

PRIESTLY LIFE AND VOCATIONS SUMMIT
Materials for CD ROM and Binder

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ii. Introduction

In the 1990s the Bishops' Committee on Vocations assisted in revising the program entitled *Operation Andrew*. This program was an opportunity for bishops to invite young men to gather with them to discuss the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. At this time, the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation of the USCCB under the auspices of the Bishops' Committee on Vocations presents a program for priests to actively invite men to consider a vocation to the priesthood. This program is entitled *Priestly Life and Vocations Summit: Fishers of Men*. This project is a presbyteral workshop which utilizes the appreciative inquiry method of asking priests about their most positive experiences in the priesthood. This program has been presented in five pilot dioceses. The overall response to the program has been very positive.

It is the hope of the Bishops' Committee on Vocations that this project will bring about a renewal of the priests in the United States and also lead to the regeneration of priesthood itself. This presbyteral workshop is based on interviews with priests. The actual convocation with the priest would include their testimonies of positive priestly experiences, establishing strategies for promoting priestly vocations, and creating a structure within the presbyterate for inviting men to consider the priesthood.

iii. Letter from the BCV

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." And they left their nets and followed Him. (Mark 1:16-18)

These words from Scripture are the very foundation for this *Priestly Life and Vocations Summit: Fishers of Men* program. The data gathered annually by the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops repeatedly shows the important impact that priests and their personal invitations to consider priesthood have on young men. Statistics from the surveys of various years of ordination classes identified that a high number of men ordained to the priesthood identified a priest as being a primary inviter to consider the vocation to priesthood. Those same surveys also revealed, unfortunately, that the percentage of diocesan and religious priests who actually invite is low. While we recognize that the responsibility of

supporting all vocations lies with everyone within the Church, this *Priestly Life and Vocations Summit: Fishers of Men* program is an opportunity for priests within a religious community or presbyterate to create an atmosphere, climate, or culture whereby young men are effectively invited and can courageously respond to God's call to the priesthood. Using the words, "I will make you fishers of men," the Word made flesh instilled into the apostles the power and authority to go forth and use the same words by which they were called: "Come, follow me, I will make you fishers of men." In our tradition and understanding of apostolic succession, whereby the very gifts, power and authority of Christ are extended through ordination, priests and bishops become men of Word and Sacrament. So too, priests and bishops are given the grace to become effective 'inviters', placing before young men the same call Jesus first made on the shores of Galilee, "Come follow me."

I am grateful to the John Paul II Cultural Center for the funding for this project. Also, I offer my appreciation to the members of the Bishops' Committee on Vocations which offered oversight into this project, as well as to the Steering Committee for the Priestly Life and Vocation Summit that assisted in the development of this program. They include Father Matthew Lee, US Navy Chaplain; Father Kevin Nadolski, OSFS, NRVC representative; Father Mark D. O'Donnell, NCVD representative; Mr. Rafael Venegas, seminarian representative; Father David Hulshof, consultant; Mrs. Dorothy Foss, program manager; Mr. Benjamin Blosser, administrative assistant; and Father Edward J. Burns, executive director.

It is our hope that this program will be blessed by the Lord of the Harvest and that through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of priests, we may continue to invite young men to consider the vocation of priesthood.

Most Reverend Blase J. Cupich
Chair, Bishops' Committee on Vocations
September 8, 2005
Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

PHASE I--/Setting the Stage/Laying the Ground Work

A wise person once said: "*If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail.*" This section will "walk you through" the many aspects of planning for the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* program in your diocese or community.

A. Agreement of the Diocese/Bishop/Presbyterate Council

The responsibility for being the lead agent in this program would fall either to the Director of Vocations or the Director of Continuing Formation in a diocese, either way, both offices should be actively involved in this process. When a program includes the

entire presbyterate or religious community, it is necessary to keep many people “in the loop”. It goes without saying, first and foremost, the diocesan bishop or religious ordinary should be approached for his approval of this convocation.

If it is agreed that such an endeavor would be worthwhile, then the act of collaboration begins. This phase is essential to the success of the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* program. Communicating the premise, goals and objectives of this program will be the benchmark for keeping the project focused and clear. This is a program for priestly vocations. While it will include a number of different people in the planning process and the execution of the project, the main involvement centers around the priests in the diocese or community, as will be communicated in the development of this plan.

B. Preparation

Consultation with many people in the diocese or community is essential. In particular, the person responsible for the continuing formation program for priests should be a key player in all phases, since this process will hopefully have a lasting affect on your diocese or community. Along with the bishop, the presbyteral council should have some input into the development and planning stages.

1. Presentation to presbyteral council (PowerPoint on CDRom)- Explanation of Goals and Objectives.

The PowerPoint, if you choose to use it, will give you some concise points that have been discovered over the past few years. In particular, it speaks of the impact of the priest on men considering the vocation of priesthood. The PowerPoint includes: (See Appendix A for the hard copy of the slides used in this presentation. An electronic copy is found in the CDRom entitled “PowerPoints & Documents”)

- Goals
 - Method
 - Theological Basis
 - Overall Process
- Phases I-IV

The presentation to the presbyteral council is a good time to review some of the interview questions, highlight the theological basis and review the overall process. This time could be used to show a sample of any multi-media presentations relative to the program.

After the presbyteral council has reviewed the program, the title can be explained. The first two phases of the program addresses the priestly life of the presbyterate through the interview process. The gathering of the presbyterate or convocation itself is the vocation summit whereby priests discuss and decide how to proceed in inviting men to consider the priesthood. Being fishers of men refers to the very act of inviting.

For this presentation you should be equipped with: all multi-media items (i.e., PowerPoint, computer, DVD, projector, etc.) the interview questions, the timeline of the project, the outline of the day (sample), the list of people with whom you should be working in this project, the feedback you have received from the bishop/major superior, and what you anticipate you will need for this program to become a reality.

a. Timeline and outline

The timeline (see Appendix B for the hard copy of the timeline - an electronic copy is found in the CDROM entitled "PowerPoints & Documents") is given as a suggestion. This document should be adjusted to reflect the unique situation of your diocese/community.

b. frequently asked questions from councils and priests

"How much is this going to cost?" Be sure that this will be one of the first questions you are asked. While we have tried to provide a number of resources at no cost, the general costs of conducting a clergy convocation remain. This is why the collaboration with the ongoing formation office is important – some costs can be shared between different budgets. Whatever additional resources you request (see resource section of this workbook) may add to the costs of your program. Nevertheless, comparatively speaking it remains an inexpensive program. The act of inviting a man to consider priesthood costs no monetary amount – but it does cost a man his life and bestows upon him a life worth living.

Are deacons, religious women or lay persons invited? In many dioceses, deacons, pastoral associates and leadership teams of the diocese are invited to convocations. It should be stressed that this program is directed toward priests. It is not meant to be exclusive, but it does highlight the distinction in ministerial service. A number of elements in this program reflect the special character and nature of the ministerial priesthood. Ordination to the priesthood and the close proximity to the Eucharist are paramount to the thrust and direction of this project. We are aware that the entire Church has a responsibility in supporting, encouraging and inviting men to consider the priesthood. This program speaks to the main responsibility of the priest in inviting men to the priesthood. Then, when looking at the involvement of the larger community: as the priest, so the flock.

c. form a task force committee-select a chair

As noted in the timeline document, a number of key people should be a part of the task force. Having someone to serve as chair will be important to keep the momentum alive. The task force will decide how to execute the process and verify the format in which the information will be received.

d. meet with bishop or religious superior to finalize the summit

Once again, it is important to keep the bishop or religious superior well informed. He will help set the tone of the day and convene the gathering of priests in the diocese or community.

e. set a date for the summit

Verifying the bishops' calendar and securing a site for the gathering are the two most important elements to keep in mind. Many dioceses have established the general times of the year when priest convocations take place. In many cases, convocations refer to a number of days. This program can be adjusted to make use of what is the best for an individual diocese.

In setting the date it is important to specify the length of the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* event. A number of those who participated in the pilot programs indicated that there was insufficient time and that it could have been longer (it's not often you hear priests say that meetings need to be longer!). Nevertheless, at this point in the planning you should determine the type of gathering you will have: a one day or a multi-day convocation. A day gathering which starts at 10:00 AM, would be recommended to last until at least 3:00 PM. There is a good bit of information in the PowerPoint, and the discussions (and presentations from individuals) in the afternoon may solicit a great deal of conversation. At the same time, the day will also include lunch, prayers, and breaks. Mass may not be scheduled in a one-day schedule because a number of priests have already celebrated Mass in their home parish prior to the gathering. These are some of the things that should be determined at this point in the planning process in order to send out the notices announcing the summit.

You may want to be attentive to whether or not you will be incorporating any video or outside resources that will assist in presenting the day. This will have to be reflected in the schedule and adjusted in the handout of the day's flow. The schedule of the day is addressed in Phase III.

2. Letter to priests announcing the summit

Communication with the priests who are being interviewed is essential. However, if all the priests of the diocese are being interviewed, this could also be incorporated into this letter. Appendix C has a sample letter from the bishop to the priests of the diocese.

PHASE II—Preparing for the Summit

This preparation phase can be a time of fruitful interaction among priests. At the same time, there may be some areas in the country where one-on-one personal contact is not possible due to priests' serving in remote areas. In these cases, it has proven successful

for priests to respond to the interview by email. In fact, communicating by email may also help when it comes time to consolidate the responses from the priests, as it eliminates the need to have the interviews transcribed. Having available the most powerful responses from the priests greatly helps the positive impact this workshop has on a presbyterate.

A. Interview of Priests prior to the Summit

This section may be met with some trepidation. Many priests are not eager to add more things to their schedule. Nevertheless, once the hesitation passes and the momentum starts with this interview process, it starts to come together and the level of interest starts to rise, especially once they are able to talk about the positive aspects of their priesthood. The benefit of this process is in the ways the questions are presented, which is aimed at soliciting a positive response. The questions are framed in such a way that they identify the best elements of what it is to be a priest. The goal of this program is to re-present the best elements of priesthood on the larger (diocesan) level so that all the priests in the presbyterate are able to see that their life as a priest is a fulfilling one - not only for themselves but also for their brother priests and that inviting others to consider this vocation of priesthood should be natural.

A note of caution should be made about adjusting the questions in a way that would attempt to solve problems in the Church or society. Once the questions are changed in an attempt to create conversation or debate, the foundational premise of seeking the benefits of appreciative inquiry will have been forfeited.

1. Selection of priest interviews

Once the task force has agreed on the questions that will be posed in the interviews, then the decision is made as to how many priests will participate in the interview process. In large dioceses or archdioceses, it would be impossible to interview every priest. In smaller dioceses, it may be the hope that all the priests will participate. The Task Force will also decide how this will take place – by email or through personal visits. The committee will have to take into consideration that the interviews should be transcribed, especially the most impressive images of priesthood given in the interviews. These are the “gems” that need to be re-presented at the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* workshop.

2. Training of interviewers

Keeping people “in the loop” is once again essential. A reminder about keeping the bishop informed is important at this point. Also, identifying some priests who could serve as interviewers may be an option. In these cases, some dioceses have opted to have training sessions with the interviewers. This would be an opportunity for them to review the questions and to prepare for various responses. On rare occasions in the pilot process, some priests offered insights that were very personal. This is the reason why it is recommended to have priests interview priests. Seminarians or lay people would do a

wonderful job with the task, but the importance of the priest conducting the interview is that priests have a fuller understanding of what is to be a priest, and are quickly able to identify nuances in the conversation. Another reason a training session with more than one interviewer would be beneficial is that some pilot dioceses showed inconsistent interview styles, which allowed for unfocused responses. When the interviewer is not a priest, the interviewer may feel uneasy about saying that the interview has gone long enough. (To look at this in a positive way, some priests have a lot of good things to say about the priesthood.)

In cases when not all the priests will be interviewed in preparation for the convocation, there could be time set aside at the convocation that would allow for them to offer some of their own positive experiences about priesthood and about inviting men to consider the priesthood.

3. Letters to the interviewees explaining the process

Once a list has been decided upon as to which priests will be interviewed for the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* project, a letter should go out asking for their participation in being interviewed for the convocation. A draft of such a letter can be found in Appendix D.

4. Interview questions

The questions for the interview can be found in Appendix E. As you will see, the questions are formatted with an introduction to each section.

5. Interviews are conducted

The coordinator of the project will have to be diligent in making sure that all the transcripts of the interviews are submitted in a timely fashion. Much work is necessary in reading all the responses and selecting the more substantial responses for the workshop. This may mean sending a reminder to the interviewers and the interviewees.

6. Gather information from the interviews and discern what the priests are saying that is important to their lives and ministry and what action priests see as possibilities for encouraging invitations

It helps if the information received is all in the same format. The decision as to what format to follow should be decided upon at the beginning of the process. A verbatim format is recommended since it captures a priest's style – showing the responses are different. Summaries of what priests say oftentimes loses the unique character and style of individual priests. For this reason, a transcription of the interview or email response captures the answers “in the priests' own words.”

7. Summarize the interview information

After specific quotes have been gathered for the workshop, the remaining responses could be summarized in order to give an overall report of answers.

B. Select a facilitator and presenters

The task force should have some idea from the beginning who would be the facilitator of the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* program. In many cases this could be the vocation director who is familiar with the process or the ongoing formation director. In dioceses where it may be best to have someone from outside, many vocation directors will be familiar with the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* format and materials.

C. Create a brochure / invitation / banners

Some of the quotes from the priests' interviews, the most impressive ones, could be utilized in a brochure that can later be incorporated into a vocation promotion piece. One diocese used the quotes on banners for their gathering.

D. A staff person selected to handle registrations, etc.

In the event that a structure is not in place to handle the logistics for the gathering, a staff person should be identified to handle the necessary details. Such details would include but are not limited to:

- Registration materials
- AV Materials
 - PowerPoint Projector & Screen
 - Computer & extension cords
- Provisions for lunch
- Seating (roundtables preferred for group conversation)
- Handouts
- Etc.

E. Create prayer and liturgical experience

A day with priests will naturally include an opportunity for morning prayer, midday prayer, Mass, etc. The theme of priestly vocations can easily be incorporated into the prayer experiences of the day. Many times the discussion of how a presbyterate should respond to inviting men includes the prayers that are prayed in a parish/diocese for priestly vocations. This gathering is a prime place for praying such prayers.

F. Select quotes from the priests to be used in PowerPoint presentation

Priests should know from the beginning that their words could be used in the public forum and at the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit*. The quotes that priests offer are wonderful expressions of living fully the vocation of priesthood. To make the most of these quotes, one option would be to create a PowerPoint presentation that is put on the “loop” cycle during breaks or lunch. This then gives an ongoing depiction of how priests express the joys of priesthood. The more quality quotes used, the better. Many priests appreciate the opportunity to see what their brother priests are saying. This exercise also provokes some response from priests, which naturally keeps the discussion going through lunch/breaks without being formally requested. Appendix F offers a sample of this exercise. The slides from this sample would not themselves be used rather, create a PowerPoint of your own priests so that they can see their own words come up on the screen; alternatively, you will be able to call on someone (hoping that he’s present) who said something substantive.

G. Use testimonials from bishops, vocation directors, pastors and seminarians that help promote the priestly life and vocations summit

If it is the desire of the task force to use some of the testimonials found in the interview transcriptions, and it is decided that a personal description of such accounts would be better than the written word, then the personal testimonies at the workshop could be used. Ask the man if he would give an account at the convocation of what he has expressed in the interview. Again, when not all the priests have been asked to give an interview, the task force may decide to set aside some time for priests to offer some brief comments on items that resonate with them. Additional brief testimonies from seminarians who have been personally invited by a priest could be beneficial to the program.

H. Finalize PowerPoint Presentation

Appendix G is a copy of a basic template for the PowerPoint presentation. This PowerPoint can be adjusted to reflect the current status in your diocese. An example of a diocese personalizing this can be seen in Appendix H. The diocesan statistics help give the priests the current picture of priestly vocations for the local church.

PHASE III--Priestly Life and Vocations Summit

This phase is the actual gathering of priests. In Appendix I you will find the schedule of the day.

A. Work of Facilitator/Presenters begins/outline of the day

Throughout the day, you may want to be attentive to whether or not you will be incorporating any video or outside resources that will assist in presenting the day. This will have to be reflected in the schedule and adjusted in the handout of the day’s flow.

B. Welcome by the Bishop

The gathering of priests with their bishop is important in order to advance the work of the diocese and help foster a regeneration of the priesthood. The welcome by the bishop helps set the tone for the day and the direction of the diocese.

C. PowerPoint presentation for the Summit

The schedule in Appendix I is directly related to the PowerPoint in Appendix G.

In Appendix J you have the schedule of the day with notes that may assist you. These notes correspond to the sections. These notes are brief and offer some essential information. This can be used at your discretion.

D. Responses of priests can be used to help “prime the pump”

As indicated earlier, some of the responses of priests could be placed on PowerPoint and set in the continuous run position so that during the break or lunch, the priest will be able to see the words of his brother priests, or even his own words.

E. Invitation Resource Process

It needs to be acknowledged that not every priest is comfortable in inviting men to consider the priesthood. Today’s social climate, the thoughts of rejection, asking someone to sacrifice (pick up his cross), a hesitancy to add another thing to his list of tasks to do - whatever the concern might be, some priests find it hard to invite. The emphasis in this workshop is that it is important for the priest to invite. As the gift of ordination gives the priest the ability to say “This is My Body”, “This is My Blood”, “I absolve you”, so too does the priest have the gifted ability to say: “Come follow me.” It’s not about us, it’s all about Christ. It is Christ’s words we speak, not our own. Christ encountered a difficult social climate, rejection, having to pick up his cross, and adding another task when people asked. It will never be easy. It was not easy for Christ, it will most likely not be easy for us. We have to work at inviting men to consider priesthood.

The sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a "sacred power" which is none other than that of Christ. (CCC 1551)

Nevertheless, this section will help priests in the act of identifying who would make a good priest, and the ways to invite a man to consider the priesthood.

1. --Qualities and characteristics of prospective seminarians

Appendix K has a list of qualities and characteristics to keep in mind when looking at the caliber of a man. We all know that not everyone is called to the priesthood. It takes a special person to be an effective priest today. This list is not exhaustive and it can be adapted to include other elements that the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of*

Men task force may like to add. First and foremost, we need to rely on the grace of God in dealing with the mystery of a priestly vocation.

2. --Ways to invite a man to consider priesthood

Personal invitation coupled with the reasons why he would make a good priest have always been a positive experience for young men. Identify the qualities that he has – what others have seen and what you see.

The Eucharist (as seen in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and also added in the notes of the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* schedule) shows that the close proximity to the celebration of the Mass remains a font of priestly vocations.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, our Holy Father renews within priests their great ability to model priesthood when celebrating the Eucharist.

The centrality of the Eucharist in the life and ministry of priests is the basis of its centrality in the pastoral promotion of priestly vocations. It is in the Eucharist that prayer for vocations is most closely united to prayer of Christ the eternal high priest. At the same time, the diligence of priests in carrying out their Eucharistic ministry together with the conscious, active and fruitful participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, provides young men with a powerful example and incentive for responding generously to God's call. Often, it is the example of a priest's fervent pastoral charity, which the Lord uses to sow and to bring to fruition in a man's heart the seed of the priestly calling. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 31)

Prior to entering the seminary, a high percentage of 2005's newly ordained were actively involved in the celebration of the Eucharist. 60% of the priests ordained this year were Eucharistic ministers. 76% were Altar servers. 68% were Lectors in their parishes. Many of our future priests are right in front of us, and their service has demonstrated their desire to serve the Church. Such proximity to the Eucharist and to priestly ministry affords the Church a prime opportunity to extend the invitation for these men to consider the priesthood.

3. --What to do when a man says "yes"

Rejoice and offer a prayer of thanks! Priests of the diocese should be informed of the importance of getting this person's name and contact information to the Vocation Office. This time of nurturing the priestly vocation and addressing the questions he might have should be shared by the priest of the parish and the vocation personnel.

4. --How to proceed in nurturing a vocation without providing dual formation

There should be an open and honest conversation of priest involvement in the lives of seminarians. The support shown to a perspective seminarian should include a healthy interaction of priests in the diocese and vocation personnel. The ultimate goal is to provide what is best for the man with the priestly vocation. Members of the presbyterate and vocation personnel should know the part they play in nurturing a priestly vocation.

F. Follow up Plans

The follow-up plans are most important in identifying the thoughts of the priests in the diocese relative to priestly vocation efforts. These plans offer each person at the table the chance to offer some insights into how best to promote priestly vocations. It also affords the group the opportunity to identify the best contributions. These “best contributions” are then discussed with the larger group during the *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* gathering. The task force then presents the follow-plans to the newly established committee of priest volunteers to help with the follow-up. Such committees and priest involvement is essential in establishing a vocation culture within a presbyterate. We all know that promoting vocations to the priesthood is not solely the responsibility of the Vocation Director. Getting more priests involved at this level reinforces this conviction.

The follow-up plans can be found in Appendix L. The statements on the follow-up sheets can be adjusted at the discretion of the task force committee in order to assure an effective response from the priests and to bring forth a smooth flow in conversation.

G. Priest volunteers for committees

In Appendix L you will find a sign-up sheet for priests to indicate that they are willing to be a part of an ongoing conversation about promoting priestly vocations in the diocese. This committee will then take the information given in the follow-up sheets and put them into action. Identify what is best and how it could be applied to your particular diocese.

H. Evaluation Form

Appendix M has an evaluation form that will assist you in assessing the day and the process.

PHASE IV--Follow-up Meetings

Thorough follow-up is the basis for successful implementation. This area gives some basic ideas of what might be helpful.

A. PowerPoint presentation on results of summit

The committee may decide to create a presentation that would be used in offering the Presbyteral Council some feedback on the project. This would include the information

found in the follow-up sheets and an overall assessment of how the program was received by the priests.

B. Formulate the process to execute the plans with Presbyteral Council

At some point, the newly established *Priestly Life and Vocation Summit: Fishers of Men* committee may want to offer some suggestions before the Presbyteral Council for their thoughts and insights.

C. Approval by the bishop

Having received the suggestions of the Presbyteral Council, the Committee now presents its strategy to the bishop for approval.

D. Execute and move forward with the plans

Ongoing efforts will be needed to get the majority of priests on board with the tasks of inviting men to consider the priesthood. However, with prayer and perseverance the Lord of the Harvest will hear our prayers and “give success to the work of our hands” (Ps.90:17).

Other Resources in Binder:

- A. Articles regarding Priesthood and Celibacy**
- B. Words of Pope John Paul II inviting men to consider priesthood**
- C. Letter of invitation to high school students by the pastor**
- D. Discernment information**
- E. Fisher of Men Rosary Beads**
- F. CDRom – PowerPoints and Documents**
- G. Trailer for the DVD – “Fishers of Men”**
- H. DVD – “Fishers of Men”**