

7 Ways to Make Your Parish Vocations Friendly

The local Church can be the rich soil to harvest vocations



By Father David Cartwright

Vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life do not occur *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”). They come from a context.

Primarily, of course, this is the call of the Lord. However, to amplify or turn up the volume of this call, a few things can help.

Our local parishes, sometimes called “communities of grace” by my archbishop, are the richest soil for the harvesting of vocations from the Church. It is here that the local Church nourishes and supports those whom the Lord calls.

It is also the local Church that calls

STEPS OF HEARING THE CALL

Throughout the ages, people have struggled to understand God’s call to them. Four basic steps of discernment — becoming aware, gathering information, making a decision, and looking for confirmation of your choice — can help.

— vocationnetwork.org

forth vocations from their number to serve the communities who nourished them. But how can these communities of grace be vocations friendly?

Let me offer a few suggestions.

1. Get Parishioners to Pray

A supernatural call requires a supernatural response. Prayer is the first ingredient to more vocations. For example, some parishes include a petition for vocations each week in the general intercessions. Perhaps the priest of the parish may offer a Mass for vocations from the missal on occasion?

Another consideration includes things such as the occasional Holy Hour for vocations, especially near times such as Good Shepherd Sunday, St. John Vianney’s feast day, Priesthood Sunday, the solemnity of the Sacred Heart, diocesan ordinations, priestly jubilees, significant moments in the life of the parish and the local Church.

Prayer is the necessary first ingredient to vocations.

2. Active Identification

There may be some young peo-

ple that you or others identify as possible candidates. First, begin to pray for them intentionally. Get others to join you in prayer for them. Do some penance for their vocation.

Second, befriend them and perhaps invite them to be involved in parish ministry. Can they serve at the altar or as a lector? Liturgical ministries are important seedbeds for vocations to the priesthood.

Ask the Holy Spirit to open their hearts and, when the time is right, pose the question to them. As the saying goes, timing is everything, and laying the groundwork and sowing seeds is important for the call to be heard and responded to.

3. Insert Vocation into the Parish Vocabulary

With the dearth of vocations in many dioceses and congregations, the temptation is for this issue to disappear from the vocabulary of many (except to lament what is not happening). Share any good news with the parishioners. When there is an ordination, priestly jubilee or other significant occasion, tell people about it. Write something for the parish bulletin

and utilize social media.

Just like thanksgiving and stewardship became part of parish vocabulary over the years, so should vocations. It's at least as important for the future of the Church as parish finances!

4 • Use the Parish Bulletin and Social Media

Use these mediums to promote and pray for vocations. Share articles, stories and events from your diocese, your vocations office and religious congregations.

The parish bulletin is perhaps the one religious thing that people will read. It is usually the only religious thing they will read, often while waiting for Mass to start or the homily to finish!

Stories, articles, items of interest about vocations and ministry in the parish bulletin will contribute, albeit subtly, to creating the culture of vocations in the parish community.

5 • Invite Visiting Priests and Religious

Visibility is important. We have a generation of young people who probably have not seen a religious brother or sister in ministry. The presence of priests in schools is not always as visible and active as it was in former times.

There are perhaps occasions when you can invite religious to the parish for the weekend. They may wish to showcase their ministry or sell merchandise. Perhaps there are occasions when a visiting priest may give a vocations testimony.

The visible presence of priests and religious can broaden the horizons of parishioners to show that vocations are not confined to the same priest — as good as he is, of course — that they see each week.

6 • Utilize Promotional Material

Things such as posters, brochures and banners may seem to some

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to be passé in this era where social media seems to reign. However, not all those who visit our parishes, schools and communities are as connected as we might think. And if they are connected, it's likely that the topic of vocations is not the top of their bookmarked web pages.

We are trying to not just increase vocations, but also to raise awareness of the Catholic population. So things like promotional material in our schools, parishes, halls, etc., are important to raise the consciousness of the issue for all people.

VOCATION GUIDE

“Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry” (Vianney Vocations, \$17) by Rhonda Gruenewald provides step-by-step guidance on how to carry out dozens of vocation-oriented activities, from powerful Holy Hours to innovative ways to support seminarians and inspire altar servers. It's written for ordinary Catholics in ordinary parishes who want to inspire an extraordinary new generation of priests and religious.

“Hundredfold” offers wisdom about how to start and sustain a healthy ministry. The author describes each phase of developing a strong vocations ministry, from start-up to maturation. Existing committees, such as long-standing Serra Clubs, will gain a new vision and fresh ideas for their continued ministry.

For more information, visit vianneyvocations.com/product/hundredfold.

7 • Be Visible in School Ministry

In times gone by, religious and priests were a regular physical presence in our education system. Their presence spoke for itself. Now, such a responsibility often falls to religious education teachers, leaders and the chaplain or parish priest.

We will not see instant results with vocations ministry. We are planting seeds for the future. The vocations that we have now are a result of the hard work of others who have led the charge before us. We owe it to future generations to do something with our school ministry.

This may be as simple as visiting a classroom and proposing the idea of a vocation once a year. Perhaps it involves the school assembly, public events, posters, newsletters, social media, retreats or camps.

Other resources

Your local vocations office may be able to offer support and ideas for promoting vocations in the local communities. Some parishes have embraced the idea of a parish vocations awareness committee. The possibilities are endless.

We devote a great deal of time and energy (hopefully) to evangelization. Vocations should be an integral part of any parish ministry.

The parish community is the locus of spiritual energy and pastoral activity of the local Church. Part of this activity must be prayer and promotion of vocations if our local communities and the wider Church is to fulfill the divine command of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. **TP**

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