

Call to serve

“I don’t know what your destiny will be. Some of you will perhaps occupy remarkable positions.... But I know one thing: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.” – **Dr. Albert Schweitzer**.

Our destiny is to serve God and others. As disciples of Jesus Christ, following our calling is not merely a task, but a journey into holiness. This journey, nurtured through prayer and expressed in stewardship of all that is entrusted to us, shapes our relationship with God.

What do invitations to serve within the parish have to do with happiness? Everything. Invitations are pastoral and spiritual opportunities to foster discipleship and grow in communion with Christ. The leaders who are serious about inviting others into the life of Christ and his church may need to rethink the way they invite others into service. It’s not a one-and-done event, taking place once a year or every three years at a parish ministry festival. Rather, it is a process of cultivation and nurturing disciples. Let’s look at how we extend the invitation to parishioners and others to commit their very selves to the Lord.

As our bishops affirm in the pastoral letter “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response,” this commitment begins in “conversion, change of mind and heart” and is “expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life.”

A community that welcomes (even strangers) well forms disciples well. Gallup has found that 76% of those who feel accepted at church are satisfied with their relationship with God. The American Beliefs Study consistently finds most parishioners seek a place where they find “**warm and friendly**” encounters. Church growth studies show that strong friendships influence long-term involvement.

Hospitality is much more than being kind, greeting people, installing signage or running a hospitality desk. It is evangelization in action. It’s a culture of presence; noticing who’s new, referring to people by name or calling a sick community member. For members of the Body of Christ, hospitality starts with each of us extending an invitation to another (even strangers). St. Paul reminds us, “**Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you**” (Rom.15:7).

Nurturing hospitality includes challenging our parishioners to be hospitable in everyday life. Challenging them to reflect on how they react in small daily moments – at the grocery store, in traffic or when someone sits in “**their**” pew. Do they greet newcomers in the church, even if they aren’t part of the greeting team? Msgr. Thomas McGread says, “When you offer people a sense of prayer, hospitality, belonging and community, then they’ll be ready to hear the call for responsibility and service.”

An invitation to serve God begins with the realization that God has uniquely gifted and called each one of us. **“Come, follow me”** was not meant only for some fishermen 2,000 years ago. Those words are meant for you and me. God’s call may come as it did to Moses, Samuel or Mary – or it may come through a friend, a spouse or a pulpit invitation. Come and follow me to serve.

As I make my first pilgrimage as a priest to Fatima, Lourdes and Barcelona (Oct. 19 – 28, 2025), I assure my prayers for all those who are called to serve, and all my parishioners wherever I served as a pastor and associate.

Praying

Fr.Alphonse