

Chapter 2

God's Plan for Your Life

Getting Started

Assign the students to read Chapter 2, "God's Plan for Your Life." Use the following questions from the Student Text to guide a discussion of the chapter:

- As of right now, what would you list as your college major? What is the basis for that choice or direction?
- If you could have any prayer answered, how would you answer it? How might your answer be different from God's answer to the same request?
- What time of the day or night do you prefer to pray?
- Name and explain some things you can do right now to prepare for marriage.
- Name a cause for which you would be willing to die. Explain why.

(See the Student Text for additional questions.) Then ask the students to read the following article.

Application Reading

<http://www.americamagazine.org/gettext.cfm?articleTypeID=1&textID=2012&issueID=377>

VOCATION EDUCATION

By James VanOosting

One can distinguish between two radically different approaches to making life choices—the professional and the vocational. The professional approach is so familiar as to be a cultural commonplace. It has such primacy in personal power, economic currency, and institutional warrant that it claims near monopoly status: is there any other way to make a decision? The professional approach is based on logic and is susceptible to quantitative analysis.

Discussion

Lead the students in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What are the differences between the professional and vocational approaches to making life choices? (The professional approach is based on logic and is susceptible to quantitative analysis; an option is chosen if the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, or if the odds of success are high. The vocational approach focuses on obedience, accountability, and faithfulness to the caller. A vocation is chosen if it fits with one's passion and gifts, and if it is confirmed by one's community or a mentor.)
2. How do vocations and professions differ in the way they define one's identity? (In a vocation, identity is based on gifts; in a profession, identity is based on what one does.)
3. Why are sacrifice and denial an important element of vocation? (Sacrificing some possibilities, and denying some gifts, is necessary in order to realize other possibilities and gifts.) What kind of sacrifices are necessary for a vocation to ordained ministry or religious life? Marriage? Single life?
4. How does faith enable people to pursue their passions and use their gifts in a vocation? (Faith teaches us that there is more to life than just getting by; it opens us to God's help, which is necessary to overcome long odds; and it gives us hope during times of challenge and struggle.)
5. What statement or concept from this reading did you find most challenging and/or interesting? Why?

Activity

A Vocation Discernment Exercise

- For this activity, each student will need a sheet of paper or newsprint and writing materials (pencils, pens, or markers). The activity will work best if the students are able to move to a quiet area for reflection; alternatively, plan to establish a quiet, meditative mood in your meeting space with candles, appropriate music, religious icons, and so on.
- Introduce the activity by reviewing the article "Vocation Education" by James VanOosting. Remind the students that one of the elements that VanOosting identifies as necessary for discerning a vocation is silence. Silence is necessary to hear more clearly the call of God, and the call of one's own heart.
- Tell the students that in this activity, they will have the opportunity to practice discerning a vocation in silence. Review James VanOosting's criteria for discerning a vocation: passion, gifts, and the confirmation of a commu-

nity or mentor. Additionally, VanOosting assumes that a vocation originates with God's call. Broadly speaking, God calls us to love God and one another.

- Have the students write the phrases "My Passions" and "My Gifts" at the top of their paper. Tell them that they will be given time to think about their passions and gifts, listing them under each category as they think of them. The goal of the exercise is to practice prayerful discernment; students should not worry about arriving at a vocation or career decision. Therefore, students should approach this time with a spirit of openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, writing down whatever comes to mind. When they are finished, the students will have the opportunity to discuss their reflections with the whole group.
- Provide the students with a generous amount of time for reflection. Some students may complain that they can't think of any passions or gifts. Offer them encouragement by pointing out that God blesses everyone with gifts, and help them to broaden their thinking. To identify their passions, they might recall the discernment method used by St. Ignatius—what thoughts or activities give them a lasting happiness? What do they have energy for? To identify their gifts, they might think beyond the categories of sports, arts, and academics to the interactions of everyday life. How do they make a positive difference in the lives of others?
- When they are finished, gather the students together for discussion. Ask for volunteers to share the top items from their lists. Encourage discussion about their lists with questions such as the following: How do your passions and gifts reflect the will of God for us to love God and one another? Which of your passions and gifts might point you toward a vocation? How might your passions and gifts be used to do something good for the world? Why is it sometimes hard to recognize our own gifts? What role do other people play in helping us recognize our passions and gifts?
- Conclude by emphasizing that discernment is an ongoing process that often unfolds over years. Because Christ is encountered in the communion of his followers, the input and advice of others—especially from the faith community—is critical to the discernment process. Encourage them to take time out for this kind of quiet reflection and discussion with others often over the coming years.

Extend the activity:

- You can extend this activity by asking the students to double their lists of gifts and passions by soliciting the input of friends and family. Have them bring the expanded lists to your next meeting for a discussion of the role that friends and family play in the discernment process.

Additional Activities

- Have students read the call of Moses and Mary as described in #2 under Assignments and Applications (page 69 of the Student Text).
- Have the students search the Scriptures for examples of calls, as described under the second "Extending the Lesson" bullet point on page 48 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Lead the students in the "Thy Will Be Done" prayer service described on page 55 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Lead the students in centering prayer as described in step 3 under Exploring Christian Vocations, page 62 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Have the students do "drive-by prayers" as described in the "Extending the Lesson" activity on page 71 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Help the students create a discipleship hotline for the homebound as described in the "Extending the Lesson" activity on page 71 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Lead the students in the prayer service described under the Chapter 2 review on page 75 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Have students complete Handout 9, "Whom Do You Trust?" from page 323 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.
- Have students complete Handout 15, "Getting Ready for Marriage," from page 329 of the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.

Additional Resources

For Internet links related to this unit, see the Teacher's Wraparound Edition.

A video related to this chapter is "The Sacrament of Marriage" (Twenty-Third Publications, 25 minutes).