



VOCATION
GIFT AND MISSION

*THE STUDY GUIDE
FOR YOUTH*

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

Prepared by
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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, S.T.L., J.C.L., 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 guide, geared specifically for the youth of the Diocese of Paterson (grades Pre-K through 12), can 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, and as a tool for the further development and growth of all of our vocations.

I hope that these materials could prove to be a valuable tool in the classroom, in youth ministry sessions and religious education programs throughout the diocese where the Pastoral Letter is discussed, and I encourage all teachers, catechists and youth ministers to use this study guide as a lead-in towards more in-depth conversations on the topic of vocations.

The questions included in this guide are starting points, and 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.

It is my sincere wish that the Pastoral Letter Vocation: Gift and Mission and this youth study guide, as well as the complementary study guide geared towards adults 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 prayer together may the gift and mission of our vocation be recognized and strengthened, and 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,

+ 
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?

The call to be a Christian is the call to intimacy. Do you see yourself as a friend of God? How can you develop your own friendship with God who loves you so much? How good a friend are you to others? Give some examples.

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 comic books or movies, but all around us, including us. We can be heroes too. What can we give up to help others? What can we do to help others? How do we feel when we do these things?

The call to be a Christian requires an immediate response. What can you do right now to show that you are a follower of Jesus? How can you help others become followers?

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 or special people. All of us have been called to be holy. All of us have been called to try to be saints.

Look at the list of gifts you made to the first question of this study guide. How can you use these gifts to become a holier person? Are there other gifts you can think of that will help you 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)

We have been called to share the message, the words and the mission of Jesus. Who do you see as people who work to share the words of Jesus in the world today? Do you see yourself as one of those people? Why or why not? How can you help share Jesus with those people you meet each day?

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 them; he called them apostles.” (Luke 6:12-13)

Prayer is very important in the life of the Church. Many times, however, prayer becomes something we forget to do, even though we know that we need to pray, since it is where God talks to us and we talk to God.

How you would describe your prayer life? What do you do when you pray? 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)

Have you ever seen a grapevine? From one main vine, many different branches sprout and grow. Some are crooked, others are bent and twisted, and some others are green and straight. All of these branches, though, need the vine to grow healthy and ripe grapes.

Jesus called himself the Vine, and we are the branches. All of us may be different, but we are connected to each other through the same vine. We all share the same life of Christ and all of us need that vine to grow in that life and to have our gifts and talents grow.

How have you helped other people see the gifts and talents they have?

How have you not helped other people see their gifts, maybe by being jealous of their talents or making fun of their gifts?

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)

Each of us has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives us special talents unique to us. We are asked to use those talents to help the Church grow.

Look at your list of gifts and talents. How can you use them to help others in the Church?

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 beginning at Pentecost, the Church has been on a mission to make all people understand that they are part of a community that is loved by God.

To help in this mission, Jesus made some of his disciples special leaders of the Church, and he gave them the name “apostle.” The apostles were the first teachers of the Church, and needed to take care of their communities. Later, the apostles chose people who would follow them in their work, up to today. These men we call bishops, and bishops can trace their work back to the first apostles.

What ministries does our local bishop do? Have you ever seen the bishop? What questions would you ask our bishop about the work he does in the Diocese of Paterson?

B. THE DIVERSITY OF VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

1. THE LAITY

The laity describes those members of the Church who are not a bishop, priest or deacon, or who are not a sister or brother in a religious community. Just because they are not a priest or sister does not mean, though, that a layperson does not have an important role in the Church. Perhaps the most important way laypeople work in the Church is through the gift of family.

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

Why do you think families are important? What is important about your family? What are the gifts that the members of your family have that are important to you? What do you think are your gifts that are important to your family?

SECRETED LIFE

2. THE CON-

*“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)*

People who have a vocation to the consecrated life (being brothers or sisters in a religious community) are special people who care for one another, share common prayer, participate in the daily celebration of the Eucharist and often live together in a house known as an abbey or convent. Many times, brothers or sisters have a special mission in the Church, such as teaching in schools or working in hospitals.

Do you know any religious brothers or religious sisters in your parish or school? Have you ever talked to a brother or sister about what their vocation to consecrated life means to them? Have you ever thought about a vocation to consecrated life yourself?

3 THE ORDAINED

*“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 share in the priesthood of Jesus. Some men share in Jesus’ priesthood in a special way, and we call these men priests. Through the laying on of hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the priest is ordained to help the bishop in leading the Church and caring for the people in the Church.

What does a priest do in his ministry? Perhaps you can interview the priest in your parish, or another priest you may know, and ask him about the many ways he helps the people in his parish and community.

Have you ever been to the ordination of a priest? What do you remember from that celebration?

*“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.

What is the Eucharist? How often do you go to Mass? Why is going to Mass important?

“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 special ministry. “Deacon” comes from a Greek word that means “servant,” and deacons are called to help those less fortunate in their community, especially the sick and the lonely. Deacons also help the bishop and priests at the Mass, by proclaiming the Gospel and perhaps giving a homily at Mass.

Do you have deacons in your parish? What ministries do the deacons in your parish do? Perhaps you can interview a deacon and ask him about the many ways he helps the people in his parish and community?

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 by using our own special talents and gifts to help others.

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)*

Sometimes society works to have us use our gifts incorrectly, or not to use our gifts at all. Television commercials tell us that the best way to be happy is to buy the right clothes, right video games or even the right brand of soda. Society tells us that happiness comes from the things we buy, not from the things we do or from the gifts we have from God.

Which is more important in your life, the image that society tells you to follow or the need to be who you want to be? Do you think you need all the things commercials want you to buy? Why or why not?

What is the most important thing in your life, something that you couldn't live without? Why is it so important to you? What would happen if you didn't have that something?

How do you react to society's demand that you "be like this person" and 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 most important place where people can hear God's call. Parents especially introduce their children into full participation in the Church.

Do you pray together as a family? What are the times that you pray together?

Have you ever talked to your parents or other members of your family about vocations? Did you ever think that you may have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, and did you feel comfortable talking about this with your family? Why or why not?

“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)

We all have a responsibility of fostering vocations. Families are important, since that is the first place where children are raised as members of the Church, but all people are called by God to continue the job of teaching people about Jesus and his Gospel.

How do other people, such as teachers and youth ministers, help the family in fostering vocations? Perhaps you can ask your teacher or youth minister how they help foster vocations.

What opportunities does your parish have for learning about vocations, such as retreats or vocation talks? How can you participate in these opportunities?

*“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 help vocations is through a personal invitation. Priests, deacons, brothers, sisters, even parents and family members, are asked to encourage vocations from their own parishes and families, so that people can hear God’s call.

Has anyone ever helped you hear God’s call in your life? When and how has this person (or persons) helped you? Have you ever helped another person in hearing God’s call? How?

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? What is that prayer like?

*“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)*

Notes

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.

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