

Family Feature

In Religion class, your senior is learning about the various Catholic vocations, as well as principles of discernment—how to figure out what to do in life. This section from one of the student lessons offers a lot of wisdom about making big decisions.

Vocation Discernment

How will I know my vocation in life?

There it is. The final question. If you are reading this, you are probably a senior in high school. Perhaps you have talked to someone about vocations, or watched a video, or—if you have worked through the other lessons on vocations—perhaps you have learned about the different vocations and gone through many discussions.



But you still might have one question.
*After all this discernment, how will I **really** know?*

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- First of all, a vocation will not usually come through a blinding flash of inspiration. It will be a quiet pull, a desire that comes back to your thoughts again and again over a long period of time.
- A vocation will make desires from your past, as well as events, conversations, talents, and skills seem to make sense or to fall into place.
- If your desire is a call from God, doors will open and problems standing in your way will resolve themselves. (Sometimes you will have to stand firm against opposition when you know what you're doing is right, but always God will make roadblocks clear if you are faithful to Him.)
- A vocation does not depend on your decision alone. Even when you decide, your vocation will depend on others to confirm whether this is your vocation. A bishop must call a man to the

priesthood; a religious order must accept an aspirant; and a person called to marriage has to find another who is willing to marry. You must decide, and then you must let your decision be examined and tested by others. *But . . . how will I know?*

- St. Francis de Sales says that the worst thing for a person besides sin is anxiety. Do not be anxious about your vocation. God wants us to love Him, not fear Him. He is not passive-aggressively trying to make you guess His will. Make a prudent choice and then go for it. God will help you.



*But . . . how will I know? I want to **KNOW!***

- St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuits. He was a master of discernment. He had to discern his own vocation after a tragic war injury, and then he had to help his new religious order through its difficulties. As a new world-wide movement, with many strong-willed members, tough decisions had to be made all the time. So St. Ignatius developed some good principles for decision-making. He is a good guide, and here is what he can teach us:
 1. Pray. Pray with Scripture. Go to Mass.
 2. Consult a priest, parent, or other trusted adult about decisions. Think about their advice.
 3. Consider: what would you advise someone in your shoes to do? Step outside the emotional struggles to try to get an objective view of your situation.
 4. Understand that the soul has ups and downs. Be aware of these. The up periods bring peace, joy, and good desires. The down periods bring sadness, anxiety, and discontent. Down periods can be solved by making an examination of conscience and getting to Confession regularly. Be sure also to get good sleep, exercise, and eat well. If it seems physically or psychologically curable, take care of it. If there is no known remedy, trust in God, and stay firm in your decisions. This type of down period

is used as a temptation to get you to lose your trust in God and change plans. But it's also a time to strengthen your resolution to be faithful to God. It comes to everyone who is struggling to follow God, and it passes.

5. Never make an important decision during a down period. Definitely don't make your vocational decision during a down period.
6. Never change your plans during a down period. If you have made your vocational decision with prudent reasons and consulted others, don't let doubts and fears in a down period sway your decision.
7. Watch the down periods. If they do not pass away as you approach ordination or final vows or marriage, talk to someone. A vocation should be accompanied with peace most of the time. Ongoing sorrow or anxiety is not a good sign. Pay attention to that.
8. Don't agonize. Set a reasonable time to decide. If your parents want you to work first or go to college, maybe that's a good deadline—you could even pray, "God, if you want this sooner, make this really clear. Open the doors and solve the things that stand in my way."
9. Choose a set amount of time, try to attend some daily Masses, and then make your decision. You aren't making a final decision when you decide to go to seminary, or live with a religious community as an aspirant, or seriously date someone. You have time to examine your vocation and continue to pray about it through seminary, religious formation, or courtship.

Above all things, pray and trust in God. He has been by your side since you came into the world, and He always wants the best for you.