(Familiaris Consortio, 13)*

Perhaps the most important way the laity work in the mission of the Church is through the gift of procreation and conjugal love given to married couples. In this total gift of self that a husband and wife make to each other, they open themselves to God’s design and stand ready to welcome the mystery of new life. In this way, spouses fulfill their vocation, form strong and stable families and contribute to the good of society.

*“In a very real sense, ‘the future of humanity passes by way of the family.’”
(Familiaris Consortio, 86)*

In our society, the institution of marriage is under serious threat. The prevalence of separation and divorce, the common practice of cohabitation, the violation of the bond of marriage have eroded the sense of the sacred in marriage, and have threatened the sacramental nature of this gift from God. Even the very nature of marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman is disputed.

In what concrete ways can you increase the gift of marriage, and strengthen the vocation of marriage in your community and parish?

How have you made the sacramentality of marriage present in your own relationship with your spouse, and within your parish?

2. THE CONSECRATED LIFE

“Those living the evangelical counsels support a spirituality of true communion for the entire Church. Their witness encourages all the faithful to see one another in the profound unity of the Mystical Body. For it is in light of this great mystery, not only that we see others as our brothers and sisters, but in this great mystery, we are made one with each other by being one with God.”
(*Vocation: Gift and Mission, 51*)

The vocation to the consecrated life stands in the way of the rugged individualism that our society wants to promote. Consecrated persons, members of religious orders as sisters, brothers and priests, live a life of communion within their respective communities, caring for one another, sharing common prayer, daily celebration of the Eucharist and a common table of fellowship. Consecrated life is truly an icon of the very mystery of God.

What contact have you had with the consecrated life? How have you experienced the ministry of persons with a vocation to the consecrated life?

3 THE ORDAINED PRIESTS

“Along with the laity and those in consecrated life, the ordained are a gift to the Church.”
(*Vocation: Gift and Mission, 55*)

All the members of the Church participate in the priesthood of Christ. Yet those who are ordained have a share in Christ’s priesthood that differs from the priesthood of the laity. The ordained priest continues the role of the Good Shepherd, who builds up and sanctifies the Church. Through the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the priest is configured to Christ the High Priest.

How do you appreciate the ministry of the priest? Are you aware that Christ has placed the priests at the service of the faithful and their ministry is essential to the Church? Have you ever participated in or witnessed a Solemn Mass of Ordination?

Have you ever discussed the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Orders with your parish priest? What questions would you ask him about the ministerial priesthood?

“Through the sacramental ministry of the priest, God makes his people holy and draws them into a deeper communion with himself.” (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 60)

At the heart of the ministry of any priest is the Eucharist, “the source and summit of the Christian’s life.” (Lumen Gentium, 11) The Eucharist continues the work of our redemption.

How often do you participate in the celebration of the Eucharist? Do you yearn for the Eucharist? Do you make an effort to attend daily Mass?

Does your parish offer other Eucharistic celebrations, such as Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic processions, Corpus Christi celebrations, etc.? Have you ever participated in such celebrations? What have you found fulfilling and enriching in those celebrations?

Have you ever discussed the possibility of not being able to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist with other members of your family or parish due to the shortage of priests? What has been discussed?

4 THE ORDAINED DEACONS

“The deacon’s entire way of acting and thinking is grounded in the very mystery of the Eucharist that makes present Jesus’ oblation of self for others. For deacons strive to carry out what Jesus stated about his mission: ‘The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve — to give his life in ransom for many.’”
[Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28] (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 65)

Deacons help the Church grow through their role in liturgy and in the ministry of service. Deacons are motivated by a spirit of service to those less fortunate in the community, the sick and the infirmed, guided always by the Gospel they are called to proclaim and preach in their words and their lives.

Do you have deacons in your parish? What ministries do the deacons undertake in your parish? Have you seen diaconal ministry in action in your community, parish or diocese?

IV. A VOCATION CULTURE IN OUR DAY

A. AWARENESS OF THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE LAITY

“In the very depth of our being, God places the gift of our vocation to be discovered, cherished and to be lived in an attitude of thankfulness to God and service to others. Today, there is a need for all members of the Church to recognize the uniqueness of their own vocation.”
(Vocation: Gift and Mission, 66)

“Fostering vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate is necessary for the very life of the Church.”
(Vocation: Gift and Mission, 68)

We are all called to a vocation, each in their own special way, using our own special talents and gifts. Through our vocation, we are called to help others deepen their vocation and become active members of the Body of Christ.

B. THE NEED TO FOSTER PRIESTHOOD AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

“The world presents a particular challenge to those who are called to the consecrated life, diaconate and priesthood.” (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 69)

Just as society is challenging the traditional understanding of the sacrament of Marriage, it is also challenging the concepts of ordained ministry and consecrated life. Materialism advocates the collection of goods as the source of happiness and success; individualism promotes the self over all others without moral consequences; commercialism urges the satisfaction of all desires and enslaves personal freedom to those desires. All of these social drives stand in the face of consecrated life, priesthood and the diaconate, which are ordered to the needs of the Church and the needs of fellow branches connected to the One Vine.

What effect has society had on your own vocation? Do you see yourself dominated by material or commercial concerns? Why or why not?

How do you react to society's overwhelming need to collect wealth, to "be your own person," to "follow the in-crowd"?

C. THE WAYS TO CREATE A VOCATION CULTURE

"Every family open to the mystery of the Church becomes a source of missionary dynamism that promotes vocations." (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 71)

The family remains the primary place for creating a space so that those called by God may hear God's voice. Parents especially introduce their children into full participation in the Church.

How have you provided this space for hearing God's call in your life or the life of your family? Do you provide time for prayer as a family? Do you discuss vocations in the Church as a family? Are you supportive of vocations, or do you feel vocations are best left for another family?

"Teachers, educators, catechists and all those involved in youth work and campus ministry continue the work of the family in fostering vocations." (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 72)

As a Church, we all have the responsibility of fostering vocations, of taking the talents we have been given and using them for the growth of our community of faith. Families have given us the gift of their children, and have entrusted to us the responsibility of assisting them in raising these children as members of the Church, called by God to continue its mission of evangelization and salvation.

How can you assist the work of the family in fostering vocations? Does your parish have opportunities for catechesis in vocations? Can you assist in youth and campus ministry programs in your parish or community? What are some concrete examples of such work where you can participate?

"The Eucharist is the birthplace for all vocations. Where Mass is celebrated daily and with great devotion, and where the mystery of the altar continues in Eucharistic Adoration, vocations flourish." (Vocation: Gift and Mission, 74)

One of the greatest ways to foster vocations is through personal invitation. Whether from priests or religious men and women themselves, or through parents and family members who encourage vocations from their own families, or even friends, that personal invitation to listen to God's call helps make vocations a reality in our Church.

The celebration of the Eucharist becomes the place where that personal invitation finds its strength and its roots.

Do you try to understand the mystery of the Eucharist? Do you center your life on Christ whose body is broken for us and whose blood is poured out for us? Do you attend Mass with devotion and more than just on Sundays and Holydays?

How have you personally supported those who feel called to the priesthood, diaconate or consecrated religious life? Do you include the need for vocations in your prayer? Do you pray for candidates for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood, and for those dedicated to consecrated religious life? Why or why not?

How have you participated in parish or Diocesan-sponsored vocation awareness programs?

“All of us are responsible to work continuously and with great prayer to create a vocation culture. And, as the Church, we grow together when each of us receives and embraces our own particular vocation from God as gift and mission.”
(Vocation: Gift and Mission, 76)

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Father, in the fullness of time,
you sent your Son, born of the Virgin Mary,
to be our Savior.

He preached the good news of our salvation,
healed the sick and cast out evil.

Now as crucified and risen Lord,
he pours out of us the Holy Spirit of adoption
making us your sons and daughters.

Through the Church, he calls us to accept the gospel
and to share in your own divine life.
Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life for all people.

In your mercy, you do not abandon us.

In every age, you raise up men and women
to offer their lives for the sake of the gospel
and the work of the Church.

We beg you, therefore, grant to this
local Church of Paterson an increase of vocations
to the priesthood and religious life.

Give us courageous and faithful men
to serve as worthy priests.

Bless us with generous and zealous men and women
willing to seek holiness in consecrated life.

May we rejoice in an abundance of vocations from our families
so that we may yield a rich harvest of good works
for your honor and glory.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who lives and reigns with
You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Arthur J. Serratelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli, STD, SSL, DD
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Notes



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