

TWO THINGS TO DO WHILE YOU'RE DISCERNING

For years, Jacob has thought about being a priest. Sometimes it has been just a passing thought. A few times, especially during Mass, it's been a very strong attraction. And sometimes—especially when he is dating—the thought seems to be altogether absent.

Jacob's experience is actually very common among men who enter seminary. While some men report always wanting to be a priest as long as they can remember, others apply to seminary only after a long period of discernment.

What do you do during that long period? The short answer is to try doing some things that priests do. Of course, you can't administer the sacraments, which is central to the priestly life, but priests do plenty of other things, too.

Here's a couple of ideas for testing your vocation.

Teach

There's an old saying: "We learn by teaching." When you have to explain the Faith to others in a compelling way, you quickly learn that good preparation is vital. And that means you'll devote plenty of time mastering your subject material before stepping to the front of the class.

Teaching RCIA, leading a Bible study, helping with the youth group—these are all great "priestly" roles. By taking the initiative to teach, you'll discover the real joy there is in bringing Christ to others. When the Holy Spirit works through you to touch someone's heart, it's both humbling and exhilarating. If you find satisfaction in this, it could be one sign you're called to the priesthood.

Serve

One seminarian related: "My pastor knew I was thinking about the priesthood, and he trained me to take Communion to the sick. Honestly, just thinking about the smell of the hospital gave me second thoughts. Every week, I cringed at the thought of going, but I was always, always grateful by the time I left. I didn't like the smell any better, but I knew I was bringing Jesus to people in need."

Let's face it; sleeping in Saturday morning is a lot easier than waking up early for the Habitat for Humanity build. And yes, you may have to DVR your favorite History Channel show because the Boy Scouts or Knights of Columbus meet on Thursday evenings.

We can all think of a thousand reasons we're too busy to serve, but the truth is we all have the same amount of time in a week. It's how we choose to use it that's different.

A priest's life is not his own. He is ordained for others, not himself. That's why serving others is a great way to test your vocation.

Discovering your true vocation is not easy. It takes time, along with a lot of soul-searching and prayer. But on a practical level, if you seek out opportunities to teach and serve, you can get a small taste of the life of a priest. Go talk to your pastor, a chaplain, or a priest you trust, and ask how you can get involved.