

ABC'S OF FOSTERING VOCATIONS (FOR PARENTS)

A: Answer your children's questions about priesthood or Religious life; never discourage them or ridicule them if they bring it up.

Ask your child to identify a talent which he or she has, and imagine together what work or ministry God might want someone to do with that type of talent. Also talk about what good things can be done with the talent right now. For instance, singing talent could be used to sing a baby brother or sister to sleep. Talent at a sport could be used to help someone on the team who needs extra practice.

B: Bring your family to the next ordination Mass or prayer vigil for religious.

C: Challenge teens and young adults to consider a Church-related vocation. Tell them about the gifts in ministry you see in them. Encourage them to participate in at least one special vocation event (ordination, vocation retreat, Focus 11, etc.).

Cultivate an attitude of service by responding as a family to the needs of others. Seek out those in need and find ways to care for them.

D: Discuss your own vocation to family life, explaining that God calls some people to priesthood or religious life, some to marriage, and some to life as single laypeople. You can talk about vocations firsthand!

E: Encourage your children to be involved in the liturgical life of the parish as servers, readers, musicians, etc. (and see to it that they get there on time).

Explore the feelings you might experience should one of your children choose to give his or her life to Church ministry and discuss with your spouse your feelings and reactions if one of your children decided to become a priest or nun.

F: Find opportunities to affirm the gifts and talents of your children, and help them relate their gifts to various career and life choices (including priesthood and religious life).

G: Guide your middle school child to pray that he or she might discover and use the gifts God has given.

H: Have a priest come and bless your home. Have your younger children make a cross to hang in each bedroom in your home. Perhaps invite him for dinner

I: Include the diocesan vocation prayer in your personal and family prayer, especially on Wednesdays.

Invite a priest, brother or sister to dinner or to an outing with your family and make sure to ask him/her their vocation story...in front of the children.

J: Join together in prayer as a family; include a short vocations prayer when you pray before meals (especially on Wednesday).

K: Keep an eye open for TV shows and movies that present Gospel-centered role models. Watch them with your children and engage in a discussion (EWTN and Discovery channels are pretty good at airing shows that fit this category).

L: Let your children see their Baptism pictures. Have the children make and send a card or note to the priest who baptized them promising him they will pray for them.

Let your children notice an attitude of openness to God's will in you.

M: Make time for teenagers in your life: your children and their friends, nieces and nephews, babysitters, etc.

N: Name the gifts of each family member on their birthday. Express gratitude for these gifts.

O: On the date of your child's baptism, talk about the life of the saint for whom the child is named (or the saint's day it is). There is plenty of information about the background of saints on the Internet. The saints are people from all walks of life who tried to make a positive difference in the world--a goal as real today as it was for the saints.

P: Pray for the seminarians of the diocese by name (available in the vocations office and/or the internet); you may want to "spiritually adopt" one of them...send them birthday cards and even invite them to your home for a meal and ask them to share their discernment story...in front of the children.

Q: Quiz your children and discuss with them stories of 'calls' in Scripture (e.g. Mary's response to God in Luke 1:26-39, Jesus' calling the Apostles in Mt 4:18-22, etc.).

R: Remember in prayer by name those who minister to your family and include in your family prayers petitions for those called to priesthood and consecrated life.

S: Set aside a "family time" each week for kids to talk about what is happening in lives. Let them share about their day.

Share the story of your own vocational choice with your children. Celebrate the occasion of your wedding anniversary as you share the story of your vocation to married life.

Support and participate in any school or parish vocation activities.

T: Talk about your family's ethnic or cultural heritage at supper, while driving in the car, or at some other time when family members are all together. Pass along memories of cultural aspects of holiday and other celebrations that you remember. Try to speak about the childrens' grandparents and great-grandparents as much as possible.

Talk positively and enthusiastically about the priests, sisters, brothers, and deacons in your parish and share with your children the stories of the priests or sisters who have inspired you and how (e.g. priest at your wedding, or baptized your children, priests or religious from school, family friend, etc.).

Tell your children why you chose your particular profession. Who helped you form your decision?

U: Use books and videos to familiarize your children with saints who are priests or vowed religious. Use these lives of the saints as a springboard for discussion on these lifestyles.

Utilize opportunities to share your vocation as parents: what you value, how you came to that decision, and the importance of faith in your life.

V: Visit Churches and Shrines while on vacation and offer prayers together as a family (San Juan del Valle).

W: Witness to your own vocation by telling stories about how you fell in love. Let the children see the love and care that parents have for each other.

X: eXcite your children about being involved in the parish life by being involved yourselves...and let them know how much you enjoy whatever ministry you serve.

Y: Yield to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in your children. If they express a desire to learn more about becoming a priest or religious, support but do not persuade them...allow the Spirit to take over.

Z: Zero in on the children's interests/hobbies/gifts and foster them by encouraging them to pray that they are used to build the Kingdom of God.

The end of the alphabet, but certainly not the end of ways or ideas to foster vocations at home...the Domestic Church!