

## AN UNDERSTANDING OF “DISCERNMENT”

How does one understand the concept of discernment. Etymologically, discernment means to “separate apart” so we might distinguish something in order for it to be perceived clearly. It is the way in which we identify God’s will within the context in which we live. Most of us do know God’s will because it has been revealed through the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. However, there are times when God’s will is not so clear and we realize that we need to search for what God is asking of us.

Discernment is an art and it is learned by doing, not just reading about it. It is a function of an individual’s personal relationship with the Lord. When we desire to do God’s will, are willing to be open to God and have a solid knowledge of God, then discernment is possible. Therefore, prayer is an essential component to the process of discernment. To be a truly discerning person, we need to be humble, charitable and courageous. As we become more familiar with the Lord in prayer, we will come to know that the “small still voice” speaks in peace never in turmoil, anxiety or restlessness.

Some **practical suggestions** which will help a young man discern a call to priesthood are:

- 1) **Daily Mass** - one who is discerning a call to priesthood is encouraged to participate in the daily celebration of Mass so that he can grow in his relationship with the Lord.
- 2) **Sacrament of Penance** – The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is the way in which a man attempts to live a holy life - through the frequent confession of sins and by the grace of God.
- 3) **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament** – this is a powerful way to grow in love with the Eucharistic Lord and to grow in the spiritual life.
- 4) **Daily Prayer** – this is time set aside for God alone, usually in a quiet place at a specific time each day. This prayer time might consist of talking to the Lord in one’s own words or praying the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels. Developing a daily habit and pattern of prayer will help the young man to hear more clearly the call of the Lord.
- 5) **Spiritual Direction** – speaking with a priest or qualified individual trained in direction about one’s prayer life and seeking advice from this person on a regular basis is very helpful as one discerns a vocation to the priesthood.
- 6) **Discernment Programs** – attending a weekend retreat at a seminary, vocation evenings or joining a discussion group of other young men discerning a vocation are invaluable in helping one to come to greater clarity about God’s call to priesthood.
- 7) **Devotion to the Blessed Mother** - praying the rosary daily and seeking the powerful intercession of the Blessed Mother is especially recommended in the discernment process.
- 8) **Get involved** in some form of service with the Church. For example, outreach to the poor, teaching religious education, lecturing at Mass, taking Holy Communion

to the sick, working with the young of a parish, etc. are ways to give one a taste of “ministry” and may also increase one’s desire for ministry and service.

- 9) **Talk to a Vocation Director** – in order to obtain further information about seminary and priestly life. The vocation director may also help through regular meetings so as to help in discerning with the young man the authenticity of the call.