

Serra Bulletin Insert for Vocation Awareness

IN TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN, have you raised the call to Church ministry? The process of answering God's call begins in childhood. Throughout adolescence and adulthood, the attitudes assumed in childhood begin to influence the course of one's life. A vocation or a talent will not grow to fruition unless it is nurtured in childhood and adolescence by a parent.

Often children talk about what they want to be "when they grow up": doctors, lawyers, athletes, nurses, movie stars, teachers, carpenters. They may talk about these roles, but do they ever talk about being a priest, sister or brother? You are the hand of God — encourage your children to consider Church ministry.

WHAT KINDS OF PEOPLE become priests, sisters or brothers?

Are they uncommonly holy, unusually saint-like? No. They are people who make mistakes, people who aren't afraid to be human while in God's service.

Are they people who can't face the competition and cruelty of the "real" world? No. They are people who believe that through ministry they can *immerse* themselves in the world and make positive changes.

Are they people who don't relate well with other people? No. They are people who love others — people who find real satisfaction chatting with a 93-year-old parishioner, holding the hand of a cancer patient, listening to the troubles of a street-wise teen.

They are people with the courage to touch lives, hearts and souls in a high-tech, un-churched world.

Are you that kind of person?

A STUDY COMMISSIONED by the Knights of Columbus revealed that 75% of Catholic young people who had seriously considered religious life felt they were never encouraged to pursue that goal. Do you know someone who would make a good priest? Why not tell him so? Your encouragement may be all he needs.

DID YOU KNOW that there are special seminaries for men entering the priesthood later in life, seminaries where students range from ages 25 to 60? Many of these men have thought about being a priest at one time or another but, for whatever reason, pushed the idea to the back of their minds. They are men who have made a career change to a second vocation, the priesthood. They're ordinary people, men who have been electricians, teachers, barbers, policemen, social workers, businessmen, farmers, dentists. Some are widowers, even grandfathers. Diverse though their backgrounds may be, they now share one aim in life: to become a priest and serve God's people. Could you be one of them?

HOLINESS IS A CHALLENGE for us all, whatever our specific vocations. We are called to be holy in all aspects of our lives. This is an ongoing process, often slowed by setbacks. When the saints were alive, they did not regard themselves as saints; rather, they knew they were sinners — and they strived to be saints. The process of becoming holy is, even for saints, painful and filled with struggle. Know you are a sinner; strive to be a saint.

FAMILY LIFE CAN BUILD VALUES integral to a strong vocation — whether to priesthood, religious life or marriage. Teaching your children to value commitment, service and prayer will help them make strong vocation decisions as adults and live out those vocations with success and fulfillment.

CHRIST SPOKE OF THE TALENTS each one of us has, talents which must not be buried. Our calling is to take those talents, develop them fully, and then use them in establishing His kingdom on earth. Are you using your talents to fulfill your vocation to service? Are you an active Christian in the parish, at your workplace, and in the home? Take some time today to reflect on how you might use your special talents in the service of the Kingdom.

HE HAS A JOB that puts him in touch with dozens of interesting people each week: He smiles over coffee while a 95- year-old woman reminisces about her first date in 1920; he discusses ideas with a world-class philosopher after a lecture.

Each day when he gets out of bed, he knows his work will make a difference. People knock on his door when they learn their spouses are sick, even dying. When they don't have the money to buy winter coats for their small children. Or when their parents have kicked them out of the house. He does his best to do something for them all, but he gets back even more. This is not a thankless job. Real appreciation is expressed in hugs, smiles and simple thanks.

His co-workers are well trained and knowledgeable in their fields. And they are supportive, never competitive. They laugh a lot with him. Sometimes they cry with him. But they are always caring.

This job has brought out in him all sorts of hidden talents. He hadn't known what a flair he had for public speaking; now, after every talk, there are pats on the back. He hadn't known how much he liked children; now hundreds of kids know he's ticklish behind the knees. This is not a dead-end job. He is learning every day.

He is a priest. Does his job sound good to you?

A MISCONCEPTION AMONG some Catholics is that the priest has an ideal job: he works one day each week, Sunday. They forget that the other six days a week, the priest works long and hard behind the scenes: bringing communion to the sick and elderly, counseling troubled families, visiting school classes, preparing individuals for sacraments. Often the job is frustrating, exhausting and thankless, but always of vital importance. Take some time this week and express appreciation to your priests for the difficult work they do.

THE LOVING ENVIRONMENT OF A FAMILY draws forth an individual's greatest talents and gifts. We've come to realize that creating an atmosphere in which children can hear the Lord's call is one of the most significant responsibilities resting on our shoulders as parents. Our own lives must reflect the presence of God, His Word, and the love He offers His people.

Parents, do you encourage your children to develop their talents and gifts? Do you encourage your children to think of Church ministry as a possible life choice?

PRAYER IS A MOVING FORCE in vocation development. Prayer is effective; prayer is powerful; prayer is essential. Few are called to priesthood or religious life, but all are called to pray for vocations.

“Lord, your Church is in need.

Touch the hearts of many within our parish with the desire to serve you.

Call forth from this community sisters, brothers, deacons, priests and lay leaders.

Help us to live lives that will nurture childhood trust into adult commitment.

May this parish be a source of hope and a source of ministers for your Church, your people and your world.

Amen.”

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, Samuel was awakened from sleep by the voice of God calling his name. In the New Testament, Paul was knocked off his horse. Does God call in this way today? Usually not. One seminarian describes his experience of call: “I was very involved in my parish doing youth ministry and teaching C.C.D. and I was happy with that. But for some reason it wasn’t enough. I had a nagging feeling that I wanted to do *more* for people.”

Do you feel you may be called to priesthood, sisterhood, or brotherhood? Contact the archdiocesan vocation office.

ALL TOO OFTEN WE FORGET to express appreciation to those in service-oriented jobs, including priests, sisters and brothers. We forget because we think, “It’s their *job* to help.” Priests and religious aren’t superhuman. They need genuine support from those they serve. Let them know how you feel.

JESUS COMMANDED US to pray for vocations with his words, “Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Mt. 9:38). Take on prayer for vocations as your personal effort to increase the number of priests, sisters, brothers, and lay ministers.

WHAT IS A SISTER? A Sister lives in a religious community that follows a constantly renewed tradition, patterned on the life and teaching of the founder of the community. The work she generally does will depend upon the ministries of that community as influenced by the needs of the Church and its people — for example: teaching, social work, administration, nursing, peace and justice ministry, etc.

Does the lifestyle of a Sister sound attractive to you? Contact the archdiocesan vocation office for more information.

A VOCATION MUST BE NURTURED for a lifetime, not just until ordination or the taking of vows. You can help nurture the vocations of priests, sisters and brothers by praying, listening, and expressing appreciation. A life of service needs support from those served.

Saint JUNIPERO SERRA, the Franciscan priest who founded nine of California's missions, was a model of perseverance and strong faith. Despite a chronic foot infection, Serra walked more miles in his career than the expeditions of Lewis and Clark and Marco Polo combined, all to spread the Good News.

It was perhaps providential that the founders of Serra International, the organization of lay Catholics who promote vocations, chose Fr. Junipero Serra as their patron in 1935. Now, even more than then, the work of promoting vocations requires perseverance and strong faith.

Please continue to pray for an increase in vocations to priesthood, sisterhood, and brotherhood.

How will you work out your life response to God?

The National Coalition for Church Vocations has distributed a pamphlet containing general information on some of the many ways to continue God's work. The following are some excerpts from that pamphlet.

"Community" describes the life religious brothers and sisters choose.

Community enables the individual to reach out to others with the strength and courage that comes from knowing, "I don't have to do it alone. Others stand with me in this. My abilities are complemented by their gifts, confidence, wisdom and vision." In community, sisters and brothers live out their vowed commitments, knowing that, though each member is unique, the binding force in life is each one's personal and communal relationship with Jesus.

Today, the three vows (celibacy, poverty and obedience) which most religious make in a public way, may seem to be out of step with an age of sexual revolution. They are considered inconsistent with the popular demand for more and better "things," and with the ultimatums for the individual's "personal rights."

Celibacy is a gift and a promise to love very deeply and to express that love for others without using those physical expressions proper to marriage. The lives of many men and women religious are rich and loving within the context of celibate love as are the lives of happily married couples.

In a world waging war on poverty, men and women religious choose to live as Jesus did — simply. Because they share expenses and try to keep their personal and communal needs simple, they can get along very well on very little.

Then, there's obedience. The obedience of sisters and brothers is to the God they love, and the ways to this love are not obscure. God's voice is heard in the many voices of community.

Everyone has a vocation; pray for yours.

“Lifestyles” and “Prayer Styles” of sisters and brothers in “community” are described by the National Coalition for Church Vocations following their description of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, as follows:

Personal choice within the specific spirit and custom of a community encourages a great deal of creative, thoughtful and prayerful decision-making about how sisters and brothers live and grow holy.

Again, community is a frame of reference. Some people find living in a traditional convent or a very large community house best suited to them and to their current ministry or apostolate. Others are drawn to small-group living, perhaps in a small home or apartment. For still others, the decision must be to live alone — and yet to be very community-oriented during this interim.

Basically, it’s not really *where* you live, but *why* and *how* you do it.

That’s true about praying, too. Everybody does it, but there are many different ways in which we can relate to God. The community helps here, too. Sisters and brothers pray — frequently within very ancient traditions of prayer, constantly finding new ways of keeping in close touch with God.

Individually, they have their special ways of being with God, listening to Him and responding to His love.

The variety of lifestyles and prayer forms evident in the so-called “active” communities is also apparent in contemplative groups of religious. Men and women attracted to contemplative life learn from the great prayers of the past even as they explore new forms of contemplative prayer and contemplative living. This vocation is a particularly precious gift to contemporary society and culture.

Among some contemplatives there is renewed interest in “hermitages.” Through this kind of life some are finding, in greater isolation and solitude, an even more intense form of spiritual life.

Pray for vocations.

As a lay person, you can serve the Church in several ways.

Your vocation could include service at the archdiocesan or parish level, as a director of religious education, as a church musician, or as an administrator of social services. If you want to do volunteer work, such service is usually for a year or two in a mission of the Church either in the United States or overseas.

In addition, the Catholic Church has restored the order of permanent diaconate. A deacon is a man 35 years of age or older, married or single, who serves the people of God in the ordained diaconal ministry. His ministry is liturgical (preaching), sacramental (except Eucharist and Penance), pastoral and social.

To find out more about all three types of service, contact the archdiocesan chancery in charge of each type of service. Many opportunities are available.

Do you consider yourself an informed Catholic?

Think hard. How do you perceive the meaning of Christ, the nature of the Church and the Church's relationship to the world? When is the last time you read, discussed or listened to Scripture, ethics, Church history, spirituality or doctrine, other than at Mass?

Heavy? Not very. While you don't need to do the course work leading to a master's degree in theology, you should learn enough to be a very informed Catholic. You should have some beliefs on these perceptions based upon your reading, your study and your dialogue with other Catholics.

In *The Responsible Person in Society*, Fr. John Pawlikowski, OSM, a professor of social ethics, asks the reader: "What sets apart the moral vision of Christians in general and of Catholics in particular? Who is the Christian, according to this moral tradition? What kind of person is the Christian called to become? How are the principles of Catholic and Christian moral theology applicable in daily life and to specific dilemmas and conflict situations?"

Pray for vocations.

Religious priest; diocesan priest. Why the separate designations?

Religious priests usually live in a religious community, which centers their lives. It is from this root and from his own interior life that a religious priest is able to meet the needs of the Church in ministries such as teaching, overseas ministry, social work, pastoral ministry, chaplaincy and the like. He takes vows of chastity, poverty and obedience according to the spirit of his own congregation. A person who feels called to this life may contact any member of a community with which he is familiar.

A diocesan priest ordinarily serves the people of God in a given area (a diocese) as a parish priest. Yet, diocesan priests are also involved in administration, campus ministry, hospital and prison chaplaincy and the like. Beneath the visible surface of these ministries lies an abiding prayerful relationship with our Lord, for whose sake and for whose people he ministers.

Are you serving our Church? Pray for vocations.

The Church is a pilgrim people, ever on the move toward the fullness of God's kingdom. They are a community of people with a future. "All of us influence the future of ministry in the Church by our own attitudes toward its value and worth," said Fr. John Adamski, a former director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Ga.

"I have the opportunity to make sure that the message of the importance of ministry in the Church, both now and in the future, is proclaimed, heard and, hopefully, understood. . . My words and works can encourage all of us to grow even more faithful as ministers for our world."

Some personal definitions of ministry are: somehow bringing the life of Jesus to our brothers and sisters; being the bridge between the Scripture and the elements of our faith, tradition and the reality of people's lives; dispensing something to another, material or spiritual; serving others in the name of Jesus out of love for God and His people.

Take inventory of yourself: How do you bring the Gospel to others? Do you put Jesus' words into action by serving others in His name?

Whether you are in eighth grade, high school or college, this is "decision time." This year is not just another year in school, but a special time in your life. This is a great opportunity to develop your gifts and talents.

So, work hard, do and be your best. Shape your own dreams and goals by using the rich talent with which the Lord has blessed you.

As you look at your future, consider a life of service in the Church. Think seriously about taking at least a part of your life and giving it to other people in the name of our Lord and through the Church. Even more than that, consider priesthood, sisterhood and the religious life. What a great contribution you could make to the world and God's people!

Have a great year in school. Do your best. Make your education have such a positive effect on you that other people in this world will benefit from you and your talent.

In the meantime, in your daily prayers, pray for your vocation.

The seeds of vocations are sown in the family. Through the loving support of parents who nurture the love of God in their children, young people see that serving God is an important and satisfying lifestyle.

So that you parents can encourage your children to listen to God's call in their lives, the following might be one of your prayers at home.

*Lord, we thank you for our children.
You are Father and Mother to us;
Help us to be good parents.
Make our home a place of life and love,
Where strangers are welcome and sins are forgiven. Make us a family, Lord.*

*Whatever you may call our children to be,
Give us the grace to say "yes" and let go of their lives.
May our family's love extend beyond our table
And be a blessing for the whole world.
Help us to have a part in making your Kingdom come. Amen.*

God has the key to your life. Ask Him to show you how to be the best parents.

To High School Senior Men:

Soon you will be marking the beginning of the end of your high school career. You may be saying, "Thank God!" However, every ending marks a new beginning. As you approach senior year, you face two challenges: what to do and who to be.

You must choose a college, a career, and a lifestyle. But more importantly, you must choose how you will make a contribution to the people of this world. How will you answer that question?

The obvious answer is to be the very best person you can be. If you want to be a mechanic, be the best mechanic. If you choose law, be a lawyer of the highest integrity. If you enter the business world, then be above reproach. Whatever you do, explore the possibilities.

Consider the priesthood as one of those possibilities. Many young men have thought about becoming priests, but they have not shared that thought with others. If you think about or are interested in priesthood, get in touch with your parish priest.

Your senior year will fill you with excitement as you look to the future and discover a way to do God's will and God's work in the world.

A study of Catholic young people in the United States and Canada showed that 75% feel they were never encouraged to pursue the religious life.

There are many young people out there wondering what vocation path to follow. Some of them may be waiting for a suggestion or two from their peers, family or acquaintances. You could ask, “What are your plans for the future? Have you thought about pursuing law, medicine, religion?” Those whom you ask may feel that you see something about them that prompted your inquiry.

Encourage them to think and talk seriously about their future and then pursue it.

Perhaps you could become part of the Parish Vocation Ministry, to generate an atmosphere that is positively directed toward ministry and Church vocations.

Let me have the attention of you future leaders of the world; all children of all ages who are wondering how you will labor, where you will labor, and for whom. One thing is certain: you must labor. But, in whose vineyards?

Life is a transitory voyage. We all know the point of origin. The point of destination? Well. . .

Whatever trade, profession or other endeavor you follow, remember the words of the psalmist, who prays to God to lead him on his search for his vocation.

Lord God, you know me.

You know when I sit

And when I stand.

You have me always in your heart. I thank you for this, Lord.

You know the path for my life And what will make me happy. Show it to me, Lord.

Bless me, guide and be my Lord, So whatever road I choose,

I may choose it for your glory. Amen.

Mary Queen Vocation Ministry

Jesus told His Disciples, “I came to serve, not to be served.”

A vocation is a call to serve. It is a profession, an urge, a predisposition to undertake a certain kind of work. It is a choice for which you are particularly suited. The central question always is, “How best can I serve my God and others?”

If you feel a calling to the married life, there are many Church ministries from which to choose. Many are in need of your service, as a deacon, a Eucharistic minister, a visitor to the sick and aged, or an usher. Whatever you choose, do something that serves others. When you do this, you are serving God.

If you feel a calling to priesthood or religious life, ask questions and talk to priests or religious. They know that surviving isn’t enough. They can help you come to know your vocation or career, or even your own true self.

Above all, start with prayer. Whatever your vocation, if you are good at what you do, it is a gift from God. Only through prayer will you be able to recognize what vocation gift He wants to give to you.

Mary Queen Vocation Ministry

Most of us like mysteries, especially those we can solve using clues, facts and reason. One of the greatest mysteries of our lives is, “Who will I become?”

Our Christian teaching tells us that we receive a personal call from God to love and serve His people. But how? What are the clues?

What do other people and events tell us about whether or not our options include a vowed life as a brother or sister or ordination to the diaconate or priesthood?

Take a look at the “facts” outside you, the needs beyond the people and world you know. How can you help house those in need, to bring about peace and justice where there is prejudice and violence?

Where do you enter this scenario? What do you sense in your heart and head? Are you a leader or a follower? Do you work well with people? How are you with God?

With these clues and facts about today’s world and yourself, how do you answer the question of who you will become? How do you decide how you will work out a life response to God?

Mary Queen Vocation Ministry

The following is from Sr. Sarah Marie Sherman, RSM, on “Why Religious Life?”

“Who are the women who are choosing religious life today? Why, with the distractions and opportunities of today’s world, would they want religious life? . . . These women are better educated and professionally prepared. . . Their level of spiritual maturity and personal autonomy is generally more developed.

“These women. . . have learned that to share life, prayer and service in community is still a truly rewarding and fulfilling vocation, but it requires a mature person, both psychologically and spiritually, to commit oneself to this lifestyle. The women choosing religious life today are coming basically for the same reason that women have always chosen religious life — because it provides an alternative way of living the Gospel. They want to be of service to others as Jesus was, and community gives them support, companionship, encouragement for what is best in them and challenges what still needs to grow.”

These women join religious life because, ultimately, they believe they are called by Jesus.

If you are interested in a religious life, consider visiting members of a religious community in your area.

Pray for vocations, including your own.

Mary Queen Vocation Ministry

Sisters are women just like you.

Women, just like you, who have families and friends, and who have come from parishes and neighborhoods and schools and jobs.

Women who have come to our area from other places.

Women, convinced that ministry within the Church is their right and their responsibility — that the vowed life and community is their vocation.

Women who serve wherever they are needed. In retreat centers and retreat houses, in parishes, schools, hospitals, homes, offices, from rural areas to the inner cities, on the streets, on justice and peace committees, on neighborhood organization boards and on parole boards, a part of commissions, agencies, institutes — everyday life.

Women who teach and preach and heal. Since their lifestyle is Gospel-centered, they do as Jesus did. The needs of the Church and the world are limitless, and so the ministry they do takes on many forms.

If this life appeals to you, make a call to serve Him. Contact the Archdiocesan Vocations Office.

Pray for vocations.

Mary Queen Vocation Ministry