



Diocese of Belleville

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ARE YOU CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST?

Dear Friend in Christ,

Welcome to the Belleville Diocese Priesthood site!

Have you ever thought of becoming a Catholic priest? Would you like to serve the Catholic Church in southern Illinois as a priest in the Diocese of Belleville? Would you like to know what you need to do to learn more about the possibility of becoming a priest? You will find the answers to these and other questions on this page. May God bless you as you think about the best way to live your life as a follower of Christ.

Faithfully yours,

Bishop +Edward K. Braxton

When is the right time to think about becoming a priest?

The idea of becoming a priest can enter your heart at any age: in elementary school, high school, college, or many years after college. You do not need to live in southern Illinois to become a priest in the Belleville Diocese. You simply need the desire to serve God in a community that has a great need for priests. That desire might give you the missionary spirit needed to tend a portion of the Lord's flock that needs good shepherds.

What should you do?

The first thing you should do is pray. If you have ever thought about being a priest, why not take some time to really think about what your life might be like serving Christ and the members of His Body, the Church, as a priest?

Spend a few moments each day praying and asking God to guide you in your discernment about a possible vocation to the priesthood. One of the best places to pray about becoming a priest is at Mass. There you are actually in the presence of a priest celebrating the Eucharist, which is at the heart of the Priesthood. You can also pray for guidance in a quiet chapel in the presence of Christ in the tabernacle, or on a long walk, or in your room at night before you go to bed. Prayerful openness to the Holy Spirit will help you to understand better the reasons why you think you might want to be a priest.

What should you do next?

The next thing you should do is talk to a priest. This could be the priest serving in your parish or some other good and faithful priest you know well. Share with him the reasons why you have been thinking about becoming a priest. Ask him questions. He will happily advise you and tell you some of the things you should do to discern your vocation. He might even take you to visit a seminary.

If he thinks there is a good chance that you might be called to serve as a priest, he will put you in touch with the Vocation Office of the Diocese of Belleville, or with a Vocation Directory. The Vocation Director will be able to give you more information concerning the process of applying to the Diocese and studying for the priesthood in a Catholic seminary. If you do not know a priest to talk to, you can contact the Vocations Office or a Vocation Director personally at the numbers listed above.

Then what?

Get a spiritual director. In the meantime, it would be good to ask a priest to serve as your spiritual director. He will help you grow in the life of prayer, which is essential in developing a deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the High Priest. A retreat or a day of recollection might also help you in your discernment. Begin to read the story of Jesus in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of St. Paul. Keep in mind the call to serve Christ as a priest is not always loud and clear. It is not necessarily like Moses and the “burning bush” experience in which God called him to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. Most of the time it is a gradual realization that a life of prayer, service, and helping Catholic people to learn, love, and live their faith is the life that appeals to you. Of course, if you pursue this vocation, you will find out that the life of a priest is full of interesting and rewarding experiences.

Who should you tell?

Be sure to let your parents know that you are thinking about becoming a priest. Ask your parents, family members, and close friends to pray for you. Do not be discouraged if some people are not enthusiastic about your thoughts of becoming a priest.

How do you apply?

At a certain point, you should go through the actual application process for the seminary through the Diocese of Belleville. The Vocation Directors and the Vocation office will help you with this. This process requires gathering some basic information about your life, getting copies of documents such as your Baptismal certificate, and responding to questions about why you think you wish to be a priest.

Remember that entering the seminary is not the same as a commitment to the priesthood. Many men enter the seminary and eventually conclude that they are not called to the priesthood. So, even if you are not completely sure about your vocation (very few people actually are), you are still free to apply to the seminary.

How long does it take to become a priest?

It usually takes about eight years after high school, four years of college and four years studying theology. Today, many men enter the seminary at the college level. A priest needs to have a good, solid Catholic education, with a special emphasis on philosophy and theology. However, you are not required to be a great scholar in order to be a good priest. After four years at a college seminary, there are four more years of study at a theological seminary. Because of the time spent in study, prayer, spiritual direction, and formation, most men who enter the seminary after high school are ordained a priest around the age of twenty-six. During this time it is very important that you give very serious consideration to what it means to live a life of obedience to the Church, a life of total service, freely forgoing the joy and companionship of a wife and children of your own.

Of course, some men go to a regular college and enter the seminary after they graduate. Others come to the seminary later in life after they have worked as a teacher, an engineer, a social worker, or some other career. During the years in the seminary you should continue to pray and discern God's call in your life, faithfully following the guidance of the seminary rector and your vocation director. Ultimately, the Bishop of the Diocese will call you to the priesthood. It is not possible to become a Catholic priest unless you are called by the Bishop. If you ever see the Bishop (He visits parishes often.), introduce yourself to him.

What if you are not a Catholic?

Do not be surprised if you are not a member of the Catholic Church and yet you think you could possibly be called to the priesthood. You are not the first person to realize that you want to be a priest even though you must become a member of the Catholic Church first! The Vocation Directors would be happy to assist you in learning how to join the Church.

Is this a bad time to enter the seminary?

No! This is a very good time to enter the seminary. Many people are searching. They are for meaning in their lives, searching for God, searching for Christ, and searching for the Church. There has never been a time when there was a greater need for priests. In recent years, the education and formation program at American seminaries has been significantly improved.

The sad stories of priests sexually abusing minors may make you or your family hesitant about considering the priesthood. This hesitancy is very understandable. Some men who are already in the seminary share this hesitancy. They are receiving the assistance they need to address their concerns. It is a terrible thing if even one priest abuses a minor. It is a source of shame and embarrassment for the Church. In spite of the wide media coverage, these grave misdeeds have been the actions of only a small number of the hundreds of thousands of priests serving faithfully all over the world. Their sinful actions do not represent the Church as a whole. They certainly do not represent the majority of priests. Most of these offenses took place in the past. Today Bishops, seminaries, Vocations Directors and others are working very diligently to select only men of mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual maturity, who are fully committed to celibacy, to serve the Church as priests. If you become a priest, we want you to be proud and happy that you have responded to this great call to follow Christ's apostles as "fishers of men."

Don't forget:

Personal prayer is very important as you go forward. Try to participate in daily Mass. Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently. Begin the practice of spiritual reading (e.g., the lives of the saints, especially priest saints). This will surely help you to decide if you should commit your life to Christ and His Church as a priest. Know that if you embrace the Diocese of Belleville as a future priest, the whole Church of southern Illinois will be praying for you as well.

Why not join us in praying our Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood each day. The prayer is:

PRAYER for VOCATIONS to the PRIESTHOOD

Diocese of Belleville

Leader: God is good.

Response: All the time!

Leader: All the time.

Response: God is good

Let us Pray:

Lord, Our God

we know that You are Goodness itself.

Throughout history you have called forth ministers of Word and Sacrament to lead, guide, and serve your people as priests.

We join with our Bishop in praying for an increase in vocations to the priesthood in our Diocese

We ask you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to stir up a desire in the hearts of young men in our parishes to serve your Church in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Help them to hear and respond generously to your call deep within their hearts, so they may join with those who have built up your Church, through their ministry as priests.

O God of Love and Mercy, we pray that you will inspire our priests to continue to share the joy and the happiness of their ministry at Your Altar in the Christian community.

Prompt parents, grandparents, and teachers to realize that sometimes you call future priests to your service through the encouragement of those who see in them the qualities of a good priest.

We pray especially for our seminarians.

We ask you to help them to be the best human beings, the best Christians, and the best priests they can be.

Graciously hear our prayer through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of priests and in the name of Jesus who is Christ the Lord. AMEN.

Would you like more information about vocations and the Church?

Please consult the following.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops vocations website: www.foryourvocation.org

For news about the Diocese of Belleville, including important statements from the Bishop, visit: www.diobelle.org; for news about the Bishops of the United States visit: www.usccb.org; for news about the Holy Father and those who help him with his world-wide ministry as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, visit: www.vatican.va .