
An Inside Look

**A Leader's Guide
to the Vocations Series**

by Clare vanBrandwijk

**Saint Mary's Press
Winona, Minnesota**



Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-consumer waste.
Printed with soy-based ink.

The publishing team included Christine Schmertz Navarro, development editor; Gabrielle Koenig, copy editor and production editor; Barbara Bartelson, typesetter; Andy Palmer, art director and cover designer; manufactured by the production services department of Saint Mary's Press.

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All Web sites were accessed June 3, 2002.

The acknowledgments continue on page 92.

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Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 2010 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02

ISBN 0-88489-775-3

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INTRODUCTION

Vocation Stories and Discernment

Stories

The Power of Stories

During the high school years and continuing into early adulthood, young people are faced with the tension and the mystery of coming to understand who they are and how God is calling them to live in the world. Along with countless external pressures about how to look and act and choices about career and higher education, an internal drama unfolds as an emerging identity poses its own series of questions. Young people can feel “up a tree,” like Zacchaeus, scanning the horizon for a way to make sense of life.

Just as Jesus beckoned Zacchaeus to come down and spend time with him, he calls young people to look at their gifts and their life in his company. Jesus desires that young people spend time with him through reading the Scriptures and listening to the story of his life and the stories that he told. The story of their own life will hopefully be one that shares Jesus’ message and brings others to God.

God also communicates with young people through Christian adults who invite young people into their life, share their stories with them, and listen to the young peoples’ own unfolding stories. Stories have a special power to engage us and transform us. In them we hear ourselves “told,” find ourselves anew, and move forward in our self-discovery and vocational discernment.

The Stories Before Us

In the Vocations series, a single person, a sister, a priest, a brother, and a married couple share their stories to mentor young people who are searching for their own vocation. In *Single Life: An Inside Look*, Donna Kamann discusses how she recognized God’s calling within her life as a single person, and she describes how this discovery has shaped her life. In *Sisters: An Inside Look*, Sr. Kathleen Rooney tells how she lives out her call to the consecrated religious life, reflecting on her ministerial journey in light of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In *Priests: An Inside Look*, Rev. John P. Mack Jr. describes the requirements, the opportunities, the work, the rewards, the challenges, and the people that inspired him to become a priest. In *Brothers: An Inside Look*, Br. Larry Schatz relates the story of his journey from a high

school teacher to a Christian Brother who touches the hearts of his students. In *Married Life: An Inside Look*, Andrew P. Manion and Amy Schlumpf Manion tell how they live their wedding vows every day. A mini-biography of each storyteller can be found on the back cover of the Vocations books. Take some time to share these snapshots with the young people because they really do, in words and picture, put faces on the narratives.

These very human stories put faces on the vocations, removing some of the mystery behind them and making them more approachable and knowable. In reading and reflecting on these vocation stories, young people can more easily discover the story written on their own heart.

These books cannot speak to all the issues that surround a particular vocation, but they can connect young people with individuals who have asked questions, struggled and wondered, and found their own true vocation in different ways. *An Inside Look: A Leader's Guide to the Vocations Series* is meant to help you, as a teacher, a catechist, a campus minister, or a youth minister, use these stories in the context of a school or parish setting.

Remember that you bring a very valuable asset to the conversation—your own story. Later in this introduction, you will be encouraged to reflect on your own story and how you might share it with the young people. Look around at the other adults with whom you live and work. What vocation stories might parents and colleagues be able to share?

The Contents of This Guide

A Flexible Approach

This leader's guide is designed for flexible use in the Catholic school and parish. Each of the following chapters is devoted to a different Vocations book and its corresponding vocation. The chapters are broken into three sections, each of which gives you the opportunity to present the vocation and the corresponding book from the Vocations series in a way that matches your time, resources, and circumstances.

Going in Depth. The first section provides activities for the optimal situation in which each young person has a copy of the particular Vocations book, allowing them to get to know the author and his or her views. The young people can then engage with the text in a reflective way. Other activities then invite the young people to go beyond the book into the community to learn more about the vocation. Find these subsections in this section:

- Reflect and Respond questions
- Universal Themes
- Interview Guide
- Activities
- Books and Media
- Portfolio

Taking a Look. The "Taking a Look" section is helpful when the young people may or may not have their own copy of the particular Vocations book

or when time or other circumstances dictate that the vocation will be studied more quickly. This section provides selections from the particular Vocations book in various forms and gives suggestions for adapting some of the activities from the “Going in Depth” section. This section includes the following subsections:

- An Introduction
- Interview
- Imagine (role-play)
- A Case to Examine

In the Course of Ministry. This final section offers “Points to Consider,” ideas for easily making vocation awareness and education a more integral part of activities that you do every day with young people; “Prayer Ideas” that are based on the particular Vocations book; and “Exploring Gifts,” which suggests fun activities to do with young people.

Regardless of your particular setting, you will want to look through each level for material that addresses the specific issues of the young people with whom you work and minister. Many of the ideas presented can be easily adapted for any setting. Mix and match!

Effectively Using This Guide and the Vocations Series

You might find some of these suggestions helpful when you are preparing to use this series in your particular setting.

Reflecting on Your Own Story

Prepare yourself to use the Vocations books with young people by reflecting on your own vocation story. This exercise will enable you to bring to mind personal experiences that might be relevant to your conversations with them. Reminding yourself of key questions, moments, and people in your history will enable you to be more attentive to parallels in the stories shared and in the lives of the young people.

Create a vocation timeline by dividing your life into seven-year segments. For each segment identify the thoughts you had about your vocation at that time. Identify the people from each time period who called forth the person you were becoming and the events that contributed to your discovery of your place in the world. Recall ways that you noticed God’s touch in your life. Draw comparisons with the material you are presenting, and make prudent decisions about how much of your own story to share.

Encouraging Critical Reading

Young people can always benefit from improving their critical reading skills. Foster critical reading of the books in the Vocations series by taking just a few minutes before assigning reading to cover the points provided on handout Introduction–A, “Reading Critically.”

Leading Discussion

One of the great powers of stories, like the parables Jesus told, is that they invite us to identify our own questions. Before entering into the specific ques-

tions about each story provided in this leader's guide, begin by inviting the young people to share any initial questions or thoughts that surfaced from their reading. Prompt them to share by posing open-ended questions such as these:

- What message did this person's story have for you?
- Which life-experiences do you think taught this person who he or she is?
- Who played a role in helping this person discover who he or she was becoming?
- If you could have a conversation with this person, what one question would you ask?

Fostering Discernment

A primary goal in sharing these stories with young people is to help them discern their own vocations. To help young people reflect on who they are and how God is personally calling them to live in the world, share the Hasidic legend and the excerpt from *Evangelium Vitae* that are in the series foreword at the beginning of each Vocations book. Then lead a discussion, asking, "How do you think you will know how God is personally calling you to live in this world?" Share the following points about discernment from the series foreword:

- **Be patient with the mystery of your vocation.** It takes a lifetime to decipher the meaning of your uniqueness. Live the questions that arise along the way.
- **Have confidence in God's direction.** God is your most present and patient companion, always at work revealing your life's purpose to you.
- **Listen to the people and events of your life.** They manifest God's presence to you. They remind you to respect others for their gifts, which highlight and mirror your own.

Introducing Young People to Quiet

Quiet can be somewhat of a hard sell, yet it is crucial for listening to God's call. In quiet we can hear the gentle voice of God speaking in our heart. Very little in our culture affirms the value of quiet, and young people are rarely drawn to it. You may want to be subtle in introducing quiet. Once the young people have an experience with quiet, they recognize their hunger for it and open up to its value.

- **Gathering.** Bring the young people together in a quiet, spacious place.
- **Posture.** Invite them either to sit relaxed in a chair with their back firmly against the chair back, feet firmly on the floor, hands resting on their lap; or to lie on their back on the floor, feet uncrossed, and hands at their sides.
- **Mood.** Establish the mood by telling the young people to quiet themselves and to allow their gaze to fall inward. Warn them that as soon as they become restless, any unrest inside them will surface: upcoming tests, disagreements with loved ones, worries, and insecurities. Reassure them that this is natural. Tell them to handle these distractions by identifying them. For example, they might say to themselves, "I have a test I am worried about," "I

had an argument with Ryan,” and so on. When these distractions “know” they have been heard, they usually go away satisfied.

- **Relaxation.** Tell the young people to relax their bodies slowly and methodically. Beginning with the forehead, moving to the cheeks, neck, shoulders, arms, on down through the torso, thighs, calves, and feet, tell them to tense the muscles in each area, hold for a few seconds, and let go. Tell the young people to be quiet for a few minutes while they relax their bodies this way, flexing and releasing muscles from head to toe several times.
- **Breathing.** Now tell them to become aware of their breathing. Tell them not to change it, just to observe it. After a minute ask them to even it out, deepen it, and gradually slow it down. Now invite them to continue like this for awhile, simply resting in God’s abiding presence. As they continue to breathe peacefully, tell them to listen to God’s invitation, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46:10).
- **Closing.** After several minutes invite the young people to close this time with God by expressing their feelings to God quietly in their own words. Tell them that when they are finished, they can open their eyes and return to a seated position if they have been lying down.

Discuss the experience with the young people. The conversation should not be awkward. Simply inviting them to share a word or phrase that summarizes their quiet time is usually sufficient. You might also ask if they have any interest in doing this kind of prayer again. Encourage them to find some time each day to quiet down and nourish their souls. Distribute handout Introduction-B, “Hints for Taking Quiet Time,” to the young people so they can practice quiet on their own.

Making Discernment a Way of Life

Catherine Bertrand, a School Sister of Notre Dame, is the executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). When she talks about fostering vocations, she emphasizes that it is never too early to be thinking about personal options. She describes the process as a way of life that includes both the steps toward discernment and the stumbling blocks.

Distribute handout Introduction-C, “Making Discernment a Way of Life,” and discuss it with the young people. In order to develop a subtle, more “holistic way of life” approach, familiarize yourself with these steps and integrate them into your time spent with the young people. Weave these steps into conversations, lessons, and shared prayer. Look for them in the stories in this series and help the young people to identify them. Focus on one of the suggested steps by posting it in the classroom or gathering space and changing it monthly. Use the activities in this introduction to challenge the young people to identify the discernment step they most need to incorporate into their life and support them with a positive word or note of encouragement.

Stumbling Blocks in Discernment

Sister Catherine identifies several stumbling blocks that people can experience in the process of discerning a vocation. These can be found on handout Introduction-D, “Stumbling Blocks to Discernment.” Again, attempt a holistic approach for building awareness of these stumbling blocks. Ask the young people: “Which of these stumbling blocks strikes a nerve with you?” “How

might a person avoid or overcome one of these challenges?" "Do you feel you have overcome or avoided any of these stumbling blocks?"

Look for these stumbling blocks in the Vocations stories and in the discussions you have with the young people. For a good discussion of commitment, see pages 55–57 in *Married Life*. For a good discussion of the influence of the opinions of others, see pages 20–21 in *Sisters*. Throughout her account in *Single Life*, Donna Kamann talks about overcoming fears and uncertainties in following a vocational path.

The Growing Edge

The term *growing edge* refers to the area of life that a person targets for learning and improvement. Use handout Introduction–C, “Making Discernment a Way of Life,” to help the young people identify their growing edge when it comes to discernment. Read over each of the six points with them, and ask them the following questions:

- Which of these six discernment practices is most present or absent from your life?
- Which growing-edge practice would be of the most help to you right now?

Invite the young people to write a journal entry that discusses which practice they selected as their growing edge and that gives at least two steps they can take to grow in this area. After sufficient time has elapsed for writing, have the young people share their ideas.

Portfolio Connection

If the young people will be assembling a portfolio as they learn about various vocations, this is a good activity to include first and then to repeat later so that they can assess their own growth. The subsequent chapters offer suggestions for activities that the young people can do for each vocation to include in a portfolio. Since each young person has several vocation options, a portfolio is a helpful way for him or her to look at those options all together. Such an overview can be a helpful step in the discernment process.

Online Vocations Resources

Catholic Online. Catholic Online has a summary of the writings of Pope John Paul II on vocations and contains links to dozens of Web sites run by various religious orders. www.catholic.org

Marriage Magazine. *Marriage Magazine* and its Web site share the stories of successful marriages and offer supportive insights for living the married vocation. www.marriagemagazine.org

National Coalition for Church Vocations (NCCV). The NCCV is a source for information about brothers, sisters, priests, and deacons. The coalition provides resources including prayer cards, posters, videos, lesson plans, liturgical resources, discernment materials, informational brochures, and Spanish language resources. See their resource *Out on a Limb: Vocation Resources for Teens* (Chicago, IL: NCCV, 1999). Contact NCCV for their catalog at 800-671-NCCV; www.nccv-vocations.org.

National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC). The NRVC provides information about vocations, links to helpful Web sites, and information about the magazine *Vision*, which is the annual religious vocation discernment guide from the NRVC. NRVC, 5420 South Cornell Avenue, Suite 105, Chicago, IL 60615-5604; 773-363-5454; www.nrvc.net.

St. Anthony Messenger Press. The Web site for St. Anthony Messenger Press offers “Links for Learners,” “Catholic Updates,” and “Youth Updates” that focus on discernment and vocations. www.americancatholic.org

Search Institute. The Search Institute is a nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. On the Web site, find *Pass It On! Ready-to-Use Handouts for Asset Builders*, edited by Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999). The developmental assets are forty opportunities, skills, relationships, values, and self-perceptions that all young people need to succeed. You will find a wealth of material that relates to promoting healthy vocation awareness in the ideas suggested in these handouts. Contact the Search Institute, The Banks Building, 615 First Avenue NE, Suite 125, Minneapolis, MN 55413; 800-888-7828; www.search-institute.org.

Serra International. Serra International is an organization of Catholic laymen and laywomen who, as members of local Serra Clubs, work to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. Several of their activities aim to surface the names of individuals who have the qualities necessary for a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life. A Ministry Potential Discerner questionnaire is also available through Serra International. Contact your local club or log on to www.serrainternational.org.

For Further Reading

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READING CRITICALLY

These ideas can help you read a text more carefully, especially when you are reading a text that requires real personal engagement.

- 1. Make notes as you read.** Make your entries either in the book margins if you own the book or in a notebook. Date your comments as a reference point. The simple act of writing your thoughts as you read helps you to enter into dialogue with the material.
- 2. Question the text in your notes.** Ask, What don't I agree with? What isn't clear? What would I like to know more about? Why does the author say this?
- 3. Record points of agreement.** Highlight passages that resonate with your own experiences, and describe similar thoughts and feelings of your own.
- 4. Finally, bring these notes to discussion.** Ask for clarification, share your doubts and questions, voice your agreement.

HINTS FOR TAKING QUIET TIME

Find a Space

Find a quiet, spacious place where you can comfortably relax without interruption.

Relax

Sit in a comfortable chair with your back firmly against the chair back, your feet firmly on the floor, and your hands resting on your lap; or lie on your back on the floor, keeping your feet uncrossed and hands at your sides.

Quiet Yourself

Quiet yourself, and allow your gaze to fall inward. As soon as you become restful, any unrest inside you will surface: upcoming tests, disagreements with loved ones, worries, and insecurities. This is natural. Handle these distractions by identifying your concern, perhaps saying something like, "I have a test I am worried about," "I had an argument with Ryan," and so on. When these distractions "know" they have been heard, they usually go away satisfied.

Relax Deeply

Relax your body slowly and methodically. Beginning with your forehead, move to your cheeks, neck, shoulders, arms, on down through the torso, thighs, calves, feet. Tense the muscles in each area, hold for a few seconds, and let go. Be quiet for a few minutes while you relax your body this way, flexing and releasing the muscles from head to toe several times.

Breathe Slowly

Become aware of your breathing. Do not change it, just observe it. After a minute even it out, deepen it, and gradually slow it down. Continue like this for awhile, simply resting in God's abiding presence. As you continue to breathe peacefully, listen to God's invitation, "Be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10, NRSV.).

Talk with God

After several minutes close this time with God by expressing your feelings to him quietly in your own words. Then open your eyes.

MAKING DISCERNMENT A WAY OF LIFE

Use these suggestions to integrate discernment into your life. These ideas challenge the common misperception that vocation discernment is a one-time event.

Explore and be open to options. Think, “My way may not be the only way.” Be aware that your own perspective is formed by your personal experiences and that there are many other ways that people grow up and live as adults. Talk to some of these other people.

Get the information necessary to make good choices. Many good paths have been left untaken for lack of understanding and awareness. Search the Web, read a book, or interview someone; become a vocations explorer. Not one minute spent in discovery is wasted.

Learn how to be attentive to the Spirit at all times. At the end of each day, ask yourself four questions:

- How was God revealed to me today?
- How did I respond to God’s grace in my life today, especially in being attentive to the needs of others?
- For what do I need to ask forgiveness?
- For what do I give thanks to God?

Find a good mentor, guide, or spiritual director, as well as good companions. Someone once said that a true friend is like a mirror of the self. Mentors, guides, spiritual directors, and friends help us to see ourselves more completely, for better or for worse, and thereby help us to grow.

Pray alone and with others. Effort is what counts when praying, not perfection or style. The following ideas will get you started:

- Find time for silence and a place that is holy ground.
- Allow your mind and heart to be touched by the word of God regularly.
- Select a passage that is your touchstone (for example, Psalm 51:10: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.”). Be attuned to what may become a favorite prayer or mantra (for example: “God, give me the gift of a generous heart.”).

Develop the art of listening and the art of being quiet. Take time each day to be quiet and reflect on the events of the day to hear ways in which God is speaking to you.

(Adapted from Catherine Bertrand, “On Responding to God’s Call: Points to Consider on Vocations” in *Origins*, volume 30, number 35, February 15, 2001)

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO DISCERNMENT

Sometimes discernment can be hampered by the following situations.

Fear and excuses. Often expressed as a lack of readiness or a concern about choosing the wrong vocation, fear and excuses put the discernment process on hold. At such times remember that God gives you a lifetime. Hang in there.

Sense of self. Young people who lack a positive identity may not feel good enough, smart enough, or holy enough to consider a particular vocation. Focusing too much on personal flaws inhibits the ability to set goals and make positive decisions.

Commitment. The choice of a particular path means the exclusion of other options as well as being comfortable within the limits and boundaries of a particular vocation. The absence of an escape clause makes commitment frightening for some.

Opinions of others. Fear of being misunderstood and of standing alone makes some vocational choices intimidating. Without affirmation and the support of others, choices for the future can be hard to make. The societal definition of success runs contrary to being a follower of Christ.

Laziness. Any vocation takes time and energy and comes with a price tag. When it all looks too daunting, remember the old adage, "The lazy person works twice." Sooner or later, forestalling a choice will mean a lot of catch-up work.

(Adapted from Catherine Bertrand, "On Responding to God's Call: Points to Consider on Vocations" in *Origins*, volume 30, number 35, February 15, 2001)

CHAPTER 1

Single Life

When is the single life a *vocation*? Single life might be a vocation for those people who eventually choose a lifetime of singleness. Others who are single, while hoping to marry or to follow a call to ordination or to religious life, might think they are waiting for their real life to begin. Being single—whether freely chosen or not—can be a vocation in itself. Do you choose to be single, or does God choose for you? (Donna Kamann, *Single Life*, p. 25)

Donna Kamann poses an important question about single living: “When is the single life a vocation?” In *Single Life: An Inside Look*, we listen as she discovers the answer. Donna tackles many of the negative societal perceptions of single living: Are single people single because no one wants them? Are they a pack of self-centered individualists? Is single living a continuous party with no strings attached? Can a person really grow as a “single” in the same way he or she could in marriage or religious life? Donna addresses these difficult questions as she shares the challenges and joys that her life as a single woman has brought her.

This chapter will help you to probe the various facets of single living with the young people with whom you work and minister. All young people will be single at one point in their life, perhaps for many years. All of them will ask some of the many questions that Donna asks herself. Reading Donna’s account, therefore, can be a great springboard for discussing the issues the young people are beginning to face now.

Single Life: Going in Depth

Reflect and Respond

These questions do not focus on reading comprehension as much as “trying on” the author’s thoughts and experiences as a single person. They are provided on handout 1–A, “Reflect and Respond: *Single Life*,” which organizes the questions by chapter. Ask the young people to prepare answers to the questions as a springboard for class discussion. Adapt the questions for use in journal writing and small-group sharing. At the end of the discussion, move the

young people toward vocational discernment around these stories by asking them to complete one of the following sentence starters:

- For me the greatest joy of the single vocation would be . . .
- For me the greatest challenge of the single vocation would be . . .
- A gift or talent of mine that I could best use as a single person is . . .
- A gift or talent that I have that may not be suited to single living is . . .

Universal Themes

This leader’s guide highlights themes from each of the books in the Vocations series that, while true for a particular vocation, apply to all vocations. Prepare the young people for the activities in this section by telling them to look for these themes while reading. More than one theme is provided for each book. You may choose to cover all the themes in the manner suggested or make one the special focus of a discussion or reflection paper.

Keeping a Balance

Throughout *Single Life*, Donna Kamann speaks of finding balance as a lifelong challenge. These passages from the book give examples of areas in which Donna struggled to find balance.

- page 18 (trusting, requesting help, taking personal responsibility for growth)
- pages 26–27 (self-care)
- pages 36–37 (sharing space)
- pages 63–65 (interdependence)
- pages 61–63 (loneliness)

Before discussing any of the particular issues that Donna addresses, invite the young people to reflect on the meaning of balance in their own life. Then examine the different places where Donna strives for balance, and ask the young people to brainstorm ways of bringing balance into that aspect of life.

Conclude the discussion by identifying ways that balance is critical for each of the vocations: single, married, religious, and ordained. If the young people have read any of the other books from the Vocations series, ask them to cite specific examples of the search for balance from the lives of the other authors.

Being a Student of Life

One of Donna Kamann’s qualities is that she is a “student of life.” She reflects deeply on her life experiences and allows them to teach her. (See pages 18–19, 38, 50–51, and 73.)

Ask the young people to identify someone they consider to be a “student of life” and to explain why. Invite them to relate a time when they were a “student of life” and to share what they learned from the experience. Explore with them how being a “student of life” is a good quality to develop for discerning vocations. If the young people have read the other Vocations books, ask them in what specific ways the other authors also displayed the characteristics of being such a student.