

# **PROMOTING RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS**

## ***Points for Parents***

A vocation is a call in which God invites a person to a deeper relationship with Him and to respond to the needs of others. God takes the initiative. Once we have heard that invitation it is our responsibility to respond to it. All of God's people are invited on this journey toward God which comes to us through our Baptism. Each person is called by God to do something special, to become someone special. Our call or vocation as Christians is to become more Christ-like.

Reflecting on our gifts and talents, we can choose to live out our Baptismal call in different life-styles: as a married person, a single person, a priest, a brother, a sister, or a permanent deacon. A religious vocation is a call to believe in God's love for all persons and to base one's life on that belief in God. It is a way to live one's life so that others can see and understand that the Good News is this: God sent his Son Jesus to become man so that all men and women could become God like.



Parents are the first teachers of their children and have the opportunity to nurture in their children the desire to serve God. These ambitions and desires may be fostered in the home through prayers, by giving sympathetic and honest direction, and by making their homes Christ-centered. In this manner parents create a climate in which the grace of God can operate efficaciously.

### **ACTIVITIES:**

- A. Let your children see the example of parents who live a Christian life and who take the Gospel demands seriously and value Church Vocations.
- B. Help your children understand, by your words and actions, that religion is important to you and build positive attitudes toward a life of prayer and service to God and to humanity.
- C. Read stories to young children (also make stories available for them to read on their own) about persons who reached out in service to others. Discuss stories.
- D. Make a collage with children that illustrates CALL, SERVICE, HEALING, PROPHECY, and PRAYER. Help children understand that the work of Christ continues in the world today through people helping people.
- E. Prayer at the family table, particularly spontaneous and personal prayer, helps to set the scene for prayer around the table of the Lord.
- F. Prayer for particular persons involved in priesthood and religious life helps children to be aware of the esteem with which the Christian family regards vocations to religious life and priesthood.

- G. **Instill in children a desire to serve others.**
- H. **Pray daily as a family, at a time most convenient for you:  
--that those already living a vocation to Church ministry may fulfill their Christian vocation in their love and service to God;  
--that those persons faced with a vocational choice consider their own God-given abilities, and decide a vocation in the light of God's will for them.**
- I. **Encourage your children to become involved in parish projects, organizations, and in charitable activities.**
- J. **Speak with respect about priests, religious brothers, and sisters, especially when differences of opinion arise. Be careful of the way criticism of the Church is handled.**
- K. **Be aware of current ideas to the formation, life and role of priests, religious brothers and sisters in the Church. Become familiar with their goals and the manner in which their role evolves as it pertains to their ministry in education and social justice.**
- L. **As a family, pray for persons who are in the process of discernment.**

### *Prayer for Discernment*

**O God, through your invitation at our Baptism,  
each of us has been called to holiness,  
to deepen our relationship with You,  
and to respond to the needs of others.**

**Guide me in my response to this call  
as I discern which of the life-styles  
will help me live out my call to holiness.**

**Give me the strength and courage  
to live out my commitment  
and to place trust in You. AMEN.**

# **A Parents Support Can Open the Door**

Although it sure doesn't seem that way when you have teenagers in your home, parents exert a huge influence on the direction their children's lives will eventually take.

What mom and dad say really does matter.

This was confirmed again recently by a study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate in Washington. The study was done on behalf of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The study found that interest among young people concerning vocations to the priesthood and religious life is not in decline, as some believe.

What is lacking is encouragement from adults.

The study found that a third of teens in Catholic youth groups have at least considered the religious life, but very few of them (about 6 percent) discuss their feelings with anyone.

They probably fear being needled by their peers if the word would get out that they are pondering a future as a priest, brother, or sisters (religious).

They may fear they will be pressured if they discuss their leanings with a member of the clergy or religious life.

They may even fear their parents would not support them should they want to look further into vocations. Perhaps they hear only negative things from their parents about priests and nuns with whom they are acquainted.

So if the young people are reluctant to bring up the topic for discussion, it is incumbent upon their significant role models -and this usually means mom and dad- to broach the subject.

Even parents who say they can talk about anything - sex, drugs, violence - somehow believe the topic of vocations is taboo.

Here's how significant parental input is:

Among those young people studied who reported being encouraged by their parents to consider a vocation, 12 percent said they were seriously considering the religious life.

But only 4 percent of those who said they were not encouraged by their parents said they were seriously considering a vocation. It is believed that if young people are encouraged, three times the current number would enter a seminary or religious community.



**Why don't parents at least talk with their children about the possibility of becoming priests, sisters, or brothers?**

**Divine Providence Sister Anne Winschel, delegate for the Office for Religious in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, points to several possible reasons:**

- 1) we have created a materialistic society in which even the very young can become preoccupied with making money;**
- 2) people have options other than the religious life to provide services to others;**
- 3) because there are few sisters in traditional ministries such as teaching, children have less contact with them.**

**Recent studies have also shown that attending Catholic schools has a dramatic effect on the likelihood of youths to seriously consider vocations. Fewer Catholic school students means fewer aspirants to the religious life.**

**In light of all this, parents must take the initiative and let their children know that they will support them if they choose to pursue the religious life.**

**It's a difficult and sometimes frightening thing for a young person to make the right choice that will set the course for a happy and satisfying life. Parents need to make sure that all doors are open.**



If you would like to discuss a Vocation in the Catholic Church as a Priest, Sister, or Brother contact Father Mark O'Donnell, Vocation Office, Diocese of Norwich, 201 Broadway, Norwich, CT 06360 (860) 887-9294, or E-Mail him at: [vocations@norwichdiocese.org](mailto:vocations@norwichdiocese.org). [www.God-calls.org](http://www.God-calls.org)

## ***Open Wide the Doors of Your Heart to Christ***

In his profoundly moving book, *Den of Lions*, former Beirut hostage Terry Anderson recounts what it was like to exist for seven years imprisoned in darkness and chains. Each day he faced the question, "Will I be killed today or not?" And it was from this experience that he wrote "Faith is what you find when you think you are alone and you're not."

In this prison setting Terry Anderson found his faith, and, he might tell you, his vocation—his calling to follow Jesus more closely. He and his fellow captives, among them Servite Father Lawrence Martin Jenco, referred to their time of deep spiritual sharing as "*The Church of the Locked Door.*" But do you see the irony of that? For Terry Anderson and Father Lawrence and the others, their physical imprisonment gave way to a tremendous freedom of spirit. The Church of the Locked Door became for them a place where the doors of their hearts were flung open to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Those wide open doors are the image that Pope John Paul II had used for the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity. He called all Christians to open wide the doors of their hearts to Christ. In doing so, like Terry Anderson, each person discovers a vocation: a profound calling from God.



The Second Vatican Council underscored the primary vocation of the human person: *to share in the divine nature of God.* This invitation of God is given to each of us on the day of Baptism, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am well pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit." For in baptism God has given to us everything God has given to Jesus. Looking upon us, God sees the image of the Son.

Now, the way each of us accepts the invitation to share in God's life takes a unique shape. For many, participation in God's life will be expressed in the sacrament of marriage. Some will choose the single life. Others will live it as a Priest, Sister, Brother or Permanent Deacon.

We naturally wonder to what the Lord has called us as our lives as baptized disciples unfold. As members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are challenged to consider the kind of contribution we can offer God's people. Paraphrasing St. Paul: those who can pray, pray with a generous heart; those who can teach, teach with the wisdom of the Spirit; those who can serve, serve with the strength of God.

As we reflect upon our own vocation, we are challenged to be true to God's word. The Lord did not abandon us but gave us shepherds, ministers to lead us in word and sacrament. What do the People of God need to be true to God's word? Certainly, we need good leadership from people who can inspire us with lives of holiness and service.

*FOR EACH OF US TO RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD, WE MUST FIRST HEAR IT.*

Within the Body of Christ there are men and women who are dedicated to a life of ministry, encouraging all the members of the Church to hear God's word and act upon it.

In order to proclaim the Good News of salvation, the Church needs people who are faithful to their vocation. Our common vocation, by virtue of baptism, is to holiness. To live a life of holiness we strive to respond to God's self-revelation in a way that makes others aware of God's abiding presence. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord has endowed each of us with gifts. Our vocation to holiness is to develop these gifts and to offer them generously to the Church. The gifts of the Lord are as varied as the members of the Church. There are some among us who are given the necessary gifts to minister to God's people as priests, deacons, sisters, and brothers.

Vocations to priesthood and religious life are not manufactured in diocesan vocation offices; they are nurtured in families and parish communities. Let us ask the Lord to open the doors of our hearts that we might respond to His calling and inspire others to do the same.

*A recent study suggests that the number one reason why young people do not respond to the prompting of the spirit to consider following a vocation to the priesthood or religious life is because no influential adult in their lives encouraged or asked them to consider it.*

## **Do You Have a Vocation?**

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