

How can a person distinguish between the universal call to Christian discipleship versus a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life?

You recognize that all Christians are called to discipleship and to share in the mission of the Church, this is the 'common vocation' of all baptized Christians. So I'm not going to talk about our common vocation here. Just let me note that it would be worth reading everything the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has to say about vocations in the section entitled "Christ's Faithful—Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life" (#871-945).

Your question seems concerned with recognizing a call to priesthood or religious life, which are 'state in life' vocations along with marriage and being single. Fr. Joseph Gallen, S.J., in *Canon Law for Religious* (Alba House) states the fundamental element in a vocation to the clerical or religious state in life is the special call, election or choice by God. Pope Pius XII, in *Sedes Sapientiae*, said that the two essential elements to a religious vocation are 1) a call from God to enter religious life or the priesthood and 2) the call or admittance by the Church.

But how does a person recognize the call of God before seeking admittance and acceptance by the Church? "The choice, election or call of God," says Fr. Gallen, "is communicated to a person through grace, and the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Ordinarily this happens when a person experiences a series of ideas, feelings and events which culminate in the decisive recognition that God may be calling to at least investigate if they are called to be a vowed religious or priest. The supernatural or graced aspect of this calling is deduced and recognized primarily from the context in which the thoughts or feelings came to the person and quality and goodness of their motives. In other words, as I was told once, "Don't wait for an angel to come down and tap you on the shoulder." That isn't usually the way.

Those who think they might be called have to ask themselves if they have the necessary physical, mental and emotional health to live the priestly or consecrated life. They ask if their motives are good—to do the work and will of God – and not because they think it's a way to escape parental control, get financial help toward a better education or escape some other problem they have.

If you believe you might be called, pray and reflect, asking the guidance of God. Ask the advice and opinion of people you trust and seek the counsel of your Pastor, a confessor or spiritual director. If you find your desire to live the religious or priestly life is something that doesn't hit you just at peak emotional moments but consistently, week in and week out, it is then time for you to contact the Vocations Director for your Diocese or the religious order or group that you are feeling drawn to and ask them for the opportunity to test what you believe is your calling and acceptance.

This article is based off of an article found on the AmericanCatholic.org website titled "How Do I Know If I Have a Vocation?" under their "[Ask the Wise Man](#)" section.