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Families Foster Vocations by Jane Carter

Introduction

For years I have thought that one missing part of programs for/with young people and religious vocations is that it is just NOT part of the home conversation.....in the course of our daily lives as parents and grandparents, how often do we actually TALK about “growing up to be a priest?” Do your children and grandchildren hear it at home or only in religion class or on Vocation Sunday? Do they have gifts that might lead them toward deciding to be a sister or brother? Have your children have ever heard you refer to your marriage as a vocation? Or the single life as a chosen plan?

When a little boy says “I want to be a fireman!” do we panic and start telling him all the dangers of a career choice like that and insist that he does not really want to be a fireman----or do you simply smile and say “Oh, what part of being a fireman do you like most?” And then buy him a bright red firefighter’s hat and a shiny hook and ladder

truck to pretend with? Well — what if he says he wants to be a priest? Is there a loss of color in your face? Does your heart pound in fear? Do you begin a list in your head of all the reasons he will be lonely or everything he must give up or selfishly think no grandchildren? Or do you smile and say “Oh? What part of being a priest do you think would be the most fun?” as you did when he said fireman....

Parents are the first educators in the faith. It is within the family that young people learn to pray. It is from the example of parents and family that faith is first experienced. Home is where children and young people share their dreams, study life around them, and first begin to discover God’s special plan for each person. It is the family, then, that must provide the atmosphere and opportunity to hear and recognize God’s call.

Listen now to the Parable of the Seed from the Gospel of Mark. (Mark 4:3-9)

The challenge of the Gospel message to us? Our homes and our families as well as our hearts cannot be worn out and unyielding like the “footpath” so that the seeds of God’s words will be snatched away. We cannot allow our hearts, our homes and our families to be shallow, like the

“rocky ground” with no depth for roots. And perhaps hardest of all, we cannot let our homes, our families and our hearts become patches of “thorny ground,” where the worries of schedules and activities, bills and tuition payments, insurance and mortgages and so on choke us and make it impossible for God’s Word, to rest in us that we might reflect, embrace, and ponder. Our hearts, our homes and our families must be open to the Word, God’s whisper, God’s call when we hear it—or our children hear it, or our spouses or grandchildren or nieces and nephews hear it.

“God calls everyone of us to a specific vocation in life. This call is built into the very fiber of our talents and abilities. Discovering that call and following it, the Des Moines Diocesan Vocations website reminds us, is our personal key to the mission God gave us and the blessing that we are to be to ourselves and others.” Think about that for a second— each of us is to be a blessing!

Do you think your children are too young to hear God’s call? A survey of priests and religious sisters asserts that over half heard the first call to their vocation in grade school....a common age was 11.

The message to our children should be—over and over again —that everyone is called by name to have a mission in life. Everyone is called to be a disciple of Jesus, to be a

good person, to be holy. They must hear it, see it lived, and experience it in the home.

We are reminded that: “Priesthood and religious life is an awesome call from God to serve his people. Not only do children need generous hearts to respond to God’s call, but parents need that same generosity to support their children!”

Fostering Vocations in the home demands that parents must strive to make a home where God is first, where being somebody is valued more than having something, where learning how to live is more important than learning how to make a living.

What is your image of GOD?

I read something that I kept close to me throughout LENT this year that really paints the image I want—and one I think we must give our children. The vision of a loving God. Not a God who watches our every move because He wants to catch us in failure, to see us make a mistake, to know when you do things wrong----but a God who watches your every move because he is soooo in love with you that he cannot take his eyes off you!

What a marvelous image!

I find myself here, in this gathering, “preaching to the choir.” But I believe there is a reason—a plan for this, a plan for US. If we are faith filled women—gathered to pray and fellowship and learn and mentor and witness together—who better to take this message out from here? To bring this program to our families and the families of our parishes? I truly believe that as faithful and faith filled women of the Church, we are the best resource God has to promote vocations within families.

As the prayer card in your packet says.....

If not us, who?

If not here, where?

If not now, when?

If not for the Kingdom, why?

Dare the dream.....

NOW.....let’s look at the program— “Families Foster Vocations!”

