



## **A Comprehensive Guide for Priests:**

### ***Helping Men Discern the Call to Consecrated Life***

---

As a priest, you hold a unique and influential role in guiding men to discover God’s call for their lives. For many, this involves discerning whether they are called to consecrated life—a radical and beautiful form of discipleship where men dedicate themselves entirely to God. Your role as a spiritual father, mentor, and guide is crucial in helping men navigate this process, offering them the wisdom, support, and encouragement they need to discern whether God is calling them to consecrated life and, if so, in what form.

Consecrated life is a distinctive vocation in the Church, where individuals commit themselves to living out the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It is a call to follow Christ more closely and to give oneself entirely to Him for the sake of the Kingdom. The Church recognizes several distinct forms of consecrated life: **eremitic life, consecrated virgins and widows (adapted for men as consecrated celibates), religious life, secular institutes, and societies of apostolic life.** Each path provides a different way of living out one's dedication to God, but all share the goal of fostering a deeper relationship with Christ and serving the Church and the world in a transformative way.

This guide aims to assist priests in accompanying men who are discerning consecrated life, equipping you with practical insights, age-appropriate guidance, and relevant spiritual practices. It provides a structured approach to discussing consecrated life with men of various ages—from high school students to older adults—ensuring that they receive the support and information they need at each stage of discernment. By offering talking points, scriptural reflections, practical advice, and spiritual practices tailored to different life stages, this guide seeks to facilitate fruitful conversations and help men recognize and respond to God's invitation.

---

## The Priest's Role in Vocational Discernment

As a priest, your role in guiding men through the discernment process is crucial. You serve not only as a source of information about consecrated life but also as a spiritual father who walks with them on their journey toward God. Helping men discern their vocation involves fostering a deep interior life, encouraging sacramental devotion, and nurturing a spirit of openness to God's will.

### Your role includes:

- 1. Spiritual Direction and Pastoral Care:** Providing ongoing spiritual direction can help men discern God's voice, understand the movements of the Holy Spirit, and work through any obstacles. Encouraging practices such as regular confession, daily prayer, and Eucharistic adoration will help them cultivate a life attentive to God's call.
- 2. Educating About Consecrated Life:** Men discerning consecrated life may not always be aware of the various forms available to them. It is helpful to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different forms of consecrated life, such as eremitic life, religious life, secular institutes, and societies of apostolic life, and explain the unique charisms and lifestyles associated with each.
- 3. Encouraging Vocational Experiences:** Encourage men to participate in vocational retreats, "Come and See" weekends, or visit communities. These experiences can provide practical insights and allow them to see consecrated life firsthand, which is often an important step in the discernment process.
- 4. Addressing Fears and Misconceptions:** Many men may have concerns about the challenges of leaving behind worldly pursuits, career goals, or relationships. It is essential to help them understand that God's call is always accompanied by the grace needed to fulfill it and to reassure them that following His will leads to true freedom and joy.

---

## Understanding the Different Forms of Consecrated Life for Men

Consecrated life offers a variety of ways to live out the evangelical counsels, each with its own charisms, spirituality, and lifestyle:

- 1. Eremitic Life:** For those drawn to solitude, the eremitic life offers a way to dedicate oneself entirely to God through prayer, penance, and asceticism. It is a radical

response to the call of Christ, lived out in a hermitage, where men can focus entirely on contemplation and union with God.

- 2. Consecrated Celibates:** While traditionally applied to women, some men may be called to live as consecrated celibates, dedicating themselves to God while remaining in the world. They offer their lives in spiritual fatherhood, prayer, and service, embodying the Church's call to holiness.
- 3. Religious Life:** In religious life, men live in community under a specific rule or charism, embracing a life of prayer, apostolic work, and communal living. Religious orders offer structured paths through vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, allowing men to live out their dedication to Christ fully.
- 4. Secular Institutes:** Members of secular institutes live out their consecration within the world, combining their spiritual commitment with professional work and daily life. This form allows men to witness to the Gospel while remaining active in society.
- 5. Societies of Apostolic Life:** Men in societies of apostolic life dedicate themselves to apostolic works such as education, healthcare, or missionary endeavors while living in community. Although they do not take formal religious vows, they share life together and follow the evangelical counsels in their ministry.

---

### **General Practices for All Stages of Discernment:**

#### **1. Daily Prayer and Meditation**

- **Commit to a daily prayer routine.** Spending time in prayer allows for a deeper relationship with God and helps to discern His will.
- **Meditate on Scripture.** Regularly reading and reflecting on passages that speak about God's call can provide inspiration and clarity. For example, consider passages such as **Luke 1:38** (Mary's "yes" to God) or **Matthew 9:37-38** (Jesus' call to pray for laborers for His harvest).
- **Practice mental prayer.** Spend time in silence, listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit. This form of prayer helps discerners to become more attuned to God's promptings in their hearts.

#### **2. Frequent Participation in the Sacraments**

- **Attend daily Mass whenever possible.** The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, providing the grace needed for discernment.
- **Regular Confession.** Monthly or even more frequent confession helps to maintain a clear conscience and opens the soul to receiving God's grace. It fosters humility and ongoing conversion.
- **Eucharistic Adoration.** Spending time before the Blessed Sacrament deepens one's love for Christ and cultivates a disposition to hear His call.

### 3. Spiritual Direction

- **Seek regular spiritual direction.** A spiritual director can help discerners understand how God is working in their life and provide guidance on how to follow His will.
- **Be open and honest in direction.** Share one's interior experiences, struggles, and hopes with the spiritual director, allowing for a more fruitful discernment process.
- **Follow the advice given.** Trust in the wisdom of the spiritual director, who can offer valuable insights and suggest practices that facilitate deeper discernment.

### 4. Engage in Vocational Discernment Programs and Retreats

- **Participate in "Come and See" weekends.** These visits to religious communities offer firsthand experience of consecrated life.
- **Attend discernment retreats.** Vocational retreats provide structured time for prayer, reflection, and learning about different forms of consecrated life.
- **Join discernment groups.** Being part of a discernment group with other men on a similar journey can provide mutual support and encouragement.

### 5. Cultivate a Life of Virtue

- **Practice the virtues of humility, chastity, and obedience.** These virtues are foundational for anyone considering consecrated life and help align one's will with God's.
- **Embrace simplicity.** Begin to live more simply, detaching from material possessions and focusing on what truly matters in life.
- **Serve others.** Engage in acts of charity and service. This cultivates a spirit of self-giving, which is central to consecrated life.

## 6. Discernment Journaling

- **Keep a spiritual journal.** Regularly write about prayer experiences, feelings, and any insights gained during the discernment process. This helps to track one's spiritual growth and recognize patterns.
- **Reflect on consolations and desolations.** Noting times of spiritual joy or struggle can reveal how God is guiding the discerner.
- **Review the journal periodically.** Looking back on past entries can provide perspective and help discern whether a sense of calling has deepened or shifted over time.

## 7. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints

- **Pray the Rosary daily.** Entrust the discernment process to Mary, who will help guide her children to Jesus.
- **Seek the intercession of saints known for their vocation discernment.** Saints such as St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. John Vianney offer powerful examples of following God's call.
- **Read the lives of the saints.** Learn from the experiences of saints who lived consecrated lives, drawing inspiration and guidance from their journeys.

## 8. Scripture Study Focused on Vocational Themes

- **Meditate on vocational passages.** Reflect on scriptural stories of calling, such as the calling of the apostles (Mark 1:16-20), the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 3), and the commissioning of the seventy-two disciples (Luke 10:1-12).
- **Engage in Lectio Divina.** Use this form of prayerful reading of Scripture to discern how God might be speaking personally through the Word.
- **Incorporate Scripture into daily life.** Let passages that resonate with the call to consecrated life inspire practical changes and deepen the commitment to discernment.

## 9. Build a Community of Support

- **Surround oneself with people who encourage discernment.** Seek friendships and relationships that foster spiritual growth and vocational exploration.
- **Join Catholic groups or movements.** Being involved in parish activities, young adult ministries, or lay movements can provide a supportive environment.

- **Share the discernment journey with trusted friends or family.** While keeping one's spiritual director as the primary guide, sharing discernment experiences with close, faith-filled individuals can provide helpful perspectives.

## 10. Remain Open to God's Will

- **Trust in God's plan.** Even if the discernment process is challenging or seems uncertain, believe that God is leading toward the best path.
- **Pray for a spirit of surrender.** Regularly pray to embrace God's will, echoing Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).
- **Avoid setting limitations on discernment.** Be open to where God may lead, whether it is to consecrated life, priesthood, or another path.

---

### High School (14-18 years)

#### Talking Points:

- Emphasize the idea that God has a unique plan for each person's life. Encourage young men to begin asking, "What does God want for me?" rather than just "What do I want to do?"
- Introduce the concept of consecrated life as a response to God's love, involving a commitment to poverty, chastity, and obedience. Explain that some men are called to follow Christ more radically in this way.
- Discuss the importance of cultivating a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer and the sacraments, setting the foundation for discerning a vocation.
- Encourage involvement in church activities, altar serving, youth groups, or retreats to deepen their faith and encounter Christ.

#### Relevant Scripture Passages:

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10: The story of young Samuel being called by God. Encourage them to listen for God's voice in their lives and to respond, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

- Jeremiah 1:4-8: Jeremiah's call shows that God chooses us even before we are born. Remind young men that God may be calling them to something special, even from a young age.

### **Practical Steps:**

- Daily Prayer: Encourage them to start a habit of daily prayer, even if just 5-10 minutes. They could read a chapter from the Gospels and reflect on what Jesus is saying to them.
- Sacramental Life: Promote regular participation in the sacraments, especially confession and Eucharistic adoration. The sacraments provide grace to help them grow closer to God.
- Spiritual Mentorship: Suggest finding a trusted mentor, such as a youth minister, deacon, or priest, who can help guide them spiritually.

---

## **College/Early Adulthood (18-24 years)**

### **Talking Points:**

- Address the challenges of independence and the pressure to make career or relationship decisions. Help them see that discerning a vocation is not about losing freedom but about finding the true path to fulfillment.
- Highlight the importance of asking deeper questions about their life's purpose and how God may be calling them to serve others in a radical way.
- Encourage a deeper exploration of the different forms of consecrated life: religious orders, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, and even hermitic life. Explain the diversity within consecrated life and help them find which form resonates with their spiritual desires.

### **Relevant Scripture Passages:**

- Matthew 19:16-22: The rich young man who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Use this passage to discuss the call to radical discipleship and the challenge of letting go of worldly attachments.
- Luke 9:23-25: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." Encourage them to consider how they can live out this call in their own life.

**Practical Steps:**

- Retreats and “Come and See” Weekends: Encourage them to participate in discernment retreats or visit religious communities. This can help them experience the consecrated life firsthand.
  - Spiritual Direction: Recommend finding a spiritual director to discuss their vocation discernment more deeply.
  - Daily Examination of Conscience: Help them incorporate this practice into their daily life to reflect on how they responded to God’s grace throughout the day.
- 

**Young Adulthood (25-40 years)****Talking Points:**

- At this stage, men may be more entrenched in their careers or relationships. Discuss how God’s call to consecrated life may be an invitation to redirect their life toward something deeply fulfilling, even if it means making significant changes.
- Address any fears or concerns about letting go of other life plans. Remind them that God’s call is not about what they leave behind, but what they are called to embrace.
- Encourage them to deepen their understanding of the particular charism or spirituality that draws them, whether it’s contemplative, active, or a combination of both.

**Relevant Scripture Passages:**

- Matthew 4:18-22: The calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Discuss how they left everything to follow Jesus. This passage can encourage men to be open to letting go of their current path to respond to Christ’s invitation.
- Philippians 3:8-14: Paul speaks about counting all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ. Use this passage to challenge them to consider how Christ can be the most valuable aspect of their life.



### **Practical Steps:**

- Extended Discernment Retreats: Suggest participating in a longer retreat or a temporary live-in experience with a religious community to better understand daily life in consecrated life.
- Service Opportunities: Encourage involvement in missionary work, volunteering, or other forms of service that can foster a deeper sense of giving one's life to others.
- Reading the Lives of the Saints: Recommend biographies of saints who lived consecrated lives, such as St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. John Bosco, or St. Anthony of the Desert.

---

### **Mid-Life (40-60 years)**

#### **Talking Points:**

- Address the possibility of a late vocation. Encourage men to see how their life experiences can be a valuable gift to a religious community or apostolic work.
- Discuss how consecrated life can be a new beginning or a “second calling.” Reassure them that God’s call can come at any stage in life, and it often involves using the skills and experiences they’ve already gained.
- Explore the different forms of consecrated life that may fit their current stage, such as lay brotherhoods, secular institutes, or societies of apostolic life.

#### **Relevant Scripture Passages:**

- Genesis 12:1-4: The call of Abraham at an advanced age, showing that God calls people at different times in life. Encourage them to see how God may be inviting them to start a new journey.
- John 21:15-19: The call of Peter after the resurrection, where Jesus invites him to “feed my sheep.” Use this passage to discuss the idea of a new mission at a later stage in life.

### **Practical Steps:**

- Personal Retreats for Reflection: Recommend taking time for extended personal retreats to reflect on life's journey and discern where God is leading them now.
  - Seek Out Late Vocation Programs: Some communities have specific programs for older candidates. Encourage them to explore these possibilities.
  - Spiritual Direction to Reevaluate Life Goals: Suggest using spiritual direction as a tool to assess whether God is calling them to a different form of service.
- 

## **Later Life (60+ years)**

### **Talking Points:**

- Encourage older men to see this stage of life as a time of spiritual fruitfulness. Discuss how they can dedicate their remaining years to God through prayer, service, and community life.
- Suggest that they consider the eremitic life, or if they are widowers, living as consecrated celibates. These forms of life can be particularly suited to their circumstances.
- Address any concerns about age or health, reassuring them that many communities welcome older members, especially those who bring life experience and wisdom.

### **Relevant Scripture Passages:**

- Luke 2:25-38: Simeon and Anna, who recognized Jesus at the temple in their old age. This passage can inspire older men to see how God can still use them in significant ways.
- Psalm 92:12-15: "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green." Use this passage to emphasize that one is never too old to live a life fully dedicated to God.

### **Practical Steps:**

- Explore Oblate or Associate Memberships: Some communities offer ways for older men to participate in their charism without full vows.

- Consider a Life of Prayer: Encourage them to embrace a more contemplative life, offering their prayers for the needs of the Church.
- Regular Spiritual Direction: Suggest continuing spiritual direction to help them integrate their life experiences into a deeper relationship with God.

---

### **Conclusion:**

As you journey with men discerning consecrated life, remember that your role as a priest is to guide, encourage, and support them in responding to God's unique call. The process of discerning consecrated life can be challenging, involving periods of uncertainty, fear, and even spiritual desolation. Yet, it is also a journey filled with profound grace, joy, and intimacy with God. As a spiritual guide, you have the opportunity to help discerners experience this grace and move closer to understanding God's will for their lives.

Throughout the various stages of discernment, remind men that the goal is to seek God's will above all else. Vocational discernment is less about choosing a specific path and more about responding generously to God's invitation to a deeper relationship. By cultivating a life of prayer, regularly participating in the sacraments, seeking spiritual direction, and remaining open to God's voice, discerners can grow in confidence and clarity as they follow His lead.

Encourage each discerner to persevere with patience and trust in God's timing. Remind them that God works in mysterious ways and often uses periods of waiting or difficulty to purify their intentions and deepen their commitment. In the end, discerning consecrated life is not just about finding the right path, but about becoming the person God created them to be—living a life of holiness, love, and service.

You, as a priest, play an indispensable role in this process. Your witness to a life dedicated to God, your wisdom in spiritual direction, and your encouragement in times of doubt can profoundly impact their discernment. Be a steady companion on their journey, offering not only guidance but also a reminder of God's infinite love and desire for their good.

Let them know that discernment is a lifelong journey and that saying "yes" to God's call is not a one-time event but a daily surrender. Wherever God may lead them, assure them that His plan is one of abundant life and fulfillment, as Jesus promised: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

May this guide serve as a resource to accompany each discerner with compassion, understanding, and spiritual insight, helping them recognize and courageously respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd calling them by name. Together, let us pray that the Lord of the harvest will continue to raise up holy men who are willing to dedicate their lives to the service of God and His Church.