



JANUARY 2025

Inscape Center for Personal Vocation Updates

We hope you had a joyful Christmas season and that your 2025 is off to a blessed start! Here are some of the exciting initiatives Inscape has been working on along with a testimony to the fruits of Inscape.

Coach Training for the Diocese of Camden and Communion of Catholic Coaches (CCC)

We continue our partnership with Donna Ottaviano-Britt and the Diocese of Camden. Under Donna's leadership, the Diocese continues to invest in coaching programs for priests and laity. In 2024, Dr. Joshua Miller had the opportunity to train coaches of the Diocese to utilize the paradigm of personal vocation and fulfillment stories. He had a similar opportunity to train members of a new and rapidly growing organization founded by Lisa Mladinich, Communion of Catholic Coaches.



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Ongoing Development of Four-Year Pastoral Coaching Leadership Program for Immaculate Conception Seminary & School of Theology (ICCST)

Inscape was selected by ICCST to help develop a four-year coaching program to enhance pastoral leadership. In 2024, our coaches implemented year one and worked with transitional deacons and newly ordained priests to help them grow in deeper awareness of their unique gifts and gain habits of more effective self-leadership. In 2025, Inscape launches the program's second year focused on helping young priests build teams and lead others. Fr. John March, priest of the Diocese of Camden, said of the coaching program that it provides "the gift of being deeply understood by another (and then self) that I think most people and priests are craving."

Study Linking Personal Vocation Formation and Improved Mental Health

Dr. Sabrina Bierstetel of Franciscan University and Dr. Miller hypothesized in a formal study that student led support groups utilizing the paradigm of personal vocation and related positive psychology interventions (PPIs) can have a significant impact on improving the mental health of young adults. Quantitative and qualitative data confirmed the hypothesis! They plan to publish the study in 2025.

A Testimonial on the Fruits of Inscape by Fr. Matthew Gonzalez

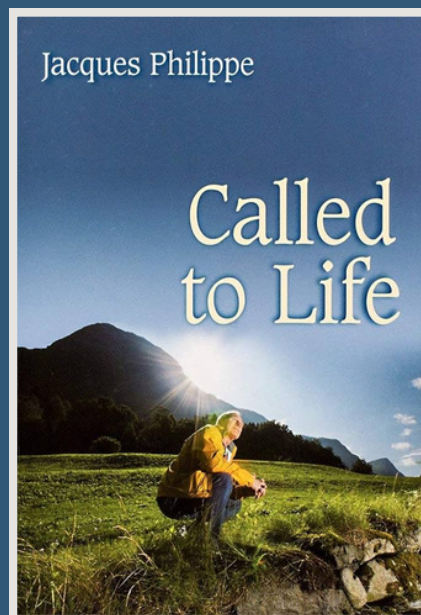
"During my time of coaching with Dr. Miller, I remember a twofold feeling: confidence and an awakening. Confidence because I began to exercise and live from the strengths and motivations that God has given me. Awakening because I felt like I was beginning to see a clearer portrait of the person I have been called to be. Ultimately, Inscape has helped me to become a more confident shepherd for the People of God and has inspired me to continue the work of personal vocation at the parish level."

Inscape Center for Personal Vocation Updates (Cont.)

New Research:

Although the Church speaks with a magisterial voice about personal vocation, the concept remains unclear for many Catholics largely because of competing ideas and confusing leadership about the very meaning of 'vocation.' In 2025, Dr. Miller will be collaborating with Dr. Petroc Willey of Franciscan University of Steubenville and other leading catechists on a publication to summarize Church teaching on Personal Vocation and its key importance for the life of the Church and the world.

Inspiring Book!



When Father God creates each of us, He also calls us. And as He sustains us constantly, so too does He call us from moment to moment into relationship with Him. Fr. Jacques Philippe beautifully develops this core message in **Called to Life**, a powerful little book that we highly recommend.

Living Your Personal Vocation Seminar

We are pleased to announce we will be running another **Living Your Personal Vocation Seminar** from **February 11 - April 29!**



Lindsey Haynes will be facilitating our seminar and providing coaching sessions. [Click here](#) to learn more!

15 spots available
Tuesday evenings
7:00 pm - 8:00 pm EST on Zoom

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez



Interview of Fr. Matthew Gonzalez, priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, with Dr. Joshua Miller, Co-Founder of Inscape Center for Personal Vocation. December 12, 2024

Fr. Matthew was introduced to Inscape when he began coaching with Dr. Joshua Miller in February of 2024 as part of a Four-Year Pastoral Leadership Coaching Program funded by a generous grant from the Lilly Foundation. Inscape co-developed the program with Immaculate Conception Seminary and now offers it to seminarians and priests.

How has the paradigm of personal vocation informed your priesthood?

Before I even knew what personal vocation meant, I had a sense that I was looking for more in terms of what vocation really means. I grappled a lot growing up with discernment because I thought it all depended on state of life vocation. I had the idea that once you figure that out, you're all set. This is a daunting way of thinking. Nonetheless, I entered the seminary all along thinking about my life as a story within a greater story. When I met you, Joshua, and worked with you through the Inscape coaching process, the idea of personal vocation we discussed deeply resonated with me. Although my state of life vocation is, without question, being a priest, Jesus is calling me to be a priest in a unique way, just as he calls every person to reflect Him in a unique way. I ask Jesus: "Who are you calling me to be for your people as a man, a friend, a brother, a son, as a priest?" "How can I uniquely incarnate you everyday and in every relationship?"

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez (Cont.)

So, the unique way God designed us to give ourselves should inform every part of our lives every day.

Yes, and this is a much more expansive and freeing way of thinking about vocation. I also think it helps orient me to the reality that the story isn't over. God is still writing the story, and He invites us to a continual discernment within it through our desires and motivations and through the needs and opportunities placed before us. Personal vocation opens us up to a continual discernment of God's will.

At your parish you have started a vocations ministry. Tell me about that and what some of the fruits of that ministry have been?

When I was in seminary, my spiritual director once asked all of us: "What are your dreams for your priesthood?" I couldn't really answer at the time but deep inside I had a lot of questions about how I even arrived at the seminary and how God was calling and the challenges that came along with that. But then getting to the parish after ordination I found this desire to start something with vocations. I didn't know exactly what that meant at the time. But, interestingly enough, everything started coming together. I went to a young adult event in Virginia. You and I began coaching together. And what I felt was I need to start a vocations team and felt the courage to do that.

I remember you telling me about it with enthusiasm when we began coaching together.

And I realized as I started it that a vocations team cannot begin with state of life vocation. It needs to begin with something more fundamental, which is that God made you and loves you and He is calling you now with a plan and purpose in mind. I realized too that this is not a niche kind of thing. My desire and my vision is that the vocations team serve at the center of everything else that happens at the parish. It's kind of like the hub in the middle of the wheel to which every other ministry is

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez (Cont.)

connected like a spoke because everything that we do in the parish goes back to personal vocation. Helping people to discover how God is calling them and what their gifts might be and how they can use that to build up the Kingdom of God in their parish.

Imagine if every parish had personal vocation as central to all its ministries?

The positive impact on the Church would be massive. That's the way I see the vocations team. It's a hub. And it's not just about state of life discernment. That is a fruit of vocations ministry, and we are already starting to see that fruit. So many things are happening in the parish as leaders understand more and more what personal vocation means. It's a beautiful story. We are continuing to do small groups with our youth group reading Fr. Jacques Philippe's book, **Called to Life**. They are loving it! We've had great conversations as we venture into topics that maybe they've never thought about. I love to see the joy on their faces as we go through conversations which have not been primarily about priesthood or married life or religious life. It's all about how God has called us from our mother's womb and how He wants us to bring His presence into the world through each of us in a special way.

What are your thoughts about the connection between personal vocation and renewal of the Church?

I have been teaching a class on the New Testament. We are talking about the Acts of the Apostles. I remember sharing with the class a truth that is nothing new, but new for them, that the Church doesn't have a mission; it is mission by its very nature. Within the Church, the Body of Christ, each member is called forth to mission. But if each member of the Body is not aware that they've been called and gifted and strengthened and given grace through the sacraments for a particular mission in mind, then how will the Church be able to live out its mission? For the Church to be itself

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez (Cont.)

and live out its mission and be in a state of renewal, we need to start with the individual person. When we help each one listen to the voice of God in their lives, that's when we're going to start seeing true renewal in the Church.

This is beautiful, Fr. Matthew! Of course we are nourished in a sacramental way within our parishes, but we can also be nourished to live out every part of our personal vocations through our parishes. You are doing that. It's beautiful.

Here in the American church there is this great sense of the Eucharistic revival helping to renew the Church, but what is the Eucharist for? It is to sanctify us and help us to grow in charity. Jesus gives Himself in the Eucharist to detonate love for the world and that only happens when we live out our personal calling empowered and enriched and sanctified by the Eucharist. But there's also this great sense in the Church right now that we need to call forth or to pray for more vocations to the priesthood. I don't necessarily think this is the right way of looking at it. Many men are being called to the priesthood and for that to really come to fruition, we have to reestablish the sense of mystery and adventure that there's something transcendent calling all of us forth.

Everyone is thirsting for that and when we renew that sense through personal vocation in the parishes, a natural after effect will be men responding to their God-given call to priesthood. There's not a vocations crisis. The issue is how do we help young people, and all people, first become aware of personal vocation. Number two, hear the call. And number three, respond in faith and courage.

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez (Cont.)

Amen! I understand that in your parish, you now have a burgeoning group of young men considering the priesthood. You have taken several of them to a Quo Vadis retreat. How has your understanding of Church teaching on personal vocation impacted your discussions with these young men?

When I started this group – it is called Sons of Thunder - under the umbrella of vocations ministry in the parish, I said to the guys that it needs to be faith, fellowship and service somehow. But I also asked the guys “How is the Spirit working in you and what do you want this group to be?” If we believe God is working in individual hearts, that means He is speaking to them. So, I said, “How do you want to pray?” The Spirit was moving in their hearts. They said, “We want to pray liturgy of the hours,” and “We want to do evening prayer together.” OK, great, let’s do that. I asked, “What about formation?” “Well...” they said, “let’s learn more about Christian masculinity and what it means to be a Christian man.” Great, let’s do that. “When it comes to fellowship we want to play sports.” Great, let’s do that. Then they talked about different ways they could do service projects: cleaning up the beach, gathering food for the poor, sprucing up the garden in the back of the parish. But basically, the angle that I’m taking is listening to how the Spirit is moving in them and allowing God to write the story in their lives. We are now talking about going to the seminary to have a tour and to pray with the seminarians. So, basically the whole thing is about community, building up the faith, service, and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak through them. It’s not trying to sell the priesthood or recruit men to become priests. I believe it is in this context of listening and calling forth that if there are priestly vocations they will respond.

Interview with Fr. Matthew Gonzalez (Cont.)

I hear you orienting them to discern the Lord's will in the present moment and leading them to grow with one another and be contributing members of the Body of Christ. Any final word to those who will be reading this interview?

Absolutely. What I share with my friends who are priests or just family and people around the parish is that I believe every parish should have a vocations ministry. I think it's indispensable to the life of the Church. What I see more and more is kind of a transactional approach. People come to get what they want or what they need. And then we all kind of go back to wherever we are coming from. But when we focus on personal vocation, everything becomes relational. Our relationship with the Lord and then ultimately our relationship with others - that's what vocation is all about. It's not simply about me. It's how am I called forth to give of myself. That's key. So, I think, number one, every parish should have a vocations ministry. It is indispensable to parish life. It is at the center of everything that we do. It integrates everything that we do. Lastly, I encourage people who are thinking about starting a vocations ministry and who are kind of afraid or doubtful to jump right in. The water is just fine, and God will lead it all in the end.