

A Marriage Made in Heaven

The Consecrated Life

LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

Goal for the Life Night

This night will expose the teens to the various forms of consecrated life. This night will focus specifically on the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience taken by consecrated men and women. Finally this Life Night will look at how teens can live out these vows while discerning their individual vocation.

Life Night at a Glance

Many people do not know much about the vocation to religious life. This Life Night seeks to give your youth group insight into the beauty of this vocation. This night begins with a small group competition creating short skits about what they think heaven will be like. The skits move into a teaching on the consecrated life and its various forms. The Break for this night will either give the teens an opportunity to get to know a religious sister or brother from their community or have a chance to discuss the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The night will close with a time of thanksgiving for the vocation of the consecrated life and a time of night prayer.

Environment

The environment for this night should present the “feel” of a convent or monastery. Be creative to make this happen. As the teens enter the room, have Gregorian chant or bells playing. Around the perimeter of the room have various religious pictures and statues. At the front of the room, create a small bedroom that would be found in a convent. Have a bed set up with a blanket and pillow. Have an end table next to the bed with a Bible and lamp on it.

GATHER 20 Minutes

Welcome and Introductions (5 min)

The youth minister should gather all the teens together and welcome everyone to the Life Night. He/She should introduce any teens at Life Night for the first time.

“The Way I See It” Skits (15 min)

It’s the age-old question: “What will heaven be like?” The Gather for this night will give the teens an opportunity to answer that question in a unique way. The youth minister should explain that each group has five minutes to come up with a one-minute skit on what they think heaven will be like. The skits can be serious or humorous.

Encourage the group to be as creative as possible.

Ensure that every person from the small group has a part in the skit. Once the five minutes is up, have each group come forward and perform their skit. Invite religious sisters from the community or parish to come and judge the skits. If sisters are not available, the rest of the small groups should vote on the best skit. Award the winning group with a prize.

PROCLAIM 15 Minutes

Teaching (10 min)

This teaching focuses on the beauty of consecrated life in many different forms. To make this teaching come alive, try having key words written on a sign or board.

The teaching can be found on pages 88-91.

“Sisters: In Their Own Words” Video (5 min)

This video asks religious sisters to share about their calling, the surprises of this vocation and suggestions for women considering the religious life. Use this as the transition into the Break.

“Sisters: In Their Own Words” can be found on Video Support 8

BREAK 30 Minutes

Large Group Q & A (30 min)

If possible, invite one or two religious brothers and/or sisters to come to Life Night to pray with the teens and share their stories. The youth minister should introduce the guest(s) and ask him/her to share their stories. After, give the teens a chance to ask questions. Close the large group by asking the brother/sister to pray over the teens.

Alternative Break –Poverty, Chastity and Obedience (30 min)

This alternative break will give the teens an opportunity to dive deeper into the evangelical counsels poverty, chastity and obedience. You will need three different spaces (the main room and two more) for this time. Try and have these spaces as close as possible to save on travel time

CATECHISM REFERENCES:

914-924 928-933
2103
1973-1974
2687
2684

SCRIPTURES:

Matthew 19:12
1 Corinthians 7:34-36
Jeremiah 29: 11-13
John 15:10

between rooms. Select three different Core Members to lead the three discussions. Divide small groups up into three large groups. The groups will rotate through the three different vow discussions every 10 minutes. Each discussion will be followed by a short time of small group questions.

#1 - Poverty

What does it mean?

- What comes to mind when you think of the word poverty? (Ask for some answers) This evangelical counsel is central not only to the consecrated life but also to our lives now.
- The vow of poverty is a promise to be detached from the world. When religious empty themselves of worldly goods—attachment to money or physical possessions—they allow God to fill their lives and hearts with his richness and love that lasts beyond this world.
- Why do religious always seem so joy-filled and content? They seem so joy-filled because their hope is not attached to the world. They are filled by the eternal hope that God gives them. They have their attachment in God.
- Jesus was always eating and associating with the poor. Why? Is it because he was poor and weak? No. Jesus was giving us a model of what our lives should look like. The poor are empty. They have no physical possessions. Jesus was showing to us that there was wisdom and virtue in poverty, especially when our poverty is aimed towards God. This is why this counsel is an important part of consecrated life.

How do we live this counsel?

- Does this sound familiar? We too are called to live a life of poverty. We are called to be detached from those things that take God's place in our lives. What are those things for you? Maybe it is a physical possession. Maybe it is another person. Whatever it is, God is calling you to let it go because He wants to give you more happiness and joy than a worldly possession will ever give. This joy lasts forever.

Small Group Questions:

1. What are the things in your life that hinder you from allowing God to come into your heart fully? Why would it be hard to give those things up?
2. Where do you place your hope? If not in God, what can you do to place your hope in God?

#2 - Chastity

What does it mean?

- Our sexuality and the virtue of chastity are gifts from God given to us to glorify him. When a religious takes the vow of chastity, it is in a sense, a type of marriage vow to the Church. He or she promises complete fidelity to God.
- Look at the habit many religious sisters wear. (Show a picture of a religious sister's habit). Is it not a type of wedding gown? The vow of chastity is self-sacrifice to the Bridegroom—Christ. It is a total offering of their body and their sexuality back to God. They are saying "God, I give you everything, including my sexuality, my desire to be a mother or father. I want to be totally yours."
- Like any other vocation, the vow of chastity requires that the religious continually practice temperance or self-control. Just because they are offering their sexuality back to God does not mean those sexual desires or the desire to be a mother or father goes away. It means that they are called to greater prayer and self-sacrifice. Their celibacy is a type of worship to God.
- Religious or consecrated life is a sign to us of what heaven will be like. When we get to heaven we will be giving all of ourselves to Christ. We will be a total self-gift to Christ, and He will fill us up.

How do we live this counsel?

- Our sexuality is a gift reserved for God's use and plan; not our own. He gets to determine the appropriate time for us to use the gift. Each of us, no matter our vocation, is called to the virtue of chastity. We have to work to have greater temperance, asking God to give us strength to protect our sexuality now in preparation for our vocation and for heaven.

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Small Group Questions:

1. Why do you think so many men and women have a hard time with this vow when discerning religious life?
2. What are some areas that you need temperance in?
3. How can you better live the vow of chastity now in preparation for your future vocation?

#3 – Obedience

What does it mean?

- Open by proclaiming the following Scripture passage: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” John 15:10
- What do you think Jesus meant when He said this? (Ask for some answers)
- Obedience requires two things from us: submission and trust. We are going to talk about these two briefly.
- Submission: Jesus came not only to save us from our sins and give us everlasting life, but He also came as an example of how to love God with all our mind, heart, and soul and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. One of those ways is by showing obedience to the Father. In everything Jesus did and said, He submitted his will to the Father. He said “THY will be done” not “MY will.” Jesus was “obedient unto death, even death on a cross”(Philippians 2:8).
- This vow requires that a religious give complete submission and commitment to God's plan for their life. Not only to God's plan, but also the orders vow complete submission. They vow to do what they are told in every situation.
- Trust: Obedience is trusting that God's plan is better than our own. As humans, we like to be in control of our lives. We like to call the shots and be our own boss. We think we know what's best for us. The vow of obedience requires that we give up our wills (submission) and trust that God will not lead us to a place we will be unhappy or alone.

- Listen to what God says to the prophet Jeremiah: “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29: 11-13).

How do we live this counsel?

- This vow can be hard for us. Some of us have a difficult time with obedience. So, how can we begin to live obedience? First, we can respect and obey people in authority in our lives. Whether that is our parents, teachers, police, or other adults, we are called to obey them and respect them. We can also obey and respect the authority of the Church. The Church does not receive her authority from a group of men in a room. The Church's authority comes from Christ. It by Christ's authority that the Church stands as the light of truth in the world. As Catholics, we are called to serve and obey her as we would Christ. Finally, we can live obedience by asking God to help us know in our hearts that He has a plan for our life and He makes the same promise to us as He did Jeremiah.

Small Group Questions:

1. Who do you have a hard time being obedient? Why?
2. Which do you say more often: THY will be done or MY will be done?
3. Do you trust that God has a plan for your life?

SEND 15 Minutes

Hope in Heaven (5 min)

The youth minister should gather the group back together and recap the night. He/She should focus on the gift of the consecrated life to the Church and our call to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Set the room with a tone of prayer. Bring down the lights and have soft music playing in the background. The youth minister should introduce the time of prayer with the following point:

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The consecrated life is a gift and sign of heaven for us. It is a sign of a total self-giving worship of the Father. The consecrated life charges us to place our hope in heaven and not the world. It looks towards heaven as a sign of things to come. Those in the vocation of the consecrated life give us a great example of how we ought to live now and also when we enter into our own vocation. We must give our whole lives to God. We can look to those who have chosen the vocation of the consecrated life as our hope that God hears our prayers and will bring us great joy.

Night Prayer (10 min)

The youth minister should briefly explain the tradition of Liturgy of the Hours and how the Church prays a rhythm of Psalms and readings all day. Explain that most religious and consecrated men and women center their day around these times of prayer and the last prayer is called night prayer. The youth minister should open the time of prayer by first giving thanks for the gift of the consecrated life. Have one Core Member lead the time of prayer. Print out copies of the night prayer so the teens can enter into prayer. You can also project the prayers on the screen rather than printing out copies. After night prayer, close the night with the Hail Mary and Ave Maria.

Use the following websites to find the specific prayers for night prayer:

www.universalis.com

www.ebreviary.com

Making It Work

- Instead of the gather game, ask a few groups of teens to submit a three to five minute video for the Life Night. The rest of the group can vote on the best video. Award a prize to the winning group.
- Have a few upper-classmen lead the discussions on poverty, chastity and obedience. Be sure to go over the requirements and hear their talks before the Life Night.
- Use the “A Glimpse Into Consecrated Life” Video found on Video Support 8 as a supplement to the Life Night, particularly if there are no religious sisters able to be present at the Life Night. This short video gives a glimpse into the day-to-day life of religious sisters.

Community Connection

- Well before this Life Night, ask the vocations director of any religious order to be present at this Life Night (if possible, to give the teaching).
- For teens who are interested in looking into the religious life, have a follow-up to this Life Night where they can ask more questions and pray together.
- If possible, organize a trip to any local convents or monasteries and invite the teens to come for a day of discernment and prayer.
- Contact a local religious order and ask them to pray for the teens during this night.

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TEACHING

To the presenter: The teaching outlines given in this Curriculum Guide cover much more information than can be presented in a 10-minute talk. This is done on purpose. It is the role of presenter to be familiar with the topic and then prayerfully prepare the main points that will be presented to the teens. Use Scripture, Catechism and personal experience to convey the message.

For the last two educational nights we have focused solely on Holy Orders. Tonight we want to pay special attention to the Consecrated Life which is those who take special vows that are neither Marriage, nor Holy Orders. So many times when we hear the word "vocations" we think that we are only talking about Marriage and Holy Orders. In the history of the Catholic Church, the role of those who consecrate their lives to Christ make up a an important part of the history of the universal Church.

They have served in every area that you can imagine and sometimes they have been "behind the scenes" and sometimes they are in front, leading the charge on any number of movements and issues.

So just in case you thought "vocations" was just for priests or married folk, sit back and relax as we crack open the Consecrated Life!

To understand the Consecrated life we have to understand what is known as the "evangelical counsels" which are offered by Christ to everyone who would listen. Those who are consecrated live these counsels without entering into what is known as the "hierarchical structure of the Church" or Holy Orders.

Those who embrace the counsels take on a life of chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God, poverty and obedience. When someone takes these on by proclaiming them publicly they take on the characteristics of a life given to God alone.

The Church sees this state of life as a way of experiencing an intimate dedication of one's life to God. Those that take these vows are living their Baptism in a way that follows God as closely as possible, dedicating themselves to a God who simply is love. They pursue a perfection of love in their own lives, freely giving of everything they have to the service of the Kingdom of God. They become a living symbol of the glory of the Church. They are living witnesses of the perfect surrender to God only. They are walking billboards for heaven!

CCC 914 - 916, 2103, 1973-1974, 2687, 933
Lumen Gentium 42-44
Perfectae Caritatis 5
Canon Law 573

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From these three vows we are going to see that there are a great number of forms or ways of living them out. They are both solitary and in community. There are different religious groups, or families that proclaim different gifts. Each of these are looking to enrich the life of the Church, to make their members holy through service to the Body of Christ.

From the beginning of the Church this practice of dedicating your life completely to Christ by practicing the counsels was endorsed by the Church and seen in individuals and groups that became hermits, removed from society, and religious groups and families that accepted the authority of the Church and were approved. As a result, bishops are always looking to prayerfully discern new types of the consecrated life. The approval of these forms is reserved for the pope. Let's go through some of these forms so we can see the large variety in what is known as the Consecrated Life.

The first type of Consecrated that we are going to address are those known as "hermits" or the "eremitic" life. These are those that may not make public vows to follow the counsels, but live a life of private devotion and praise to God. They separate themselves from the world doing prayer and penance, usually in silence.

In doing this, they make an example of their lives of that intimacy with Christ, giving everything to God. Usually, hermits find this call in the desert, where they are able to do spiritual battle, to unify themselves completely with God because God is everything to them.

The second type of Consecrated is those that consecrate their virginity to the Lord. There are those that make a vow of perpetual chastity for the sake of the Kingdom. They live in a special way with a greater freedom of heart, body and spirit to be able to serve the Lord as a spouse. They are consecrated to God by the bishop, taking Jesus as their spouse. The rite is called "Consecratio Virginum" and the person is seen as a sign of the Church's love for Jesus, an image of the heavenly Bride of Christ in the life to come.

Like other types of Consecrated, the order of virgins live in the world praying, doing penance, serving others, and preaching the Gospel according to their gifts. Sometimes they form themselves into communities to help each other serve and live their vows, but this is not always the case.

CCC 917 - 919, 2684
Lumen Gentium 43
Perfectae Caritatis 1
Canon Law 605

CCC 920-924, 2719, 2015, 1618-1620, 1537, 1672
Matthew 19:12
1 Corinthians 7:34-36
Canon Law, 603 - 604
Vita Consecrata 7
Ordo Consecrationis Virginum, Praenotanda 1-2

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The third type of Consecrated life is the Religious Life. In the first centuries of Christianity, these groups that formed under the authority of the Church were always in community. They made their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience publicly. Their prayer was liturgical in nature, and they were a living witness of Christ and the Church. At its root, religious life is about showing the sacrificial love of God in the language of the time. The religious community is making an example to the world of the sacrifice of Christ.

Each religious community assists the Bishop in the pastoral care of the Church. This can be seen throughout history as religious communities have helped with missionary work and evangelization and even the formation of new churches. Religious communities are essential in passing along the faith to those who are learning it for the first time, or even those who need their faith renewed.

There are two other types of Consecrated life that we can touch on. The first is the Secular Institute. It may seem like a strange title for something that is religious in its nature, but the Secular Institute is one where those who are involved work and live in the world. Their goal is the perfection of their sacrificial love so that the world may be made holy.

These Institutes often commit themselves to the counsels through sacred bonds, and have a fellowship that is characteristic of their way of life. Their goal is to always bring the earthly world closer to God through the work they do from the inside. You can even think of it as God's spy network, going into the enemy territory in order to cause a spiritual revolution against Satan!

The other type are the Societies of Apostolic Life. These members do not take the religious vows but pursue the purpose of the society. They live according to a certain way of life and they embrace the counsels according to the constitution of the society in which they live.

As we can see there are many different ways that members of the Church can live what is known as the Consecrated Life. Through this life, the members of the Church are able to see the many gifts of the Holy Spirit and how it is working in the Church. Each of these groups

CCC 925-927, 1672, 796, 854
Canon Law, 607, 591
Unitatis Redintegratio 15
Christus Dominus 33-35
Ad Gentes 18

CCC 928-933, 901, 775, 672, 679
Canon Law, 710, 713, 731, 783
Provida Mater
Perfectae Caritatis 11
Redemptoris Missio 69
Lumen Gentium 31, 44

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pursue evangelization and missionary activity in a way that is particular to them.

Many people in the world who do not understand the Church may say that the religious are simply removing themselves from the world. The truth is that they are imitating Christ in order to follow his example of emptying himself on the cross so that the world can be saved. When the Consecrated man or woman does this, they are choosing a narrow path that allows them to be more present to the world because they are not distracted by material goods, serving a family, or making decisions that are the authority of their superior. They are showing the world that we need to be transfigured through the Beatitudes.

If the Consecrated is public, private or even secret, the example is a beautiful display of a life completely dedicated to Jesus Christ that points to His Second Coming. Their witness points to an eternal life, to the glory of God, to the Heavenly Kingdom, to the joy that is to come. They follow the example of the Blessed Virgin whose own consecration to God brought God to Earth. Each Consecrated person who faithfully lives their life makes God present to the world in the model of the Blessed Mother.

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CHECKLIST

Core Planning Team:

Date of Life Night:

One month prior to the Night:

Give copies of the Life Night to each of the members of the planning team. Each person should read the Scripture and Catechism references as well as review the planning guide before the brainstorming meeting.

Get the planning team together for a brainstorming meeting (this should last no longer than 1 hour). The team prays and discusses where the teens are in their faith journey in relation to this topic. Then using this planning guide as a starting point, the team adapts the Life Night to meet the needs of the teens and the parish. Create a detailed outline with any changes and/or adjustments.

Assign the person responsible for each part of the Life Night:

Environment _____

Introductions _____

The Way I see It Skits _____

Religious Witness _____

Poverty, Chastity, Obedience (Optional)

Hope In Heaven _____

Two Weeks Prior to Life Night:

Turn in a detailed outline of the Life Night to the youth minister. Allow the youth minister to give feedback and make any necessary changes.

Create a list of needed supplies and materials. Assign a person to collect and purchase the materials needed.

Decide the people that will be doing the following things. Make sure they have a copy of the script and/or teaching outline. Inform them of any practices and/or deadlines

Teaching _____

Week of the Life Night:

Written outline of the teaching is given to the youth minister and practiced.

Run a dress rehearsal of the Life Night. Youth minister gives feedback.

Create environment and collect needed supplies.

E-mail entire Core team an overview of the night.

Day of the Life Night:

Set up the environment. Make sure the room is clean and presentable.

Set up video. Test the slide show to make sure the pictures work.

Walk the entire Core team through the Life Night. Make sure all transitions are ready and everyone knows their roles.

Pray! Pray for the teens attending the Night. Pray for God's will to be done through the night. Pray over those involved.

