



# Into the Depths

## A Year of Fishing

by Fr. Timothy D. Hepner

In the middle of the summer, I found myself sitting at a Mexican restaurant with about eight men from one of our Catholic high schools. The food wasn't that great, but the conversation was. Before I knew it, we had been there about three hours, joking, talking about the faith, and discussing the problems of the world. I was very impressed by these men. Not only did they know their faith, but they had a personal relationship with Christ. Eventually it felt natural for me to ask, "What do you guys think your vocations might be?" A few answered "Marriage," one said, "I might be called to be a priest, I'm not sure." But one young man looked at me with eagerness and confidence and simply said, "Priesthood." Surprised at his boldness, I asked, "What makes you say that." He said, "I don't know. I can't explain it."

Many young men in our diocese are experiencing a mysterious tug at their hearts toward something very countercultural and impractical. Despite the cynicism and anger that pervades our country, these young men, intelligent and aware of the world, are ready to joyfully give themselves to discernment for the priesthood. And I have been blessed enough to witness the initial stirrings of the Spirit in their hearts.

When any priest tells his vocation story, there is always an inexplicable element—an interior movement that can't be reduced to words. This is why, from the beginning, the Holy Spirit has made me realize that my job as vocation director is to "set out into the depths." I'm not a salesman or an army recruiter. While I do

challenge men to be open to the priesthood, I never give undue pressure. My goal is to build relationships, to give them tools for prayer and discernment, and to fan into flame whatever holy desires they have. In a word, my main job is discipleship.

I have been blessed to travel to our Newman Centers, high schools, grade schools, and parishes and connect with men who have potential vocations. I have been humbled to see their virtue and their prayer lives. I have also been moved to prayer by the obstacles placed before them: a culture, friends, and sometimes even families who can't comprehend why a

man would "throw his life away" for the priesthood. I don't blame these people. Their objections make perfect sense according to the world's rationale. But because of their influence, men who are discerning often suffer, and sometimes even

waver in following through on their call.

That is why we are continuing our efforts to promote vocational awareness in schools, parishes, and especially families. Fifty years ago, discerning a vocation was commonplace and expected among Catholics. Every Catholic boy and young man should be open to the possibility of the priesthood, and every family should see that as a possibility—and even

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# Upcoming Events

We have big plans in the next few months, and we *want you to be part of them!* Here are some events you are invited to:

**September 14<sup>th</sup>, 6:30pm, St. Thomas the Apostle, Peoria Heights:** Monthly Peoria-area Holy Hour for Vocations. *For more information on these Holy Hours, or to start one in your parish, please contact us.*

**September 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Diocesan-wide Novena to St. Therese (enclosed) begins. The bishop is asking *all Catholics* in our diocese to pray this. Please make copies for

friends, fellow parishioners, and the sick and homebound.

**September 27<sup>th</sup>, 6pm, St. Patrick Church in Galesburg:** Holy Hour for Vocations for the Galesburg Vicariate

**October 1<sup>st</sup> (Feast of St. Therese), 6pm, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Peoria:** A special holy hour asking St. Therese to continue sending us good holy priests. Students from our high schools and Newman Centers will serve and play music.

**October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10:30am, Cathedral:** Mass for Vocations in honor of St. Therese.

**October 25<sup>th</sup>:** Rhonda Gruenewald, author of *Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry*, speaks to all diocesan priests about promoting vocations at a parish level and creating Parish Vocations Apostolates

**January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, 9am-2pm, St. Jude Parish, Peoria:** Parish Vocations Apostolate Workshop by Rhonda Gruenewald. *More info below.*



## How to Pray for Priestly Vocations

Use the Prayer Calendar and offer your works and prayers of each day for a different priest, seminarian, or group of people.

Adopt a priest or seminarian to pray for every day.

Start a monthly vocations holy hour at your parish.

Give a vocations prayer card to a person who is sick, homebound, in the hospital or nursing home and ask them to offer up their prayers and sufferings for vocations.

Pray a brief prayer every day and ask that God choose one person from your family, school, parish, or group of friends to be a priest.

Fast or offer up some other sacrifice, in union with prayer.

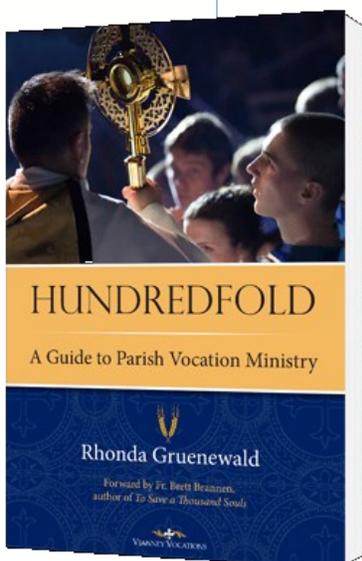
Go to [comeandfollowme.org/howtohelp/prayer-and-sacrifice](http://comeandfollowme.org/howtohelp/prayer-and-sacrifice)

## Beginning a Parish Vocations Apostolate

Next January 21<sup>st</sup>, we will have a diocesan-wide workshop on beginning Parish Vocations Apostolates. The main speaker, Rhonda Gruenewald, helped to create a successful vocations ministry in her parish in Houston, Texas. She then went on to write *Hundredfold: a Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry*. Many parishes in our diocese are already implementing the lessons from *Hundredfold* in their own vocations apostolates. Many others have also begun praying and working to increase vocations awareness in various ways. But, through the intercession of St. Therese and with the guidance of Mrs.

Gruenewald, we have decided to launch this new effort diocesan-wide, with renewed prayer and energy. Priests will have a chance to hear Rhonda speak on October 25<sup>th</sup>, and we will ask each priest to select

people to represent his parish or cluster at the workshop in January. We would also like representatives from our schools, Newman Centers, religious orders, and lay movements to come.



If you are interested in helping with communication/publicity, event logistics, finances, or networking for the workshop, please contact us in the Office of Priestly Vocations (309-671-1550 or [fr\\_hepner@cdop.org](mailto:fr_hepner@cdop.org)). If you would like to underwrite the workshop to ensure that it is free for all who attend, please contact us as well. What follows is a description from Rhonda's website, [vocationministry.com](http://vocationministry.com), of what a vocations apostolate (sometimes called a vocations "ministry") will look like:

"The expectation is that each ministry will start small and simple, and then grow in size and depth. Each ministry must prayerfully and logically assess its interest in and ability to tackle a particular event.

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# Passage to Pray With:

## LOVE NEVER FAILS

“Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury. It does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” ~1 Cor 12:31-13:8



## Apostolate cont'd.

For example, a Vocation Ministry that has three members and no budget will be limited to certain activities until the Holy Spirit provides more volunteers and resources. Another parish may have ample financial and human resources but still be a fledgling ministry; it, too, will have to be careful about which activities parishioners are ready to receive. Perhaps the most influential factor, after prayer, in a ministry's success is choosing which activities to initiate, and when. Each diocese, parish, and ministry will differ in size, age, maturity, inclination, interests, budget, and support.

The importance of the concept of doing this work in phases cannot be overstated. Understanding and accepting the ministry's developmental stage is absolutely critical to the success of the program. Similar to a weekend athlete overextending himself and suffering an injury, a Vocation Ministry risks biting off more than it can chew. The result could be a setback with far-reaching implications. Pay prayerful and careful consideration to the section on phases, and use the first-hand advice on how to choose the most appropriate activities at the most appropriate times in the ministry's life.

The activities fall within four major categories: Prayer, Education/Awareness, Youth, and Affirmation. Prayer for vocations is first and foremost, and it will transform a parish in God's time. Raising awareness and knowledge of vocations in both cradle Catholics and converts strengthens the ministry and broadens its reach. Certain activities specifically target youth, both in religious education classes within the parish and at the parish schools.

Finally, time spent affirming those who have given their lives to the priesthood, religious, or married life shows appreciation and lifts their spirits. It also draws attention to their service and their joy in serving, which can inspire others to follow their worthy path.

The success of a Vocation Ministry should be measured over years, not months, so leaders and participants are encouraged not to rush to take on too much at once—and not to get frustrated with early roadblocks or with what feels like slow progress. Progress and transformation happen in God's time; all the Vocation Ministry can do is focus on prayer and on educational, affirming, and inspirational activities, allowing God to bring the harvest.”

~Taken from [vocationsministry.com](http://vocationsministry.com)

## Quote of the Month

**“Unfortunately when I have compared myself with the saints, I have always found that there is the same difference between the saints and me as there is between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and a humble grain of sand trodden underfoot by passersby. Instead of being discouraged, I told myself: God would not make me wish for something impossible and so, in spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint. It is impossible for me to grow bigger, so I put up with myself as I am, with all my countless faults. But I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new [...] It is your arms, Jesus, which are the lift to carry me to heaven, and so there is no need for me to grow up. In fact, just the opposite: I must stay little and become less and less. ~ St. Therese of Lisieux**

### THE LIFE OF PRAYER:

“For me, prayer is an upward leap of the heart, an untroubled glance towards heaven, a cry of gratitude and love which I utter from the depths of sorrow as well as from the heights of joy. It has a supernatural grandeur which expands the soul and unites it with God. I say an Our Father or a Hail Mary when I feel so spiritually barren that I cannot summon up a single worthwhile thought. These two prayers fill me with rapture and feed and satisfy my soul.”

“Praying for sinners fascinated me, but praying for the souls of priests, whom I thought were purer than crystal, seemed strange to me! ... I lived with many holy priests for one month and understood that, if their sublime dignity lifts them above the angels, this does not mean that they are not weak and fragile... This is the vocation of Carmel, because the only purpose of our prayers and our sacrifices is to be an apostle of the apostles, to pray for them whilst they evangelise souls by words and above all by example.”

~St. Therese of Lisieux

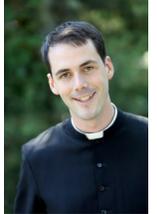
rejoice at it. For this reason, I'm also asking all of you to pray for the families of men who are called to seminary. Pray for open hearts, softened and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Pray also for these men to have courage to say "yes" to Christ and embrace the awesome call before them despite the obstacles they face.

After a year of "fishing" for vocations, I have been blessed to spend time in the depths and in the sacred space of young people's experience of Christ. I ask you to help me continue setting out into the deep by persevering in prayer and in your own spiritual life. Do you practice *Lectio Divina* every day? Are you able to visit the Blessed Sacrament or attend daily mass during the week? Do you pray the rosary and meditate on the mysteries of Christ's life? Is confession a regular part of your life? Through all these things we develop an interior life and, unconsciously affecting those around us, draw them into the deep waters of grace as well. This is how we promote vocations, by making it possible for young

people to hear that mysterious voice in the silence of their hearts. We can't give what we don't have, so we will never teach young people to pray if we ourselves haven't put in the effort. And when you pray, please keep in mind those of us who work for vocations.

Finally, I ask you to consider participating in some of the events that are planned in the next few months and publicized inside this newsletter. In particular, I want to invite you to **pray the Novena to St. Therese beginning September 23rd, the Holy Hour for Vocations at the Cathedral in honor of St. Therese on October 1st, and to the Vocations Apostolate Workshop on January 21, 2017.** Please contact us if you would like to be involved in planning these or future events. Above all, on behalf of the bishop and the entire diocese, *thank you* for your work in promoting vocations to the priesthood!

*~Fr. Tim Hepner is the Vocation Director of Recruitment for the Diocese of Peoria.*



**WANT TO SUPPORT PRIESTLY VOCATIONS? KNOW A YOUNG MAN WHO MAY BE CALLED? CONTACT US:**

**CALL 309-671-1550 OR VISIT US ONLINE AT COMEANDFOLLOWME.ORG**

**FOLLOW ME.**

Everyone is called to something. What's your calling?

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*Want to save paper and help us be good stewards? Sign up for an electronic copy: email [achovan@cdop.org](mailto:achovan@cdop.org).*