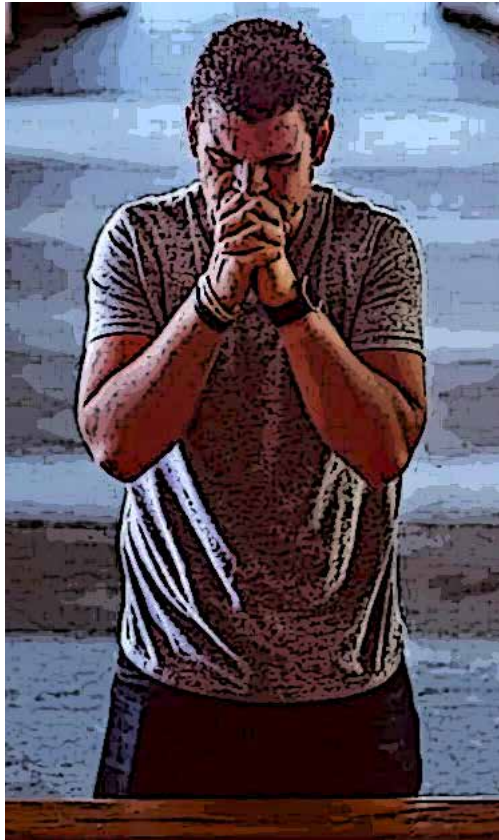


GATHERED INSPIRED SENT



Being called by the Lord to serve Him and His people is an affirmation that you have what God needs to undertake the mission of building His kingdom in our world. Being a religious brother or priest is a wonderful response to the Lord's invitation because we get to speak daily about hope, whose name is Jesus. Discerning the call to a religious or priestly



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Vocation Newsletter

vocation is the process of clearly hearing what one is being called to do. Throughout the discernment process, the discerner is listening to the Lord and praying for the courage to answer the call to service in the Church. While the process involves time and effort to understand the call, ultimately this journey is about growing closer to the Lord. Whether the discerner enters a religious formation program and seminary, or chooses another path of following the Lord, the discernment process leaves the discerner with an acute awareness of the Lord's presence and the deep knowledge of how loved one is by the Lord. I believe that this is the blessing of discernment.

For those who enter a religious formation program or seminary, doing so can be a bit daunting, even scary. Leaving the comfort of what is known for the unknown world of religious life can be both exciting and a little frightening at the same time. The scariness is the unknown of what religious life is really about. Until the date of entrance into the formation program, your major contact with the community has been

with the vocation director. Upon entering, you may wonder what awaits you. What awaits you is a community of consecrated religious men who are excited that you see their religious life and tradition of community as a reason to leave what you know are familiar and comfortable with to join them in the pursuit of loving and serving Christ and the Church. Your desire to share their life is a validation of their religious life and of their service to the Church. The formation community is the place where you will further deepen your discernment within the context of living this life with the community. Common prayer and meals, conversations and classes, ministry and meditation with the professed religious will give you a means to both understand the life of a religious and to discern whether the life is what you are called to live. Entering formation is not to begin your discernment, but to deepen it.

Here are some things to consider when entering a formation program.

1. Have no agenda, but know your agenda.

A person can enter formation with expectations of how the community should pray, how the community should dress (in habits or not), or how it should be doing ministry. Such expectations are personal but may not reflect the spirituality and tradition of the community. You have chosen to enter the community's formation program because you feel that the community's charism is a fit for your living the Gospel of Jesus. Knowing what you want for your life is important. So is the life, spirituality and tradition as well. The personal ways you like to pray and grow in the spiritual life might be incorporated into the large scheme of the

walking through the formation process with you. Enter the formation process with faith in those who are walking this journey with you, namely the Formation Director and his staff, the professed members of the formation community, your spiritual director and confessor. All of these people want to see you succeed if this is your life's call. Their wisdom and example are meant to accompany you in this moment. Throughout the formation program you will learn more about yourself and about your beliefs. You will learn to understand the faith and the challenges in your faith through the academic classes that are part of the program. You will engage in self-reflection meant to strengthen your self-knowledge as you strive to become a better disciple

responded to His invitation to "follow me." Communal and personal prayer, meditation and reflection, spiritual reading and pondering the Scriptures are an important part of the formation program. These moments are an invitation to enter the work of the Lord which is to put your life into the Lord's and commune with the One who is life and love. Each time we pray and engage the Lord our hearts stir with a deeper sense of how deeply God loves us. Every time we pause the activity of the moment and sit with the Lord, we long to more profoundly hear the Lord's words for us. Each moment of prayer is a classroom where we grow to understand ourselves in light of the love, mercy and compassion of the Lord. How can we not grow from this experience? Loving the



formation program. But having no agenda when entering gives you the openness to learn all the Lord wants to teach you through the community.

2. Trust the Lord.

New ways of living can be unnerving, especially when this is different than from what one knows. In calling you to enter the community, the Lord has a wonderful plan of spiritual and personal growth for you. The Lord never abandons those whom He calls. Trust that the Lord is

of Jesus. Study and reflection, prayer and ministry, retreats and guidance from the formation personnel are an invitation by the community for you to better know yourself, the community and the Lord. This process is meant to prepare you to be a good member of the community and a good minister in the Church.

3. Expect to grow deeper in love with Jesus.

You entered the formation community because you love the Lord and

Lord is the reason for religious life. It is the reason why we choose religious life.

4. Lastly, community can be difficult at times, but is so worth the effort!

Living with people whose habits, personalities and life perspectives are different from yours can be challenging. It can even be uncomfortable at times. But religious life is about searching for the Lord with fellow seekers in community, using the religious order's spirituality and traditions as a guide. Community life is not



about all the members being the same. Community life living is about seeing Jesus in the life and faith of fellow community members. Community living is learning to navigate personal habits and ideas to see that my life is better because of the faith witness, support and fraternal challenge of the brothers you live with. Community living can be difficult at times, but is worth the effort to strengthen it because you have brothers who will always have your back.

Responding to the Lord's call to follow Him in the consecrated religious life is the start of living your vocation as a disciple of Jesus. Entering the community's formation program is the start of understanding your vocation as a disciple of the Lord. The blessing of religious life is that we

live our vocation with other men who are on the same journey seeking the same destination, a deeper union with the Lord. Formation in the consecrated life happens within community because it is the community who is tasked with assisting you in understanding and living your vocation. Formation can be challenging, but the blessing comes in knowing oneself better in light of the Lord's deep and abundant love for you. You trusted the Lord in discerning your call. Trusting Him while in formation will be the foundation upon which to learn if the consecrated life is the best way for you to be a disciple of the Lord.

Questions for Reflection:

I. What do I need to know about the community's formation program as I discern?

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