

12th Grade: Religious Life

OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on lesson's scripture.

"More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ...forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus."
- PHILIPPIANS 3:8, 11-14 ^[1]

REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

CLASS OVERVIEW

This lesson helps students to be prepared to eventually discern whether they might have a vocation to the religious life. It also helps students to develop a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the religious life.

The lesson includes a class discussion of challenges from family or friends to discerning the religious life, followed by a role-play of talking to others about interest in the religious life, especially parents and friends. The lesson closes with the students actively participating in a reenactment of the rite of religious profession.

Everything in this lesson is applicable to guys discerning a religious vocation. However, since the Priesthood lesson primarily concentrates on helping guys learn about discerning the priesthood, this lesson primarily concentrates on helping girls to discern a religious voca-

RELIGIOUS LIFE

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CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Imagine that you feel called to the Religious Life. Now imagine that you need to tell your parents about it. How would you prepare?

STEP 1: INITIAL CONVERSATIONS

- Before announcing your intention to pursue a vocation to the religious life, seek conversations with your parents about the religious life in general.
- If you do not know how they feel about the Catholic Church, ask them about it. If you do not know how they feel about the general idea of the religious life, find out.
- See how they react, rather than simply assuming there will be a problem. You might be pleasantly surprised by their reactions, especially if they have a high regard for the Church and the religious life.
- If they seem put off by the idea of the religious life, stay calm and affectionate—it's your family!—and ask them why they feel that way. It will be more beneficial to your relationship in the long run if you are calm and loving rather than reacting with indignation. Even if their responses are very negative, they are more likely to come around if you don't allow yourself to be disturbed by their reactions.
- If you have been in contact with a particular order, ask the vocation director for advice on how to talk to your family. Otherwise, talk to another trusted and knowledgeable adult.



Remain calm when talking to your family, even if they may not agree or understand at first.

STEP 2: BREAK THE NEWS, GENTLY

Hopefully, you have been able to follow Step 1, talking with your family and friends multiple times about the general idea of religious life. If it has been too hard to talk about your personal interest, don't worry. You have to tell them sometime, and here is how to break the news in the best way possible.

- As you begin the conversation, especially if you have never mentioned the possibility of this vocation, do some damage control. Apologize for the fact that you never brought it up before, and tell them that you love them. You don't need to give reasons why you never mentioned the topic.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>



tion, in the interest of addressing equal time to both genders. Time permitting, time could be spent doing the role-plays with both girls and guys, but if you have only one class period, it may make sense to use it primarily for the girls.

CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Goal

Students will consider concerns family and friends may have regarding a vocation to religious life, and practice responding to those concerns positively, from an informed perspective.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>



**CLASS DISCUSSION:
PREPARING TO TALK WITH
OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION** *continued*

Instructions

Initiate a class discussion using some or all of the following points:

1. If you have ever felt some desire for a religious vocation, you might be wondering how you would tell your family or your friends. It can be hard to talk to people about this. It can also be hard to hear this news from a sibling, friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Fortunately, you will probably not have to worry about some reactions that others have encountered. Take, for example, what happened to St. Thomas Aquinas when he announced he wanted to join the Dominicans. His family locked him up! St. Teresa of Avila tells a similar story about one of her Carmelites. This nun had a big family. She was actually engaged—one of those long family-arranged engagements. Then she discerned a call to the religious life. It was extremely hard for her to tell everyone, especially because her family loved her fiancé. She also cared about her fiancé and did not want to break his heart. But she made a careful discernment and realized that it would not be fair to the fiancé for her to enter marriage when she wasn't called to it. And it wouldn't be fair to God. She needed to do God's will. When she told her family, they forbade her. She entered the convent and they obtained a court order; the police came to the Carmel, arrested her, and took her back to her family. She finally entered the Carmel by slipping away from her mother one day at Mass and

[2] St. Teresa of Avila, Foundations, Chapter 11

RELIGIOUS LIFE

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running over. She entered the Carmel and, once in, would not come out. Her family gave up. Teresa writes, "thus she fulfilled the good inspirations the Lord had placed with her".^[2]

2. If you fear the reaction of your family, remember the reaction of family and friends is based on their love for you; they are not your enemies. However, they may also not have good information, and therefore think that you are making a mistake. It's important to be both solid in your convictions and patient with your family when approaching them with the possibility of an extraordinary vocation.

**CLASS DISCUSSION:
PREPARING TO TALK WITH
OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION** *continued*

Then ask these questions:

1. What reaction do you think you would receive if you told your parents, family, or friends about this vocation? What do you think they would say?
2. Has anyone already talked to parents, trusted adults, teachers, friends, about an interest in religious life? Can anyone share about how this went? What was hard? What was really helpful?
3. How would you react to this news from a friend or sibling or even maybe someone you were dating? What would you say?

During the conversation, list on the board what the students fear/expect in discussing this vocation with others. If conversation lags, here are some typical concerns:

1. If you never consulted your parents/family/friends, they may be hurt that you have made up your mind without ever consulting them. They know you and love you, and they will have a reason to resent what looks like “going behind their backs.”
2. Parents/family/friends might want you to be successful, in the earthly, standard form. They want you to get a great education, have a successful wealthy career, marry, and have grandchildren. They might possibly want help in the family business. They see the religious life as throwing this all away.
 - A. “I’ll feel like I’ll disappoint them if I choose a religious vocation.”
 - B. “I’ll feel like I’m disobeying if I choose a religious vocation over my parents’ wishes.”



RELIGIOUS LIFE

**CLASS DISCUSSION:
PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS
ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION**

- During the conversation, tell them very simply that you want to enter religious life. Tell what attracted you to it, and demonstrate that you understand its challenges as well as its joys. If this is the first conversation, and you expect resistance, you do not need to mention how firmly you have made up your mind.
- Offer practical ways for everyone to get more information about your desire. You have to plan ahead for this:
 - Have the order’s web address and any other materials they may have available, such as brochures about the community.
 - If the order is an active order, find out whether one of the members could visit your family. See if your family would like to invite some of the religious over to the house.
 - Take your family to visit the order if possible. See if family can talk to the order’s vocation director.
 - Invite them to attend a temporary or final profession Mass for any religious order with you, especially if it’s possible to attend one of the order you are considering, or show your family and friends a video of one of these events.
- If any “downsides” to the vocation are brought up, acknowledge that you are aware of the and challenges of this vocation. If pressed for more information, address any particular concerns the others might bring up. If it seems like the discussion is turning into an argument, it might be good to back down a bit and suggest pursuing one of the practical steps suggested above. Try to end conversations by expressing your love and concern for family and friends.

**ROLEPLAY: TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT A
RELIGIOUS VOCATION**

In this exercise, you will role-play a conversation between parents and their child who is interested in becoming a religious sister or brother.

To prepare, you may want to refer to the “Tough Topics” pages:

- Contemplatives – Hiding from the World?
- Why Enclosure?
- Critics of Mother Teresa

GROUPS OF 4

One girl to play mom, one guy to play dad, one girl/guy to play “potential religious,” and 4th guy/girl to play coach.

The “potential religious” tells “parents” about his/her plan to pursue a religious vocation. The “parents” play Devil’s Advocate and ask questions or express concerns to the “potential religious.” The “potential religious” practices answering and addressing these concerns. The 4th student coaches the “potential religious” if he/she is having trouble explaining or answering questions. If the group finishes early, you can switch roles.

GROUPS OF 2

One student plays parent/friend and the other plays “potential religious.”

The parent/friend plays Devil’s Advocate and asks questions or expresses concerns to the “potential religious.” The “potential religious” practices answering and addressing these concerns. If time allows, you can switch roles.

OPTIONAL: PRACTICE ENCOURAGEMENT

One girl/guy to play friend or sibling; one girl/guy to play “potential religious.”

The “potential religious” tells his/her plan to the friend. The friend practices practices how he/she will respond. You can offer congratulations or encouragement, or ask questions. If time allows, you can switch roles.

3. Parents/family/friends might have been pressuring you somehow to become a religious.
 - A. “If I enter an order and then leave, people will be devastated.”
 - B. “If I leave, I won’t ever be able to have a normal place in the family / community again.”
4. Parents/family/friends might think the Catholic Church is not doing good in the world or worry that religious life will be too hard for you.
 - A. “They’ll say—if you want to help people, why can’t you do that with a good job? Or at least get a job and then volunteer at something more mainstream.”
 - B. “They’ll want to know why I would choose chastity and no kids. They’ll be worried about my being poor. They’ll worry about whether they’ll ever see me again and how far away I might be.”

CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION *continued*

When students have articulated some of their fears, direct them to the student section “Talking with others about a Religious Vocation.” This can be used as further discussion material, or given as a reading assignment in class or at home. (Handouts can be printed from the student PDF.)

ROLEPLAY: TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT A RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Break students into groups to prepare and then role-play talking about the vocation of the priesthood. (See grouping options in the student section. If you have fellow teachers, teacher aids, trusted students, etc., you can pick a grouping of 2 to 4 people to model to the whole class how to role-play the conversation, or how not to have a good conversation.) If there is time, students can break and re-form into new groups.

Resources

To help prepare for their role-playing sessions, students may refer to the Tough Topics pages listed in the student section. Students can review the resources in groups, talk about them, and then practice talking about the vocation with family/friends.

After role-play, bring class together for a discussion about their experiences. Some suggested questions:

- What would be hard about talking to family/friends?
- What are good ways to support someone thinking about the religious life?



RELIGIOUS LIFE

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ROLEPLAY: THE RITE OF PERPETUAL PROFESSION

Note to the teacher: Acting out the rite aloud in dialogue can be very powerful. Students can feel what it is like to be at the Rite of Solemn Profession and how important that would be. It can help them have a sense of reverence and awe for religious life that they might not get by a silent reading of the rite.

If there is not time to act out the rite, one of the rites may be read aloud, ideally with students chosen to read the parts.

These rites are based closely on the actual rites used by Passionist Sisters and Dominicans Friars. Some parts have been left out for brevity or adapted for simplicity, but these give a good representation of a real rite of profession.

Assign the following parts:

- The “Sisters” and/or “Brothers” about to make their professions: Each student can choose a Christian religious name, or they may use their own names. Names are used during the rite.
- Celebrant (priest, if roleplaying the profession of sisters): Male teacher or student
- Narrator: Male or female student
- Female Superior (if roleplaying the profession of sisters): Female student
- Prior (if roleplaying the profession of brothers): Male student
- All (congregation): All other students

Everyone should follow the postures of sitting, standing, kneeling where outlined in the rite and read by the narrator. (There is no narrator, of course, in a real rite). If the teacher so wishes, props can be obtained for a full representation of the rite.



RELIGIOUS LIFE

ROLEPLAY: THE RITE OF PERPETUAL PROFESSION

RITE OF PROFESSION (PASSIONIST SISTERS)

Calling of the Candidates

Narrator: *The Rite of Profession takes place in the context of Mass. After the Gospel has been proclaimed, those to be professed go and stand before the Celebrant. Then the Celebrant begins by calling the religious names of the sisters to be professed. As each is called, she responds:*

Sisters: Lord, you have called me. Here I am.

Narrator: *When all have been called, the celebrant questions all sisters together:*

Celebrant: My dear Sister, what do you ask of God and of His holy Church?

Sisters: I ask to follow Christ as my Spouse in the Congregation of the Nuns of the Most Holy Cross and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to persevere in this intention all the days of my life.

All: Thanks be to God.

Narrator: *Then those to be professed return to their place and all are seated. A homily follows.*

Examination of Candidates

Narrator: *After the homily, the sisters to be professed stand before the Celebrant. The Celebrant asks:*

Celebrant: Dear Sisters, in baptism you have already died to sin, and have been set aside for God's service. Are you now resolved to unite yourself more closely to God by the bond of perpetual profession?

Sisters: I am so resolved.

Celebrant: As brides of Jesus Crucified, are you resolved to commit yourselves perpetually to that life of perfect chastity, obedience and poverty chosen by Christ our Lord and His Virgin Mother?

Sisters: I am.

Celebrant: Are you resolved to commit yourself to follow the Gospel, to cherish in your heart a grateful remembrance of the Passion of Jesus and to promote it in others, to observe the rule of your community and to strive constantly for perfect love of God and neighbor?

Sisters: I am so resolved.

Celebrant: Are you resolved to live for God alone in solitude and silence, in persevering prayer and willing penance, in humble work and holiness of life?

Sisters: I am.

Celebrant: May God who has begun this good work in you see to its completion and perfection for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

Prayer for Those Sisters Who Are To Be Professed

Narrator: *The Celebrant stands facing the people, and with hands joined says:*

Celebrant: Dear friends in Christ, let us pray to God the Father who gives us everything that is good. In His mercy, may He strengthen His servants in the purpose He has inspired in them.



Passionist sisters are covered by a pall, symbolizing their death to the world and rebirth in Christ.

Photo from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/53119790@N02/>

[3] Alice von Hildebrand, *By Love Refined: Letters to a Young Bride*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Press, 1989, 12).

Suggested props (can be omitted or adapted to the circumstances):

- List of the religious names for the sisters/brothers making their profession. The celebrant uses these names during the rite, and the sisters/brothers refer to their own names.
- (For profession of sisters) Name for the Mother Superior, name for the women's convent, because the sisters have to refer to this.
- (For profession of sisters) A piece of fabric as big as a sheet, one per sister, and students assigned to be the ones to drape it on each student playing a sister.
- (For profession of sisters) “Altar” or table with pens and a piece of paper to be the text of the solemn profession formula which each sister signs.

ROLEPLAY: THE RITE OF PERPETUAL PROFESSION

continued

Opening notes for the teacher (can be explained to the students in whole or in part):

- Two sample rites follow. ^[3] The first (for girls) is taken from the rite the Passionist Sisters, and the second (for boys) from the rite for Dominican Friars. Use either rite as seems fit, or both if there is opportunity.
- The rite takes place within the context of the Mass.
- The Rite begins with the Liturgy of the Word; everything is done as at regular Mass, except the readings may be taken from those suggested in the special Lectionary.
- Optional discussion questions are given as hover-notes in the student section.



RELIGIOUS LIFE

ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

Litany of the Saints

Narrator: All kneel. During the Litany of the Saints, the sisters to be professed lie down full length or prostrate before the altar, and are covered with a funeral pall, the symbol of dying to themselves that each may rise as new person in Christ. In this ancient ritual, there is rich Paschal symbolism of death and resurrection. When the pall is removed, the religious "rises up" to pronounce her religious vows, an intense participation in the covenant of baptism.

All: Lord, have mercy...Christ, have mercy...Lord, have mercy...

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us...

St. Michael, pray for us...

St. Gabriel, pray for us...

St. John the Baptist, pray for us...

St. Peter, pray for us...

St. Paul, pray for us...

St. Joseph, pray for us...

St. Dominic, pray for us...

St. Ann, pray for us...

St. Mary Magdalen, pray for us...

St. Cecilia, pray for us...

All holy men and women of God, pray for us...

Lord, be merciful, Lord save your people...

From all evil, Lord save your people...

Christ, hear us, Christ, graciously hear us...

Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.

Narrator: At the end of the litany, the pall is removed. The sisters to be professed stand. All others sit.

Religious Profession

Narrator: The celebrant alone rises and says, with hands joined:

Celebrant: Lord, grant the prayers of Your people. Prepare the heart of Your servants for consecration to Your service. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, purify them from all sin and set them on fire with Your love. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Narrator: The sisters to be professed then pronounce the words of profession according to the following formula:



A Salesian sister signs her name to the formula of the vows after professing them before her community.

Used with permission from the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco - www.salesian-sisters.org

Sisters: To the honor of God, I, Sister [name], firmly resolve to consecrate myself more intimately to Him and to follow Christ more closely. In the presence of the community of this Monastery of [Name], a part of the Institute of the Religious of the Passion of Jesus and a sign of the universal Church, and in your hands, Reverend Mother [Name], I vow to promote devotion to and grateful remembrance of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, and to express it in my style of life. I also vow chastity, poverty, obedience, and to live in enclosure perpetually, according to the Rule and Constitutions of the Religious of the Passion of Jesus Christ. I promise to lead a life of love, together with you, my Sisters, "called within the Church to be a sign of the love of Jesus Crucified for the Father and for mankind." May the grace of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary and of St. Paul of the Cross, and your charity, my Sisters, sustain my weakness, and strengthen me in what I have promised by vow. Help Your servant, Lord. With trust in the word of Your Gospel, she has given You her faith.

Female Superior: By the authority entrusted to me, I accept your vows in the name of the Church for the Institute of the Religious of the Passion of Jesus Christ. I commend you earnestly to God that you may fulfill your dedication which is linked with this Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Narrator: The newly professed Sisters then go to the altar for the signing of the profession formula, which is left on the altar for the remainder of the Mass.

{3} Text for the Passionist Rite used with kind permission. Text of the Dominican rite can be found in a study copy available at the international Dominican website www.op.org and specifically at http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier/rite_of_profession_2001_en.pdf. Dominicans offer several other versions for their own profession. The text of both rites has been adapted for the sake of brevity and clarity. Where options have been given, only one has been chosen. These rites are generally representative of the profession rite for most religious communities, though the prayers and wording will be different.



ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE



Dominican Friars lie prostrate as they seek their final profession.

Photo from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dominicanfriars/>

RITE OF PROFESSION (DOMINICAN BROTHERS)

Calling

Narrator: *After the Gospel has been proclaimed, those to be professed go before the Prior, where they prostrate themselves. Then the Prior questions those to be professed, saying:*

Prior: What do you seek?

Brothers: God's mercy and yours.

Prior: Brothers, arise.

Narrator: *Then those to be professed return to their places and all are seated for the Homily.*

Examination

Narrator: *After the homily, the Prior turns to those to be professed and asks:*

Prior: Are you resolved to make solemn profession according to the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers?

Narrator: *Those to be professed rise and together respond:*

Brothers: I am, with God's help and yours.

Prior: May the Lord who has begun this good work, bring it to completion.

All: Amen.

Prayer for Those Brothers Who Are To Be Professed

Narrator: *All rise for prayer. The priest stands, with hands joined in front of him, and turning to the people, says:*

Prior: My dear brothers, let us pray to God the Father almighty, that he may pour out the grace of his blessing on these servants, whom he has called to follow Christ perfectly. In His kindness, may he confirm them in their holy intention.

Litany of the Saints

Narrator: *All kneel.*

All: Lord, have mercy... Christ, have mercy... Lord, have mercy...
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us...
St. Michael, pray for us...
St. Gabriel, pray for us...
St. John the Baptist, pray for us...
St. Peter, pray for us...
St. Paul, pray for us...
St. Joseph, pray for us...
St. Dominic, pray for us...
St. Ann, pray for us...
St. Mary Magdalen, pray for us...
St. Cecilia, pray for us...
All holy men and women of God, pray for us...
Lord, be merciful, Lord save your people...
From all evil, Lord save your people...
Christ, hear us, Christ, graciously hear us...
Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.



ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

Religious Profession

Narrator: *All sit. Each of those to be professed kneels in turn before the Prior, who is seated, and places his hands into the hands of the Prior. The brother to be professed then pronounces the words of profession in an audible voice according to the following formula, which is proper to the Order.*

Brothers (each in turn): I, brother N.N., make profession and promise obedience to God, to blessed Mary, to blessed Dominic, and to you, Master of the Order of Friars Preachers and to your successors according to the rule of blessed Augustine and the Constitutions of the Friars Preachers that I will be obedient to you and to your successors, until death.

Narrator: *Once profession has been made, the Prior receives the brothers who have made profession to the kiss of peace — a sign of reception into the Order — by which the bond of obedience and communion is signified. Then the Prior advises the newly professed:*

Prior: Dearest brothers, by this solemn profession you have handed yourselves over to God and his will: therefore through the ministry of the Church God has consecrated you to himself.



The religious places his hands between the hands of his superior during his profession of vows.

Photo from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dominicanfriars/>

HOMEWORK

Write a letter to the Founder or Superior of an order you are somewhat interested in, asking every question you have about the religious life, including particular questions about the order you chose. If the Founder has been canonized, ask for help discerning your own vocation. Your letter may include personal questions or questions you have heard from other people. Feel free to ask anything.

While this letter will not be mailed, write as if you were really writing to the Founder or Superior.