

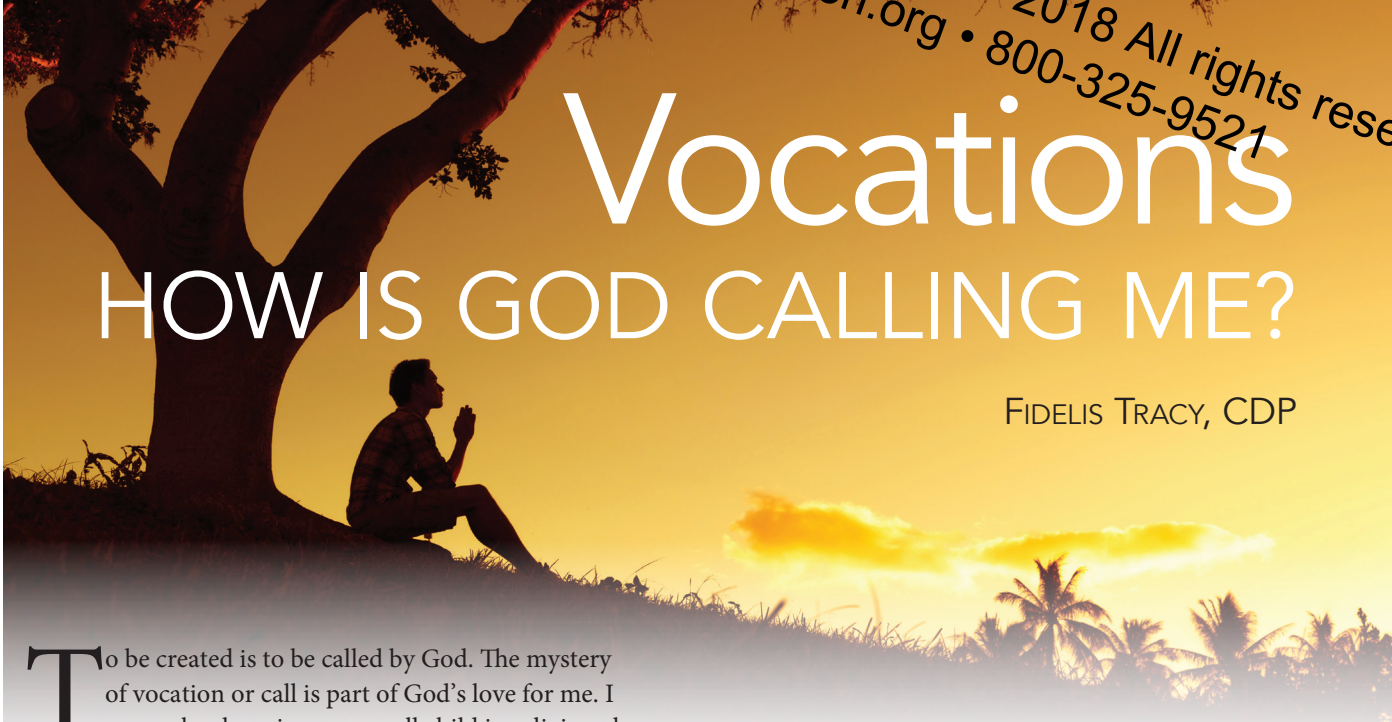
Catholic

UPDATE

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Vocations

HOW IS GOD CALLING ME?

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To be created is to be called by God. The mystery of vocation or call is part of God's love for me. I remember learning as a small child in religion class that God loves me and keeps creating me day by day. So I am convinced that God's creating me is both a gift and a call. I respond to God's love and God's call by becoming more visibly the image of God that I am.

In this *Update*, we will take a closer look at this notion of calling, or vocation, especially in relation to the specialized callings of ordination and religious life. It is important to remember, though, that everyone is being called by God. These specialized vocations of ordained and religious life can only be understood in that context. Everyone in the Church is called to help nurture these particular vocations of service to the people of God. So this *Update* is not only for those who are considering religious life or ordained ministry, but also for parents, grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles—indeed everyone in the Church who is seeking God's ongoing call or who is nurturing God's call in others.

How do we know we are following our call to holiness? It will manifest itself when we become like Jesus: compassionate, forgiving, loving, and healing toward others. If I think about the people in my life whom I would readily call holy, I would think of neighbors who reached out to

those in need when it was not convenient or those who were concerned about suffering people in poor countries. Or I might associate holiness with courage in adversity, a courage that comes from faith. Holiness is manifested in selfless love, forgiveness, and service. Everyone has a vocation.

We may think we know each other well, but our knowledge of each other only goes so far. In our depths, each and every one of us is in touch with the mystery of God. At the core of each person is a call, a vocation. It is a call to holiness, to becoming a living response to God's love. Call is common to everyone, yet responding to God's love is meant to be unique and particular for me. Knowing myself and being honest about my dreams and capabilities are the first steps in discovering how I am called to live out my vocation to holiness.

Discovering the mystery of God's calling for me is not like solving the mystery laid out in a novel or TV series. God is not cleverly trying to trick me into suspecting the wrong choice is the right one. As a matter of fact, God is so gracious that as I choose any direction, there are before me a multitude of paths toward my goal of union with God.

As I try to discover whether God is calling me to holiness through marriage or single life, as a priest, deacon, or member of a religious community, it is important to remember that my call is not a narrow plan that God is hiding from me. Being relaxed and trusting that God loves me and always gives what I need for my salvation will help me discern my call in a healthy way.

Ministry is not for a chosen few but is mandated by our baptism. And every ministry, married or celibate, involves service. The service required of me may be a specifically Church-related ministry such as religious education or pastoral care of the sick. Or it may be service to the poor in a soup kitchen, serving the sick as a doctor or nurse, or caring for children or an aging parent. As a baptized Christian, I participate in the life and mission of Jesus by attending to the needs of others.

There is a misconception that one becomes a member of a religious community in order to work in a parish, school, hospital, social service organization, or as a missionary to a Third-World country. All these ministries can be done by persons who are not members of religious communities.

Signs of a Call to Religious Life

Love of God that manifests itself in a desire to give one's life as a witness to the immensity of God's love for all people

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The vocation to religious life



A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path... on rocky ground...among thorns....But some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. MATTHEW 13:3-9