

# MISSION INTENTIONS

FEBRUARY 2024-2025

Let us pray that the Church might welcome the desires and doubts of young people who feel called to serve Christ's mission in the priesthood and religious life.

## Country Focus: United States of America

## Leading to Knowledge of the Faith

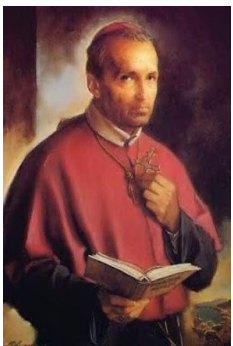
It is no secret that the number of people entering the priesthood or religious life here in the United States is declining. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), out of Georgetown University, the U.S. had about 60,000 priests in 1970, but only had about 34,000 in 2023. The decline in religious sisters has been even more drastic. In 1970, there were about 180,000 religious sisters in the U.S., compared to about 35,000 in 2023. Additionally, in 2018, about 58 percent of religious sisters responded to a CARA survey stating that a relative or friend had tried to talk them out of joining the religious life.

However, there is some hopeful news in regards to vocations in the U.S. The number of priestly ordinations has not declined significantly in the last 25 years. In 2000, about 450 priests were ordained in the U.S., about the same number that was ordained in 2023. Let us join the Holy Father in prayer this month so that we might see an increase in vocations in the U.S.

God gives each of us gifts and talents that are uniquely ours so that we may achieve the purpose for which He has created us. Discerning what God is calling us to may often be a difficult process. Pope Francis, in his 2019 Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, gives some advice on how to begin discerning our vocation: *"...there are certain questions we should ask... These questions should be centered less on ourselves and our own inclinations, but on others, so that our discernment leads us to see our life in relation to their lives... [God] has decided that you should also be for others, and he has given you many qualities, inclinations, gifts and charisms... to share with those around you"* (nos. 285, 286).

## Saint Spotlight

## Saint Alphonsus Liguori Feast Day August 1st.



If you were a Catholic in the 1700's, it is possible that the homilies you heard at Mass would have seemed very stern, and maybe even dramatic, based on the preaching style of the time. This is what made Saint Alphonsus Liguori such a popular priest with so many people. His preaching style was simple and practical. His messages could easily be understood by people with little to no education and who struggled daily with poverty.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori was born near Naples, Italy, about 1670. His parents provided him the best of educations, hiring private tutors to teach him. Saint Alphonsus Liguori excelled at his studies, receiving a doctorate in canon and civil law when he was just 16.

However, after several years of practicing law, Saint Alphonsus Liguori knew that it was not the job for him.

Much to the disappointment of his father, he gave up his career as a lawyer to join the priesthood, and was ordained in 1726. Just six years later, he founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (known as the Redemptorists). Redemptorist priests, including Saint Alphonsus Liguori, would go from town to town preaching and living within the communities to whom they were ministering. This was how Saint Alphonsus Liguori lived for many decades.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori was also a gifted writer and composer who wrote many books now used to guide the Church in her teachings on moral theology. He also composed hymns that are still sung today.

When he was 66, he was appointed bishop of Sant' Agata, a title he was reluctant to accept. He retired in 1775 due to poor health, and died in 1787. He was canonized in 1839 and became a Doctor of the Church in 1871. In 1950, he was made a patron of confessors and moral theologians.

## Formation for Life in Christ

Joining the priesthood or religious life may be a scary thing to consider. Signing up for a life that is radically different from what is regarded as “normal” in today’s culture may come with many doubts and fears. It is important to remember that God has called each of us to a particular vocation, and it is only through living out that vocation—whether we are called to the priesthood, religious life, marriage, or fruitful singlehood—that we will find true happiness.

If you are considering if priesthood or religious life might be something God is calling you to, there are many spiritual practices to help you in your discernment process. The first is to attend Mass regularly, including daily Mass when you are able. Receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation often may also help you determine God’s will for your life. Praying every day, especially the Rosary, spending time in adoration, and reading the Scriptures and other spiritual books may also help you clarify God’s call for your life. Getting involved in your parish may help you learn whether the priesthood or religious life might be for you. Finally, finding a spiritual advisor, such as a priest or religious sister, to answer any questions you might have and to help you with your discernment process, may be a great tool in helping you decide whether you are called to be a priest or religious sister.

The Office of Vocations in the

Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis also offers several programs to help young people decide if they are called to the priesthood or religious life. Young men ages 16-24 are invited to learn about the seminary at Vianney Visits. These events include Mass, prayer, testimonies from seminarians, and conversations with St. John Vianney priests. Operation Andrew Dinners for men 16 and older are hosted by Archbishop Hebda and/or one of his auxiliary bishops. During the dinners, young men who are discerning priesthood have the opportunity to gather with one another and to learn about seminary life and the application process. Archbishop Hebda and the Director of Vocations also offer a discernment retreat for high school juniors to men aged 24. This allows those thinking about entering the priesthood time for reflection and clarity in their discernment.

For young women thinking about entering religious life, the Office of Vocations offers Miriam Dinners for women ages 16-35 to pray and meet religious sisters and hear vocation stories. Both young women and men ages 14-17 may also attend the annual Quo Vadis camp to learn how to listen to God’s call. For more information, visit <https://www.10000vocations.org/>.



## Celebrating the Mystery

While all baptized Catholics are part of a common priesthood, some men are called to a special role to become ordained priests. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, these men become representatives of Christ and are called to imitate Jesus in all they do.

A priest is first and foremost a servant of others (Sacramentum Caritatis, no. 23). “*As Christ ‘emptied himself’ (Phil 2:7) to become the suffering servant, so too priests give themselves in service for the Church and the world*” (Sacraments and Social Mission, “Holy Orders: Ordained to Serve, Gather, Transform and Send”, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021). Priests have many responsibilities, including celebrating the Eucharist, teaching the Gospel, and ministering in a special way to the sick and poor. When a priest lives out his calling, he helps to continue Christ’s mission.

### Teaching Prayer: Discernment

How can you tell if God is calling you to the priesthood or religious life? Did you know God gives us signs to help reveal our vocation? There are four main signs. **Availability and openness** means being open and able to respond to God’s call; **desire** means feeling satisfied when considering a potential path; **proper motivation** means wanting to do something for spiritual reasons; and **general disposition** means being able to carry out the work. For more information on discernment, [click here](#).

## Curious About What Vocation God is Calling You To?

✚ In this month’s video, we hear several people talk about their vocations. How did each person decide what God was calling them to do with their life?

✚ Name one thing you learned about discernment from watching this video. How does this help you decide what vocation God is calling you to?

✚ What vocation do you think God is calling you to? How could you use this vocation to help build up the Church?



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