

9 Tips for Discerning Religious Life

All Catholic women are invited to take a time of discernment before entering into their vocation. The Latin word *discernere* means “to separate”. So, when someone is discerning a vocation to the consecrated life, they are taking extra time apart from their regular duties in order to pray and discover God’s unique plan. If you are currently open to discerning consecrated life or have a daughter, cousin, or friend who is asking the question, here are a few tips.

1. Do Not Be Afraid

Ask the Lord to make His desires your desires.

2. Create a Timeline

Usually a year of serious discernment can provide a lot of clarity. Obviously, we can’t control God’s timing, but we can do the hard work of discernment on our end and then go forth in peace. Some women get sucked into a vortex of perpetual discernment, which can be very confusing and exhausting.

I entrusted my own vocational discernment into the hands of Mary and chose a Marian feast as an ending date.

3. Pray, Pray, Pray

This is obvious, but there are some specific prayer practices that can be especially helpful.

- Go to daily Mass // This will be the source and summit of your day and your life.
- **Make frequent Confessions** (at least once a month) // Many sisters have confession every week and this Sacrament is a source of incredible grace.
- Create **space for solitude** and silence every day // Become familiar with the voice of the Good Shepherd, so that when He calls, you will recognize his voice.
- Learn how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours (as this is prayed by most religious communities) // Try starting **here** if you are not sure how to navigate the four volume breviary.
- **Pray the Rosary** // Ask Our Lady, Star of the Sea to guide your discernment.

4. Find a Spiritual Director

Your pastor may be able to provide spiritual direction, a recommendation, or reference for you. Consider contacting the vocation office in your diocese. Trust me, it's not as scary as it sounds! The vocation director can also provide spiritual direction or give a recommendation.

Some priests are more open to taking a new directee if they know that it is a short term commitment. Say something like, "Would you have time to meet 3 times in the next 6 months as I am discerning my vocation?"

You could also go on a directed silent Ignatian retreat. You can start with a 1 or 2 day retreat and work your way up to an 8 day retreat.

5. Research and Pray with the Charisms

Look into the various religious orders (Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian, etc.) and their charisms. Also dive deep into the Evangelical Counsels (chastity, poverty, and obedience).

6. Learn More About Active Vs. Contemplative Life

Religious life can take on many forms: cloistered, monastic, mendicant, contemplative, active, and so on. The [Council of Major Superiors for Women Religious](#) and the [Institute on Religious Life](#) are good places to start.

7. Spend Time with Other Women Who are Discerning

Many dioceses offer Women's Discernment Weekends, Miriam Dinners, and discernment houses.

8. Start Visiting Sisters!

Come and See Weekends with religious communities are such incredible opportunities. Receive the hospitality of sisters, listen to their vocation stories, ask all your trivial and serious questions, experience their prayer, community life, and Apostolates. You can find some retreats [here](#).

9. Ask for Intercession

Ask for the intercession of St. Ignatius of Loyola and pray with him the Suscipe:

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*