

INTRODUCTION

Dear parish volunteer, you've received this booklet because your pastor and parish community want to thank you for everything you do for this parish.

- Maybe you serve in a liturgical ministry as a lector, a member of the choir, a greeter, an altar server, Eucharistic minister, sacristan, or usher.
- Maybe you serve in an evangelization ministry as a member of the RCIA team or in outreach to lapsed Catholics.
- Maybe you serve in a pastoral ministry visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, helping with youth ministry, or leading a prayer group.
- Maybe you serve in a catechetical ministry as a catechist, a parish librarian, a vacation bible school aide, or a member of the adult education committee.
- Maybe you serve the cause of justice by helping with food and clothing drives, assisting refugees, or taking an active role on the Right to Life Committee.
- Maybe you serve the social needs of the parish by welcoming new parishioners, organizing the parish

picnic, hosting the coffee and donut hour after Mass, or coordinating the senior citizen group.

- Maybe you serve the temporal needs of the parish by helping with parish mailings, cleaning the church, sitting on the stewardship committee, working on fundraisers, or helping in many other ways.

No matter what role you play as a parish volunteer, you generously offer your time and your talent. You put your faith into action. But most important, as the poem popularly attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila tells us, you bring the presence of Christ to other people:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people.

So, thank you, thank you, thank you! Thank you for everything that you are! Thank you for everything you do!

One of the ways your parish wants to express its gratitude is by making sure you have the spiritual support you need to continue and deepen your ministry. It is not uncommon for volunteers to neglect their spiritual lives amid the hustle and bustle of getting things done in a parish. The pastor and staff always stand ready to help you with your spiritual needs, and this little booklet offers some simple, practical ways to grow closer to our Lord.

Let's start by looking at how you were called to become a volunteer.

Chosen *by* God

TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK BACK ON HOW YOU STARTED VOLUNTEERING IN THIS PARISH. On the surface, you may remember having some extra time and offering to help in some way. Maybe you got involved because your kids were involved. Or a friend asked you to assist at a parish event. Or someone recognized that you have a talent that could meet a special need in the parish.

But if you reflect a little more deeply, you may recall a desire to do something meaningful. Or maybe you experienced a strange series of events, coincidences, or changes in your life that led you to the place in the parish where you are today. Whether you realized it or not, the Holy Spirit was calling you into parish ministry.

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit speaks to us in an unexpected encounter, a dream, a difficult situation, or a touching moment. Sometimes the message is transmitted through something we read or through comments, advice, or insights offered by someone else. Images, ideas, and inspirations sometimes pop into our heads.

In his spiritual autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton described the movement of the Holy Spirit as “something quite new and strange, this voice that

seemed to prompt me, this firm, growing inner conviction of what I needed to do.” When you got involved in this parish, you said yes to the Holy Spirit. But it’s important to understand that being called is not a singular event. The Holy Spirit continues to speak to you in your ministry.

From Pope Francis

“You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world.”

GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE, 23

Ask for the ability to see where you are being led. Ask for the courage to follow. Then empty your mind and spend some quiet time, slowly reciting the name “Jesus,” until a calm sense of God’s presence comes over you.

In the evening, think back on the day. Record in a spiritual journal the things that happened and your reflections on how the Holy Spirit may have been speaking to you.

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

Listening to the Holy Spirit is not something that comes naturally, but it is an essential skill for anyone involved in parish life.

One of the biggest problems faced by volunteers is that we get so busy with what we are doing that we might not take time for quiet prayer and reflection. It’s a good idea to set aside a specific time every day for listening. If you’re just getting started, try to set aside five or ten minutes in the morning and another five or ten minutes before you go to sleep.

In the morning, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your path through the day.

Listening will open you to an exciting new awareness of God. As you move more deeply into your prayer life, new questions may arise.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO?

Sometimes, you will know with certainty where the Holy Spirit is leading you. Other times, it might not be as clear. Sometimes, you will see that what God is asking of you is very different from what you had originally thought.

St. Francis of Assisi misunderstood when God asked him to “go and repair my church.” He interpreted it as a directive to rebuild the chapel at San Damiano. It was only later that Francis realized God really wanted him to embrace a life of holiness through voluntary poverty that would restore the Catholic Church by challenging the worldly and complacent Christianity of his time.

How will you know if you are doing God’s will? In his *Rules for Discernment*, St. Ignatius of Loyola says confirmation of God’s will is characterized by a feeling of consolation or deep inner peace. It is the deep, abiding peace of Christ that the world cannot give or take away (see John 14:27).

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How were you called into ministry?
2. In what ways have you experienced God's continuing call?
3. Describe one time when you were certain of God's will. One time when you were uncertain. And one time when the Holy Spirit led you in a direction that was completely unexpected.

Gracious and loving God, help me to recognize your presence in my life and in my ministry. Keep me open to the inspirations of your Holy Spirit. Give me the courage I need to follow your will in everything that I say and do. Amen.

Gifted *and* Talented

GOD NEVER CALLS US WITHOUT GIVING US WHAT WE NEED TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT WE ARE BEING ASKED TO DO.

- Spiritual gifts are given for leadership, for spreading the gospel message, for prayer, for healing, and for ministering to the people of God. St. Paul tells us: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).
- Talents are in-born traits or abilities. Talents cannot be acquired. They are things you do naturally. Maybe you have a beautiful singing voice. Or athletic ability. Or you can comfort people. Or make people laugh.
- Skills are abilities that you acquire through study, practice, and hard work. You might have professional skills. Or carpentry skills. Or technology skills. Or culinary skills.

Our gifts, our talents, and even our ability to perfect skills were never intended for our own glory. We are expected to use our gifts to help each other, to share the gospel message, and to make the world a better place.

From Pope Francis

“Do not bury your talents! Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful. Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn.”

GENERAL AUDIENCE,
APRIL 24, 2013

Pope Francis tells us, “The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7)” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 11).

WHAT ARE YOUR GIFTS?

When we try to identify our gifts, we are sometimes stifled by a false sense of humility. We may know that we are gifted, but we don’t want anyone to think of us as conceited. Or we may underestimate our gifts or see them as insignificant. In both cases, it is important to remember that gifts are not about us. Everything we have—no matter now great or how small—is a gift from God.

ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR GROWTH AREAS

As we reflect on our strengths, however, an awareness of our weaknesses might also arise. We may question our ability to do what God is asking of us.

Don’t allow yourself to become discouraged. Everyone has a mix of strengths and weaknesses. Remember that God knows who you are. God knows your innermost thoughts, your desires, your insecurities, and your motivations—both good and bad. When God calls you to some ministry in your parish, you will receive the grace you need to make it happen.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What gifts and talents has God given to you?
2. What special skills have you developed?
3. How are you using your gifts, talents, and skills in the service of the Lord?

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Thank you, Lord, for the gifts and talents that you have given to me. Help me to always use my gifts and talents for good. Increase my faith so that I will always believe that you will give me the grace I need to accomplish whatever you ask me to do. Amen.