

Welcome

You probably already know that Confirmation initiates you into the Catholic Church and into the “fullness of the Holy Spirit.” The process you are about to begin will help you take the final steps in your Confirmation preparation. It will prepare you to sustain the spirit for the sacrament of Confirmation and beyond.

This is not a book you just open up and read—it’s a book that you *do*. The process will take a few months. It contains self-evaluations, exercises, brief essays, stories, and interviews. It even invites you to do a little research.

The adult you have chosen as your sponsor will be doing the same things you are doing. Choose someone who has faith and who seems to be trying to live it. Choose a sponsor who is easy to talk to. Your sponsor won’t have to come to any meetings, so you are free to choose anyone from any part of the country.

There are three parts to this process. After you complete each part, you will find suggested topics that you can discuss with your sponsor. On three different occasions, you and your sponsor can compare a few notes over the phone, via email, or face to face. When you connect with your sponsor, the two of you are only expected to discuss the specific topics listed. The rest of the material is for your own personal reflection.

The person coordinating your parish Confirmation program will probably schedule a one-time gathering and invite you and all the other candidates to attend. This will be a time to further discuss some of the topics in this book and perhaps deal with some of the deeper questions the exercises raise. It also gives your program leader an opportunity to touch base with you.

If you take this process seriously, you will discover the strengths and weaknesses of your own spirituality and you will be able to design your own personal Spiritual Growth Plan. What goes into this plan will be entirely up to you. The whole point is to help you nurture your spiritual sense as you deal with the complexities of your life.

Note to Sponsors

This process is meant to be an opportunity for spiritual growth for both you and the candidate. While the book is addressed to the candidate, a substantial amount of the content and exercises have actually been adapted from adult resources. Your participation in this process requires that you complete all of the same exercises as the candidate, and that you share your thoughts around the specific topics listed after each of the book's three parts. So please plan on scheduling three conversations—by phone, email, virtual meeting, or in person—with the young person who has asked you to be her or his sponsor.

Thank you for willingness to join your candidate as he or she prepares for Confirmation. May this book be the catalyst for further conversations with your candidate in years to come.



PART ONE

The Spiritual Life

In this section you will learn about three dimensions of spirituality and discover the dimension that is most natural to you.

You will also explore the “callings” of your life and begin to make a plan for how you can continue to take control of your own spiritual growth. One of the goals of this book is to help you learn enough about your spirituality so that you can create your own Spiritual Growth Plan (SGP). So, the first thing to do is recognize the three different dimensions of spirituality—vertical, horizontal, and internal—then figure out which dimension you are naturally drawn to.

My Spiritual Life Profile

To begin this process, take the following self-assessment survey. On a scale of 1–5, indicate how true each of these statements is for you. 1 equals “not true”; 5 equals “very true.” (**NOTE:** *not everything is supposed to be “very true” for you. Answer honestly so you can get a true picture of your spirituality.*)

- _____ 1. The most important thing about my faith is keeping close to God.
- _____ 2. The most important thing about my faith is being a good person.
- _____ 3. The most important thing about my faith is that it helps me cope with life’s ups and downs.
- _____ 4. My faith motivates me to serve others.
- _____ 5. My faith brings me a lot of inner peace.
- _____ 6. I pray a lot, and prayer helps me feel closer to God.
- _____ 7. My faith helps me feel better when I am sad.
- _____ 8. Because of my faith, I try hard to be straight with people.
- _____ 9. For me, going to church is an important way to stay close to God.
- _____ 10. God and I are close.
- _____ 11. My faith guides my decisions about what’s right and wrong.
- _____ 12. My faith helps me stay hopeful.
- _____ 13. Because of my faith, I pay attention to when others need help.
- _____ 14. My faith helps me heal from emotional hurts.
- _____ 15. Nothing is more important to me than my friendship with God.
- _____ 16. My faith brings me a lot of happiness.

- _____ 17. I have a strong relationship with Jesus as my friend and savior.
- _____ 18. Living in a loving way is the most important thing about my faith.
- _____ 19. Because of my faith, I believe that it is wrong to tell racist or dirty jokes.
- _____ 20. My faith helps me deal with my anger.
- _____ 21. I'm always interested in learning more about God.

SCORE PROFILE (VERTICAL, HORIZONTAL, INTERNAL)		
Vertical	Horizontal	Internal
<i>Add up the numbers you gave for statements #1, #6, #9, #10, #15, #17, #21</i>	<i>Add up the numbers you gave for statements #2, #4, #8, #11, #13, #18, #19</i>	<i>Add up the numbers you gave for statements #3, #5, #7, #12, #14, #16, #20</i>
Your vertical score is	Your horizontal score is	Your internal score is
_____	_____	_____

What the survey means

The vertical dimension of spirituality represents the relationship you have between yourself and God “above.” The “above” part is why we call it “vertical” (even though God is in others and inside ourselves as well). People with a highly vertical spirituality invest most of their spiritual effort on improving or maintaining their relationship with God by praying regularly, going to church, learning more about God, and/or participating in religious events, rituals, and traditions.

The horizontal dimension of spirituality represents the way your faith motivates you to treat other people. People with a highly horizontal dimension to their spirituality invest most of

their spiritual effort trying to be a good person to others. People with a highly horizontal spirituality are always recognizing others in need, helping out, treating people with respect and kindness, and sticking up for those who need it. And they are actively forming a strong moral conscience about what's right and wrong, what's noble and true.

The internal dimension of spirituality represents the way your faith helps you deal with the stuff inside. People with a highly internal dimension invest most of their spiritual effort in coping with emotional issues, past hurts, and life's ups and downs. People with a strong internal dimension often have hope even when things don't go well. They don't give up easily, and they calm down more quickly when they get frustrated or angry.

The goal for true spiritual growth involves the development of all three of these dimensions. This book will help you develop a plan for growing in all three dimensions.

What is spirituality?

Spirituality is about prayer and worship (vertical), but it's more than that. If you spend all your spiritual focus on prayer and worship, you might have a solid personal relationship with God, but you might not be spiritually motivated to serve others.

Spirituality is also about treating others lovingly, making good moral decisions, and being a person of character and conscience (horizontal). But it's more than just that. If you spend all your spiritual focus on others, you will be a kind person but not necessarily someone who maintains a close relationship with God, your soul's truest friend.

Spirituality is also about tapping into your inner strength to handle the emotional issues you struggle with (internal). But it's more than just that, too. If that's all you work on spiritually, you might cope pretty well with life's ups and downs, but you won't necessarily reach out to help others or develop your relationship with God.

These three dimensions are a lot like the three virtues of faith, hope, and love. They each have their primary direction and they each overlap. Faith, hope, and love: vertical, internal, and horizontal. Spiritual growth should take place in all three dimensions. Remember the words of St. Paul: “In the end there are three things that last: faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor 13:13).



Which of the three dimensions—vertical, horizontal, or internal—represents your strongest spiritual tendencies? Why do you say so?

Seeing three dimensions

Here are some actual statements people have made about their spirituality. Read each one and decide which dimension it represents. Place an “H,” “V,” or “I” next to each statement.

- ___ “I pray a lot, like when I’m waiting for the school bus every morning. I see the changes of the four seasons and I wonder how anyone could think that nature works by accident.”
- ___ “My faith helps me deal with issues.”
- ___ “My faith helps me accept everyone, no matter what they wear, what they listen to, or who they hang around with.”
- ___ “The closest I’ve been to God in the last six months? Okay, last April I guess. I was stressing out big time, losing weight, always tired but could never fall asleep at night, about to cry over everything—over nothing. My PSAT scores were down. I had a C- in English, baseball was a bust; I couldn’t hit anything. And my parents were on me to clean my room, but I never had time and

I didn't even know where to start. One night I was listening to music and talking to God—and God started talking back—not like in a real voice, but I was sure it was God talking to me, telling me, 'It will all work out. I'm gonna help you get through this.' I was so sure it was God talking to me. I fell asleep on the top of my bed with all my clothes on. The next day I went to school and quit stressing. Since then, things just began to work out."

Spiritual Dimensions and the Ten Commandments

Practice recognizing the three dimensions of the spiritual life by focusing on the Ten Commandments. We believe that God gave these commandments to Moses, who then gave them to the rest of us. They are the basis or foundation of a universal code of conduct. Almost every other religion in the world has a set of commandments like these. The ancient emperor Hammurabi, who lived before Moses, is said to have had one of the earliest lists of commandments. (Go online to Wikipedia and look up "The Code of Hammurabi," a real code!)

Look up the Ten Commandments in the Bible in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 5, verses 1–21. Decide which commandments point toward the vertical dimension of spirituality, which point toward the horizontal, and which point to the internal. Place a "V," "H," or "I" after each number below.

1. ___ 2. ___ 3. ___ 4. ___ 5. ___ 6. ___ 7. ___ 8. ___ 9. ___ 10. ___

Notice anything?

—— “During spring break I did Habitat for Humanity with some friends in my class, helping this family build their own home. There was just this mom and her five daughters. The oldest daughter was fourteen. The mom worked second shift and had to take the last bus home just before midnight every night. So it was the oldest daughter who had to make sure her sisters did their homework, took baths, and had their clothes laid out for school. I could never have done that at fourteen! Such a hard-working family! For the first time in my life, I understood that being poor is not something people bring on themselves. I really felt like I was doing something that would make God happy.”

—— “I went on a retreat last month and everyone was in small groups for the whole time. On the last night, each small group had to spend an hour of quiet time in the chapel. It was cool. All dark and all, just the candles lit and one small light. Since we don’t have kneelers in my church, I decided to kneel. I started looking at the tabernacle and talking to God and got into the zone. God and I were talking about everything. I forgot that there were other people in the chapel with me. I knelt for the whole hour and it felt like fifteen minutes. Talked about everything. Totally in the zone.”

—— “I ask a lot of questions about God and religion. You can ask my friends; they’ll tell you that I drive them crazy. But I can’t help it. I like learning about religion, especially my religion.”

- “Because of my faith, I think it’s wrong to tell racist jokes, stereotype people, or even ignore people who are different. What God wants most from me, I think, is to be a good person.”
- “My faith helps me accept myself even though I’m not as popular as..., as smart as..., as funny as..., or as good looking as....”
- “I don’t believe in having sex before marriage; it’s against my faith. For that matter, so is doing drugs.”
- “My faith challenges me to use my potential.”

Three vocational “callings”

The spiritual life also involves “callings.” Seems like everyone wants to know, “What am I called to do with my life?” or “What’s my vocation in life?” Usually you ask this sort of question when you think about what career to pursue or which job to take. But questions about callings also have a soulful side because of where the call is coming from—as in, Who is calling you? It helps to see that there are three calling” in life.

1 *The call of faith*

This is our highest and most basic calling and it addresses the question: “How am I to live?” This call, for all people—Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu—is a call to live as a child of God. Ideally, we are invited to make a three-dimensional response to this call: vertical, horizontal, and internal (which you have just reviewed).

2 *The call of relationships*

This call addresses the question: “With whom am I to live?” and invites us to travel life’s journey as a family member, friend, or

spouse. Right now, the call of relationships for you is all about your family and friends. Perhaps later in life it will be mostly about your spouse, your children, or a religious community of priests, sisters, or brothers

3 *The call of work*

This call addresses the question: “How should I labor?” Right now, the call of work for you is all about school. (Maybe that’s why it’s called “schoolwork.”) But the kind of work you enjoy doing outside of school can sometimes give you a glimpse of how you may want to answer this call when it’s time to think about choosing your career.

Each of these calls brings its own set of joys, opportunities, responsibilities, and commitments. And yet, these three vocational calls are always overlapping. How do you know when you are making the right responses to these callings? The answer: when the role lines up with your soul. When and how does the role you play in each of your relationships line up with—agree with—your soul? How about the role you are taking within the call of faith? How and when does it align best with your soul? When and how does your role not agree with your soul? How about the roles you take on in school/work? When and how do they align or not align with your soul?

Sometimes there may be something wrong with the role you are taking within each of your callings, and sometimes there is nothing wrong with the role, but you might need to take better care of your soul. Sometimes your vocational journey will take you to places where these three calls are working together. Sometimes you will find yourself in places where one call may be in tension with another, for example, when the call of faith is in tension with the call of relationships. And sometimes on the vocational journey you will find that one call seems to be written with a capital C, asking you to give it more attention than the other two.