

12th Grade: Priesthood

OPENING SCRIPTURE

5-7 min

Begin with short prayer and/or lead a meditation based on lesson's scripture.

"And another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say farewell to my family at home.' Jesus said, 'No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

- LUKE 9:61-62 ^[1]

REVIEW OPTION

8-10 min

Tie today's class to the previous vocation lesson or other classes you have been working on.

Note to teacher: A free program is available to begin a "discernment group" to help male students further discern the priesthood. The Melchizedek Project offers free books, discussion guides, and leader guides. Groups meet seven times per semester for about 90 minutes. Order a sample packet or request free materials for your group.

CLASS OVERVIEW

This lesson helps male students to be prepared to eventually discern whether they might have a vocation to the priesthood. It also helps all students to develop a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the priesthood.

The lesson includes a class discussion of the priesthood using an example story, followed by a role-play of talking to others about interest in the priesthood, especially parents and friends. The lesson closes with the students actively participating in a reenactment of the ordination rite.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>

PRIESTHOOD

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CLASS DISCUSSION:

PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Guys: Imagine that you feel called to the priesthood. Now imagine that you need to tell your parents about it. How would you prepare?

Girls: Imagine a close male friend feels calls to the priesthood. Help him prepare to tell his parents about it.

STEP 1: INITIAL CONVERSATIONS (BEFORE "BREAKING THE NEWS")

- Before announcing your intention to pursue a vocation to the priesthood, seek conversations with your parents about the priesthood in general.
- If you do not know how they feel about the Catholic Church, ask them about it. If you do not know how they feel about the general idea of the priesthood, find out.
- See how they react, rather than simply assuming there will be a problem. You might be pleasantly surprised by their reactions, especially if they have a high regard for the Church and the priesthood.
- If they seem put off by the idea of the priesthood, stay calm and affectionate—it's your family!—and ask them why they feel that way. It will be more beneficial to your relationship in the long run if you are calm and loving rather than reacting with indignation. Even if their responses are very negative, they are more likely to come around if you don't allow yourself to be disturbed by their reactions.
- Ask the vocation director (or another trusted and knowledgeable adult) for advice on how to talk to your family.



Talking to your close friends and family about your plans is important, even if it's not always easy.

Image from www.shutterstock.com

STEP 2: BREAK THE NEWS GENTLY

Hopefully, you have been able to follow Step 1, talking with your family and friends multiple times about the general idea of the priesthood. If it has been too hard to talk about your personal interest, don't worry. You have to tell them sometime, and here is how to break the news in the best way possible.

- As you begin the conversation, especially if you have never mentioned the possibility of this vocation, do some damage control. Apologize for the fact that you never brought it up before, and tell them that you love them. You don't need to give reasons why you never mentioned the topic.
- During the conversation, tell them very simply that you want to become a priest. Tell what attracted you to the priesthood, and demonstrate that you understand its challenges as well as its joys. If this is the first conversation, and you expect resistance, you do not need to mention how firmly you have made up your mind.

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CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Goal

Male students will prepare for possible concerns from friends and relatives about a vocation to the priesthood, and practice responding to those concerns positively from an informed perspective. In addition, all students will gain a better appreciation for the potential challenges of telling their family or friends about their intention to pursue a vocation to the priesthood.

CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD *continued*

Instructions

Initiate a class discussion using some or all of the following points:

1. Boys, if you have felt some desire for the priesthood, you might be wondering how you would tell your family or your friends. It can be hard to talk to people about this. Girls, it can be hard to hear this news too — from your brother, friend, or even boyfriend.

A. Story example: St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) had a hard time telling his family about his decision to become a priest. He had been a successful lawyer; his family had worked hard to help him get to that successful position. It was not easy to tell them he was leaving it all. He is not the most famous saint, but in many churches in Lent, if you ever go to Stations of the Cross, you may find them using the most popular prayers ever written for the Stations of the Cross, written by Fr. Alphonsus Liguori. One of the lines that comes up over and over is this prayer to Christ: “Grant that I may love Thee always; and then do with me what Thou will.” That’s a good prayer for any of us, especially one who is wondering how to talk to his family about a vocation.

2. If you fear the reaction of your family, remember the reaction of family and friends is based on their love for you; they are not your enemies. However, they may also not have good information, and therefore think that you are making a mistake. It’s important to be both solid in your convictions and patient with your family when approaching them with the possibility of an extraordinary vocation.

PRIESTHOOD

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Then ask the students these questions:

1. What reaction do you think you would receive if you told your parents, family, or friends about a desire to be a priest? What do you think they would say?
2. Has anyone already talked to parents, trusted adults, teachers, or friends about an interest in the priesthood? Can anyone share about how this went? What was hard? What was really helpful?
3. How would you react to this news from a friend or brother?
4. (To the girls) How would you react to this news from a boyfriend? What would you say? It is not common but it does happen. What do you think would be the best possible reaction you could have to this news, one that would acknowledge the goodness of God’s plan for him?

CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD *continued*

As students begin this conversation, list on the board what they might fear or expect in discussing this vocation with others. If conversation lags, here are some typical concerns:^[2]

1. If you have never consulted with parents, family or friends, they may be hurt that you have made up your mind without ever consulting them. They know you and love you, and they may resent what looks like “going behind their backs.”
2. Parents, family or friends might want you to be successful, in a conventional, worldly way. They may want you to get a great education, have a successful and wealthy career, marry and have grandchildren. They might possibly want help in the family business. They could see the priesthood as throwing this all away.
 - A. “I’ll feel like I’ll disappoint them if I choose the priesthood.”
 - B. “I’ll feel like I’m disobeying if I choose the priesthood over my parents’ wishes.”
3. On the other hand, some men feel pressured into become a priest.
 - A. “If I enter seminary and then leave, people will be devastated.”
 - B. “If I leave, I won’t ever be able to have a normal place in the family or community again because of what people will think.”
4. Some family or friends are against the Catholic Church, or at least the priesthood.
 - A. “They’ll bring up issues about the priest scandal, celibacy, women’s ordination—anything. What would I say?”



PRIESTHOOD

CLASS DISCUSSION: PREPARING TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

- Offer practical ways for everyone to get more information about your desire. You have to plan ahead for this:
 - *A Priest in the Family* by Fr. Brett Brannen is a great resource for parents.
 - Ask if them if they would like to meet the vocation director, even have him over for dinner.
 - Visit a seminary and see if family can talk to the rector.
 - Attend the diocesan annual Chrism Mass or an ordination Mass. The vocation director can give you these dates.
- If any “downsides” to the vocation are brought up, acknowledge that you are aware of the challenges. If pressed for more information, address any particular concerns the others might bring up. If it seems like the discussion is turning into an argument, it might be good to back down a bit and suggest pursuing one of the practical steps above. Try to end conversations by expressing your love and concern for family and friends.
- Again, remember that it will be more beneficial to your relationship in the long run if you are calm and loving rather than reacting with indignation. Even if their responses are very negative, they are more likely to come around if you don’t allow yourself to be disturbed by their reactions and show them that you are open to hearing them, even if you remain firm in your intention to discern your vocation.

ROLE-PLAY: TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT THE PRIESTHOOD

In this exercise, you will participate in will role-play a conversation between parents and their son who is interested in becoming a priest.

To prepare, you may refer to the “Tough Topics” pages:

- Clerical Celibacy
- Male Priesthood
- The Sexual Abuse Crisis

GROUPS OF 4

One girl to play mom, one guy to play dad, one guy to play possible priests, and 4th guy/girl to play coach for the “potential priest.” The “parents” play Devil’s Advocate and ask questions or express concerns to the “potential priest.” The “potential priest” practices answering and addressing these concerns. The 4th student coach helps the “potential priest” if he is having trouble explaining or answering questions. If the group finishes early, they can switch roles.

GROUPS OF 2

One parent/friend, one guy to play the “potential priest.” The parent/friend plays Devil’s Advocate and asks questions or expresses concerns to the “potential priest.” The “potential priest” practices answering and addressing these concerns. If the two are both guys, and time allows, they can switch roles.

OPTIONAL: PRACTICE ENCOURAGEMENT

One girl to play friend, sister; one guy to play “potential priest.” The “potential priest” tells his decision and the girl/guy practices offering more than generic encouragement. This is a good moment for both to think about what they would and should say to such news. You can offer congratulations or encouragement, or ask questions.

When students have articulated some of their fears, direct them to the student section “Talking with Others about a Vocation to the Priesthood.” This can be used as further discussion material, or given as a reading assignment in class or at home. (Handouts can be printed from the student PDF.)

[2] Taken from Fr. Brett Brannen’s *To Save a Thousand Souls*, p. 206.

ROLE-PLAY: TALKING TO OTHERS ABOUT THE PRIESTHOOD

Break students into groups to prepare and then role-play talking about the vocation of the priesthood. (See grouping options in the student section. If you have fellow teachers, teacher aids, trusted students, etc., you can pick a grouping of 2 to 4 people to model to the whole class how to role-play the conversation, or how not to have a good conversation.) If there is time, students can break and re-form into new groups.

Resources

To help prepare for their role-playing sessions, students may refer to the Tough Topics pages listed in the student section. You can also provide other resources from previous units – in particular, see Applying for the Priesthood (from the Junior Unit). Students can review the resources in groups, talk about them, and then practice talking about the vocation with family/friends.

After role-play, bring class together for a discussion about their experiences. Some suggested questions:

1. What would be hard about talking to family/friends?
2. What are good ways to support someone thinking about the priesthood?



PRIESTHOOD

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ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

Note to the teacher: Acting out the rite aloud in dialogue can be very powerful. Students can feel what it is like to be at an ordination Mass and how important that would be. It can help them have a sense of reverence and awe for the priesthood they might not get by a silent reading of the rite.

Assign the following parts:

- The Candidates to be ordained priests: Male students
- Bishop: Male teacher or student
- Deacon: Male teacher or student
- Narrator: Male or female student
- Vocation Director: Male teacher or student
- Congregation: Remaining students

Everyone should follow the postures of sitting, standing, kneeling where outlined in the rite and read by the narrator. (There is no narrator, of course, in a real rite). If the teacher so wishes, props can be obtained for a more complete representation of the rite.

Suggested props (can be omitted or adapted to the circumstances):

- “Cathedra” (chair) for the bishop
- “Lectern” for the Vocation Director
- List for the “Deacon” of names of the candidates to read aloud
- “Vestments” for the new candidates—looking like a stole or chasuble
- Olive oil for the “chrism”
- “Linen” cloths, one for the bishop and one for each candidate to wipe the “chrism”



PRIESTHOOD

ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

RITE OF ORDINATION

Narrator: *The ordination of priests begins after the Gospel. The bishop wearing his miter sits at his chair; the candidates are called by the deacon.*

Calling of the Candidates

Deacon: Let those to be ordained priests, please stand.

Narrator: *The Deacon reads each name. Those to be ordained stand and answer as they are called, bowing to the bishop as a sign of reverence.*

Candidates: Present.

Presentation of the Candidates

Vocation Director (standing at lectern): Most Reverend Father, holy Mother Church asks you to ordain these, our brothers, to the responsibility of the priesthood.

Bishop: Do you know them to be worthy?

Vocation Director: After inquiry among the Christian people and upon the recommendation of those responsible, I testify that they have been found worthy.

Election by the Bishop and Consent of the People

Bishop: Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we choose these, our brothers, for the Order of the priesthood.

Narrator: *All present give their assent to the choice by applause.*

Homily

Narrator: *All sit, and the bishop gives the homily. He begins with the text of the readings from Scripture and then speaks to the people and the candidates about the office of priestly office.*



The candidates stand before the bishop as he questions them.

Examination of the Candidates

Narrator: *The candidates then stand before the bishop, who questions all of them together:*

Bishop: Dear sons, before you enter the Order of priesthood, you must declare before the people your intention to undertake this office. Do you resolve, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank, as worthy fellow workers with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you resolve to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you resolve to celebrate faithfully and reverently, in accord with the Church's tradition, the mysteries of Christ, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you resolve to implore with us God's mercy upon the people entrusted to your care by observing the command to pray without ceasing?

Candidates: I do.

[3] Alice von Hildebrand, *By Love Refined: Letters to a Young Bride*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Press, 1989, 12).

Notes for the teacher (may be explained in whole or part to the students at your discretion):

- The rite takes place within the context of the Mass.^[3]
- The Rite begins with the Liturgy of the Word; everything is done as at regular Mass, except the readings may be taken from those suggested in the Lectionary.

Optional discussion questions are given below, if you wish to spend a further class later going through this rite. Otherwise, simply read through the rite.

{3} There is a great pictorial presentation of the Rite of Ordination at <http://norprov.org/news/ordinations2005.htm>



PRIESTHOOD

ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

Bishop: Do you resolve to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with him to consecrate yourselves to God for the salvation of all?

Candidates: I do, with the help of God.

Promise of Obedience

Narrator: Then each candidate goes to the bishop in turn and, kneeling before him, places his joined hands between those of the bishop.

Bishop: Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

Invitation to Prayer

Narrator: Then all stand, and the bishop, without his miter, invites the people to pray:

Bishop: My dear people, let us pray that God the all-powerful Father will pour out abundantly the gifts of heaven on these, his servants, whom he has chosen for the office of priest.



The candidates lie on the ground asking for God's mercy, that they may become holy and upright priests for His people.

Narrator: The Candidates lie face down on the ground while the rest pray a Litany of the Saints, like the following:

All: Lord, have mercy on us...
Christ, have mercy on us...
Lord, have mercy on us...

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us...
St. Michael, pray for us...
St. Gabriel, pray for us...
St. John the Baptist, pray for us...
St. Peter, pray for us...
St. Paul, pray for us...
St. Joseph, pray for us...
St. Dominic, pray for us...
St. Ann, pray for us...
St. Mary Magdalen, pray for us...
St. Cecilia, pray for us...
All holy men and women of God, pray for us...
Lord, be merciful, Lord save your people...
From all evil, Lord save your people...
Christ, hear us, Christ, graciously hear us...
Lord Jesus, hear our prayer.

Narrator: Then the bishop alone stands and, with his hands joined, says:

Bishop: Hear us, we beseech you, Lord our God, and pour out on these servants of yours the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the power of priestly grace, that those whom in the sight of your mercy we offer to be consecrated, may be surrounded by your rich and unending gifts. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Laying On of Hands

Narrator: All stand. The candidates kneel in a row before the bishop. The bishop lays his hands on each of their heads, in silence. Next all the priests present, wearing stoles, lay their hands upon the candidates, in silence. After the laying on of hands, the priests remain on either side of the bishop until the prayer of consecration is completed.



ROLE-PLAY: THE ORDINATION RITE

Prayer of Consecration

Narrator: *The candidates kneel. With his hands extended over them, the bishop says the prayer of consecration:*

Bishop: Draw near, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, author of human dignity: it is you who apportion all graces. Through you everything progresses; through you all things are made to stand firm. To form a priestly people you appoint ministers of Christ your Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, arranging them in different orders. Already in the earlier covenant offices arose, established through mystical rites: when you set Moses and Aaron over your people to govern and sanctify them, you chose men next in



The Bishop says the prayer of consecration with his hands on the ordinand's head.

rank and dignity to accompany them and assist them in their task. So too in the desert you implanted the spirit of Moses in the hearts of seventy wise men; and with their help he ruled your people with greater ease. So also upon the sons of Aaron you poured an abundant share of their father's plenty, that the number of the priests prescribed by the Law might be sufficient for the sacrifices of the tabernacle, which were a shadow of the good things to come. But in these last days, holy Father, you sent your Son into the world, Jesus, who is Apostle and High Priest of our confession. Through the Holy Spirit he offered himself to you as a spotless victim; and he made his Apostles, consecrated in the truth, sharers in his mission. You provided them also with companions to proclaim and carry out the work of salvation throughout the whole world. And now we beseech you, Lord, in our weakness, to grant us these helpers that we need to exercise the priesthood that comes from the Apostles.

Grant, we pray, Almighty Father, to these your servants the dignity of the priesthood; renew deep within them the Spirit of holiness; may they henceforth possess this office which comes from you, O God, and is next in rank to the office of Bishop; and by the example of their manner of life, may they instill right conduct. May they be worthy coworkers with our Order, so that by their preaching and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the words of the Gospel may bear fruit in human hearts and reach even to the ends of the earth. Together with us, may they be faithful stewards of your mysteries, so that your people may be renewed in the waters of rebirth and nourished from your altar; so that sinners may be reconciled and the sick raised up. May they be joined with us, Lord, in imploring your mercy for the people entrusted to their care and for all the world. And so may the full number of the nations, gathered together in Christ, be transformed into your one people and made perfect in your Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Investiture With Stole and Chasuble

Narrator: *After the prayer of consecration, the bishop, wearing his miter, sits, and the newly ordained stand. The assisting priests return to their places, but some of them arrange the stoles of the newly ordained as they are worn by priests and vest them in chasubles.*

Anointing of Hands

Narrator: *Next the bishop receives a linen gremial and anoints with chrism the palms of the new priests as they kneel before him.*

Bishop: The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, guard and preserve you that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God.

Narrator: *Then the bishop and the new priests wash their hands. Mass continues as usual, with the exception that the changeable prayers are replaced with prayers specific to ordination, and that the new priests concelebrate with the bishop.*



PRIESTHOOD

HOMEWORK

Write a letter to the Diocesan Vocation Director, asking every question you have about the priesthood. It may include personal questions or questions you have heard from other people. Feel free to ask anything. Girls' letters can ask for advice on how to counsel a friend who is discerning the priesthood.

While this letter will not be mailed (unless you decide to mail it), write as if you were really writing to the Vocation Director.