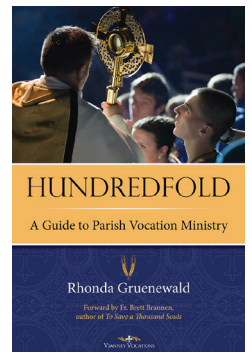




## InnerView

### With Rhonda Gruenewald, Vocation Promoter and Author of *Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry*



***How did you first get started in promoting the awareness of priestly and religious vocations at the parish level?***

The call that started it all happened in the fall of 2011. Our brand-new parochial vicar, Fr. Victor Perez, had seen me around campus, at youth retreats and praying in front of Planned Parenthood, so he called me about three hours before that first meeting to see if my husband and I could attend a meeting about priests and such—it was all very vague. Even without that knowledge, after hearing Father Victor’s enthusiasm for the work of the vocation committee that he felt was one of the most important ministries at any parish, I was immediately hooked!

I went home and scoured the Internet and read anything I could about vocations. I found several websites with various activities, but nothing comprehensive about how to start or revive a parish-based committee, just bits and pieces. Our ministry had no guide to follow, so we tread our own path.

Father Victor wanted to set our parish on fire for Jesus and vocations by holding a wide variety of events that increased parishioners’ awareness of and interest in priestly and religious vocations. It was an exciting time!

***As a convert to the Catholic faith, was it difficult to first grasp the differing vocations***

***within the life and mission of the Church?***

Absolutely! But I have a confession to make: As a convert, I did not know what the word “vocation” meant in the Catholic context at the time! Which should prove to all of us that God can use *anyone* to further His kingdom on earth if they just say “YES”!

Since I did not even know what the word meant, I had so much to learn about each vocation, and to me the most complex was religious life. I am amazed at the beautiful diversity of religious orders and charisms.

***How did you first get started writing your comprehensive vocations guide, Hundredfold?***

After hosting different activities every month at our parish for several years, the Serra Club Governor’s Council in Houston asked me to consult with them about how to bring our model of a vocation ministry to every parish in Houston. So, in December of 2013, I said I would write a pamphlet, a short road map for how to have a successful parish vocation committee. Only 17 months later, it was a professionally edited book with an imprimatur. The Holy Spirit has been working overtime!

***In general what has been the overall reception of this manual that promotes a culture of priestly and religious vocations within the local Church?***

The reception has been incredible.

Originally, the publisher, VIANNEY VOCATIONS, thought that it would take two years for the book to become profitable and if ten dioceses bought copies for their parishes, we should be happy. The book has been ordered in bulk by almost 30 dioceses in 10 months, and *Hundredfold* became profitable in only five months. Praise God! We have found that just like I had a great need for a manual to help me at St. Cecilia’s Parish, others, too, wanted guidance in this important work.

Since I never had planned to write a book, build a website, or travel around the country to speak to parishioners and priests alike, no one is more surprised than I am by the reception of the message of Vocation Ministry. I have now given workshops or presentations in ten different dioceses, with plans for seven more during the rest of 2016, and have spoken to over 1,200 parishioners.

***What spiritual fruits have you witnessed from your promotional efforts?***

The goal of any vocation ministry is to create a vocation-friendly environment where the Holy Spirit can easily plant seeds of holiness that are watered by the *prayers of faithful parishioners*. So prayer for vocations, in its many forms, is one of the most important activities we can do at a parish.

In this guide, the 57 activities that have step-by-step instructions are divided into four categories that help balance the work of the ministry:

*Prayer, Awareness and Education, Youth, and Affirmation.* Prayer must be first and constant, whether that is through a vocation prayer after daily Mass, during Eucharistic Adoration for vocations, or a Family Holy Hour.

Unfortunately, only 10-20% of parishes do anything at all for vocations, so the potential here to make a great impact with prayer alone is astounding. Imagine the vocation boom we could experience if parishioners at every parish in the nation were praying for more priestly or religious vocations.

I like to share the true story of Lu, Italy, where a group of Catholic mothers saw the lack of priests and consecrated religious from their small Italian village. They longed for more vocations, so they asked Our Lord in prayer after Mass and before the Blessed Sacrament for young men and women from their village to answer that a priestly or religious call.

In about 60 years, over one-third of its population became priests or sisters! There were 323 religious who came from its less than 1,000 inhabitants between 1881 and the 1940s!

Like the dedicated mothers in Lu, our Vocation Ministry understood early on that weekly or monthly adoration for vocations would be instrumental in our efforts to bringing about a vocation-minded parish and for increasing vocations overall.

While speaking around the country, a common complaint I hear from priests and parishioners alike is that parents are not eager to have their son or daughter enter seminary or religious life or, let's be honest, even *entertain* the idea of such vocations. Let us challenge and inspire the parents and grandparents in our parishes to pray for vocations, in general, first, which, in God's time, will soften their

hearts. Then, we need to make a sincere effort to show the parish families the joy of these vocations. In time, ask them to pray for vocations from their own families.

***How can members of religious communities utilize your resource that is primarily focused on parish-based activities?***

A religious community needs to bring about awareness to their existence to attract new members and benefactors. And in most cases, the parishioners need to see religious priests, brothers and sisters witness that they live a joyful life. How can the young girl in Rapid City, South Dakota, even give religious life a second thought when she has never seen a religious sister?

I would recommend a practical and simple way to bring awareness to any institute of consecrated life:

Open up your diocesan Catholic publication each month or look online at the local parish bulletins and pick one to two nearby parish events to attend per month. *Be not afraid!* Do not wait to be invited to go among the faithful and show the joy of the Gospel with your smile and presence. How can you "wake up the world" as Pope Francis has encouraged if you solely stay within your community and never venture out, except to fulfill your obligations?

I tell the parishioners at my workshops, the responsibility of vocations does not rely solely on the vocation director or even their pastor's shoulders. By Baptism, it is the responsibility of each of us. Each religious sister, brother, and priest needs to be a "walking vocation promoter" by living a joyful life of encounter with the youth and families in their surrounding community and not just

during National Vocation Awareness Week. I would challenge you to go out, even a distance, spontaneously from your community to visit a parish and/or Catholic school that *never* sees, let alone speaks with, a religious man or woman.

The families and youth of the parish, who are most exploring their future career options according to studies, need to have joyful witnesses placed in front of them. So make it a point to attend the parish festivals, Bingo nights, and Lenten fish fries, etc., interacting with parishioners along the way. Doing so will make an impact, helping dispel the myth that you are completely different from the youth, and by coming into close contact with the parents and grandparents, they more easily see their children living a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

Last February, our St. Cecilia Vocation Ministry finally received permission, after four years of asking, to have a religious speak at all the Masses during World Day for Consecrated Life. This was an incredible opportunity to give a short message on vocations to the religious life in front of 2,500 families! But not one sister could gain permission to speak at one of the seven different Mass times! This must change.

A friend of mine recounted a story of a young girl seeing a habited religious sister in the airport and saying, "Look, Mom. There is the Church!" Consecrated religious represent the Church, and we desperately need to encounter you at our parishes.

***How can our readers learn more about your vocation work?***

Go to [VocationMinistry.com](http://VocationMinistry.com), which has many resources for those preparing the soil in the parishes. ☕