

What Vocation is God Calling You To Do In Life?

Over the years a question I've been asked a time or two is how I decided to become a priest.

The answer to that is a little complicated, for like many, I took a winding road.

I'm what you could call a "cradle Catholic" in the sense that I've been Catholic since I was born. But, like all of us, my faith, and discerning what God has called me to do, has been a process that is still unfolding.

As a child, my parents introduced me to the faith. We'd pray in the evening before bed. Mass on the weekend was always a priority. And others in my family, such as my grandparents and my godparents would also teach me about the faith, such as what happened at Mass, or what the vestment colors meant that the priest wore and different kinds of prayers we say.

I also saw the faith lived out through my parents and people around me. While we'd pray and go to Mass, what happened there became something that influenced how they lived. They would show kindness and love to me and others. They'd work hard. They cared about the people around them. They had so much joy. (And still do).

I'd also see the faith in action through people who served in the Church.

I went to Saint Bridgets through the third grade (where Fr. Paul Jarvis is at now) and then to Our Lady of Victory fourth through eighth grade, both now-closed north Minneapolis Catholic schools. Here, I had a number of Benedictine Sisters who would teach us so much about the faith. And it was in sixth grade that something got in my brain that it might be fun to serve at Mass. With that in mind, I approached Fr. Vince Colon, pastor at the time at OLV and asked him if this would be possible. Our Lady of Victory hadn't had servers for quite some time, but he didn't hesitate at all and invited me to come the next Saturday.

So getting this good exposure to the faith from family and from people in the Church got me to thinking, maybe I'd like to serve one day not just at Mass, but as a priest. As I said, I felt at peace in Church. But as with anything, sometimes you begin to think you are called to other things.

In high school I met people of other faiths, which got me to thinking about my faith differently. I never left my faith, but questioned it for a time, like many do. In the end, this experience made my faith stronger.

I also began to think about being married one day as I started dating in high school and college.

And I began to look at other careers that interested me too; such as politics, journalism or law.

While all this was going on, I started to volunteer again at church, this time at Saint Vincent de Paul of Brooklyn Park where our family also went. I'd help out Sunday nights teaching 8th grade catechesis. I also would go to confession there and my confessor, Fr. Curt Lybarger, started encouraging me to look at priesthood. And so I started thinking about his words as my college graduation neared (I was a political science major at the U of M) and I realized that while I liked other things, perhaps it was in fact priesthood that would ultimately make me happy, because this is what God was calling me to do. I prayed about it. I went to an information night at the Archbishop's residence. And then I applied, and was accepted pending my college graduation. I graduated in August of 2001, and then started in September of 2001 - almost getting cold feet and not going, but then realizing I had to take the plunge.

At times I remember thinking what did I just do, I'll be in school forever having just finished college. But while as with anything there were challenges, it was a blessing to be in seminary, to learn the faith more deeply, but also learn more about myself and become more firm knowing God had called me to the vocation of the priesthood. I made new friends; got a new mentor in Fr. Bob White, still serving at the parish I assisted at in seminary, Saint Victoria; and I also found a true sense of peace, because I knew that God had called me to this.

Ordination day came and was incredibly moving and beautiful.

And now here I am almost 15 years later.

As with anything, there have been ups and downs. But I've had great support from family and friends, and most of all I'm at peace. I'm happy. As Archbishop Flynn said, "If I had 100 lives to live I'd live them all as a priest." I'd concur. (He had not one but two golden retrievers, so he's a smart man!). Sure, part of me would like to be married. Part of me wouldn't mind being a full time photographer. But deep down I know I wouldn't be truly happy doing these things because it's just not what I'm called to do with my life.

So, how about you? What is God calling you to do?

I share my story because coming up next Saturday, October 30th, from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. is a Discernment Retreat with Bishop Cozzens, who was just named the new Bishop of Crookston. He won't be formally starting till December, so you need not drive up north. Rather this retreat will be held at the Aspirancy House, 1976 Dayton Avenue in Saint Paul. You can get more information on the Archdiocesan vocations website, **www.10000vocations.org**.

Also coming up in November, November 18-20 is the "Vianney Visit." This is for college age men, 16-24, to attend Mass and a spiritual conference at Saint John Vianney and meet seminarians. Again, just visit **10000vocations.org** for more information. (Saint

John Vianney is the college seminary; Saint Paul Seminary is the major seminary for men completing minor seminary, or who already have a college degree).

The website also has information on religious life for women, too.

Perhaps you've already discerned and realized what God is calling you to do. That's great - but keep listening to Him, because there's always change in our vocation. Maybe you're being called to do something different in your family or with your family in terms of how you relate to your spouse or kids. Maybe you're being called to a new career. I know as a priest, I have to listen attentively to God's voice too when I think about parish matters, how to handle situations, or when it's time to change parish assignments or how to talk to a person. Finding what God is calling us to do is one thing, but listening to Him for guidance is life-long.

At the end of the day, we have to listen to God and discern where we are called, and ask ourselves a question: am I happy? No matter what we do, there will be challenges. But when we find our vocation, we find happiness and peace. So listen to God's voice and where you are being called.

If I too can ever be of help, please let me know. Maybe you are thinking about the priesthood, or have a son or grandson or great grandson who has thought about it. I'd love to meet and have a conversation or help in any way. Shoot me an email or call me at the parish.

Happiness, true happiness, is indeed a wonderful thing - and we find it when we listen to God. No matter what we are called to, each of us is here for a reason - to make a difference in this world by bringing God's love into it through our vocations and how we live our lives. So still your heart, and be open to listening to where God wants you to go, and trust in His plan. Though it may not always be a smooth journey, it will always lead you to happiness and joy when you work together with our Lord and discover what He has called you to do.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul