

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



Vocation Office

INSEARCH

A Program of Discernment and Formation for
Adult Men Interested in the Priesthood

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Chicago has a long tradition of providing a supportive environment for young men interested in the priesthood. Historically, high school and college seminaries have met this need by providing education and formation for candidates to the priesthood.

More recently, however, a growing number of men outside this traditional age group are seeking information and discernment about diocesan priesthood. Often older than other candidates, these men have graduated from college or worked in business or professional life, sometimes for a number of years. Presently, many begin their inquiry and discernment of a vocation to the priesthood during their post-college years.

Recognizing the needs of this growing group of candidates, the Archdiocese of Chicago has a program to provide support, information, and formation for adult men considering priesthood. InSearch, a program for men 22–40 years of age, provides a supportive and formative climate in which they can freely and openly explore their interest in the priesthood.

Designed for individuals who have a serious interest in the priesthood and have begun a discernment process, InSearch provides information, group interaction, and the opportunity for apostolic experience and spiritual direction. InSearch provides a “sacred space” in which an individual can listen to the promptings of God and his own heart, and then respond with generosity and commitment in the way that is best for him.

I. FAITH AND PRAYER

Candidates who begin InSearch often say that they see priests as men of **faith**. By their commitment to God and the Church, priests do publicly profess their faith. Candidates discerning priesthood need to establish and gain confidence in the quality and strength of their own personal faith. Until a candidate can say, “I am a man of faith,” he is not ready to make a vocational decision. Articulating one’s personal faith, by sharing it with others, is a valuable resource for vocational discernment.

Priests are also men of **prayer**. InSearch provides regular experiences of **communal prayer**, so that participants might grow as men of prayer. By praying together, they strengthen their bond with the Lord and with each other in the Holy Spirit. Communal prayer is a source of nurturance and support for InSearch participants.

InSearch participants also pray with the wider Church. They are expected to participate regularly in the Eucharist, which is the center of Christian life and ministry.

Through group dialogue, faith sharing, and prayer, the InSearch group becomes a community of faith, which is a source of support and strength for the individuals who are a part of it.

II. PRIESTLY VOCATIONAL WITNESS

“Teacher, what good must I do to possess everlasting life?” —Mt. 19:16

Those who have an interest in the priesthood often have questions about their faith as well as the Church and its teachings. Faith, after all, is multidimensional, and its intellectual component is very important.

InSearch provides opportunities for participants to learn more about Catholicism and receive answers to their questions, and hear the vocation stories of Chicago priests. Jesus has called these men and continues to call today. By listening to their stories and asking them questions, discerners have examples of those who have gone before them, providing a roadmap for discernment and commitment.

III. RETREAT AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

“Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God.” —Lk. 6:12

Faith is also a matter of the heart. In order to know the deepest desires of our heart, we must pay close attention to our innermost stirrings, attractions, and aspirations.

Quiet times of guided reflection help InSearch participants to find and explore their heart's deepest desires. A **weekend retreat** during the program gives participants time and space to explore more thoroughly the inner movements of their hearts.

In addition to quiet reflection and a retreat, InSearch offers **spiritual direction** for participants. Spiritual direction is a confidential process in which an individual talks with a mentor about his prayer life, the stirrings of his heart, a possible vocation to the priesthood, as well as the issues, thoughts, and feelings that surface as a result of other dimensions of the InSearch program. A confidential, trusting relationship in spiritual direction helps move an individual's discernment process forward. Indeed, a spiritual director is often a key person in an individual's vocational discernment.

IV. APOSTOLIC WORK

“The gift you have received, give as a gift.” —Mt. 10:8b

In his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola advises people making decisions not only to weigh alternatives and pros and cons, but also do “walk down the road” with a specific option, to take a few concrete steps toward it, to experience what it might be like to have made a particular choice.

For those considering the priesthood, engaging in apostolic work or pastoral ministry in a parish setting is a very important step “down the road.” Doing apostolic work in a parish gives InSearch participants a valuable experience of what pastoral ministry is like, and helps them imagine what it might be like to be a diocesan priest.

Because InSearch participants usually have full-time jobs, an apostolic experience is in accord with his available time and energy. An apostolic experience informs and grounds his vocational choice.

V. PERSONAL PRAYER

“Lord, teach us to pray.” —Lk. 11:1

In prayer, we become more aware of our relationship with God, and attend to it. In prayer, we become more aware of ourselves and of the deepest stirrings of our heart. We become aware of God revealing Himself and His will to us.

Prayer, then, is an indispensable dimension of vocational discernment.

As noted before, InSearch provides times and opportunities for participants to grow in their life through communal prayer, quiet reflection, and retreat time. In addition, participants are asked to spend some time each day in personal prayer.

Moreover, reflection on one’s experience of personal prayer is an integral part of spiritual direction.

GUIDING PHILOSOPHY OF INSEARCH

The philosophy of InSearch is based upon the thought of Albert Cardinal Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago from 1958 to 1965. As a priest, for 15 years he served as a scripture professor and rector at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. During those years, he formulated a model of discernment for priesthood candidates.

Cardinal Myer believed that an individual considering priesthood should attend to three realities and how they might be integrated within himself. These are:

- 1.** An individual's humanity, and the humanity of others.
- 2.** An individual's Christian formation as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.
- 3.** The ministerial priesthood.

The first two realities, the human condition and an individual's Christian formation, inform and ground a person's consideration of the priesthood as a vocational choice. A person must be at home with his humanity and his Christianity in order to make a good decision about priesthood.

Cardinal Meyer's wisdom is the guiding philosophy of InSearch, as the program seeks to facilitate a participant's integration of his humanity and his Christianity, and to aid his consideration of the priesthood.

EXPECTATIONS OF INSEARCH PARTICIPANTS

InSearch participants are expected to:

- 1.** Have a serious interest in diocesan priesthood.
- 2.** Make a commitment to full participation in the InSearch process. The weekly meetings are held on Tuesday evenings, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The InSearch weekend retreat in March begins on Friday at 6:30 p.m. and ends on Sunday at 11:45 a.m.
- 3.** Engage in apostolic ministry in a church setting, as one's time and energy permit.
- 4.** Choose and see a spiritual director to discuss one's spiritual life and vocation.

At the end of the InSearch program, some participants may decide to pursue the priesthood by applying to Mundelein Seminary; others may desire more time to discern a decision about the priesthood. Still others may decide that the priesthood is not their vocation and pursue life as a Christian layperson in the marketplace or lay ministry.

If a participant decides to apply to Mundelein Seminary, he will be expected to go through the seminary's admissions process. He may begin this process at the conclusion of InSearch, as well as any time during the course of the program.

For more information about InSearch, please contact:

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