

God's call: 'You belong with ME'

"If you could see that I'm the one who understands you, been here all along, so why can't you see? You belong with me."

These lyrics are from a Taylor Swift single that tells the story of a teenage girl who is in love with her friend who cannot see past his girlfriend and realize all that she has to offer. She sees that he is not able to be himself around his girlfriend, because the girlfriend does not understand who he really is.

This story is not unlike how God views us. God could be the nerdy Taylor Swift character trying to get our attention to let us know that there is someone beyond the superficial things in life who loves us and wants the best for us.

Most of us will never have our lives depicted in a Taylor Swift song, but we will have experiences of vocational discernment throughout our lives. "What do I want to be when I grow up?" "What college should I attend?" "What should be my career path?"

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It has been my experience with youth and young adults when this topic has been discussed that they rapidly fire off what course

of study they plan to pursue in college and are excited to engage in conversation about it. I applaud them for their selection of such noble professions and their due diligence, but my challenge to them is the same for all of us: that we seldom ask the question, "God, what is it you want from me?"

WHAT WE BELIEVE

When we talk about vocation, we introduce a vertical dimension in our life, which is God. It is no longer simply "what I prefer." A vocation is not something that you can switch like a profession or a career. The Modern Catholic Dictionary defines vocation as "a call from God to a distinctive state of life, in which the person can reach holiness."

This call to holiness is an ongoing conversion experience rooted in our baptism. It keeps our eyes open to new awareness of God's loving presence. It keeps inviting us to turn toward God by aligning our will with God's will. It is a movement that draws us toward a deeper union with God. We come to understand that there is a reason for our existence and there is meaning in our lives.

Jesus does not call us as nameless people in a faceless crowd. He calls individually, by name. God intends each one of us to play a unique role in carrying out the divine plan. There is no shortage of vocations in the Catholic Church. What we're seeing is a shortage of vocational discernment. Not enough people ask themselves what God wants them to do with their lives.

Discernment — not recruitment — should be central to vocation efforts today. Vocation

is not earned or a problem to be solved. It is a gift freely given by God and not contingent upon anything that we do or say.

OUR CHALLENGE

The diocese works diligently to help bridge any gaps in vocational discernment with young people. This is done through several direct ministry events such as retreats, in which seminarians participate in various roles. Staples of these ministry events include vocation discernment and witness talks, Mass, eucharistic adoration, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and prayer teams.

So, what are young people telling us about their experiences of discernment? The recent National Dialogue final report, the fruit of engagement with more than 10,000 young people, ministry leaders and families in over 450 recorded dialogue experiences, found that young adults already possess a strong sense of vocation and mission. They want to change the world and hope that others can accompany them in that calling. The Church needs to find ways to accompany the people of God at all stages of life in deeply personal ways. Our greatest challenge — and our most profound joy — will be to link this passion with a response to God's call. When we receive God's love, then freely give what has been so freely given to us, "We belong with him." †

DEACON JOHN BRANNEN
is director of youth, young
adult and campus ministry
for the Catholic Diocese
of Lexington.

