

On a Mission from God



Aug 2013

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Fostering vocations in your children

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This Month...



Fr 2	St Peter Julian Eymard
Su 4	Ordinary Time 18 Treasure in Heaven
Mo 5	St Mary Major
Tu 6	Transfiguration
Th 8	St Mary of the Cross MacKillop
Su 11	Ordinary Time 19 Be Ready St Clare of Assisi
Th 15	The Assumption
Su 18	Ordinary Time 20 Keep Running
Tu 20	St Bernard
Sa 24	St Bartholomew
Su 25	Ordinary Time 21 A People Gathered
We 28	St Augustine

Priests, nuns and Brothers don't grow on trees!

There has been a lot discussion in recent decades about the decline in vocations. Indeed this has come to a crisis point in the western world with parishes closing and merging, religious orders dwindling into aged care homes and seminaries standing empty.



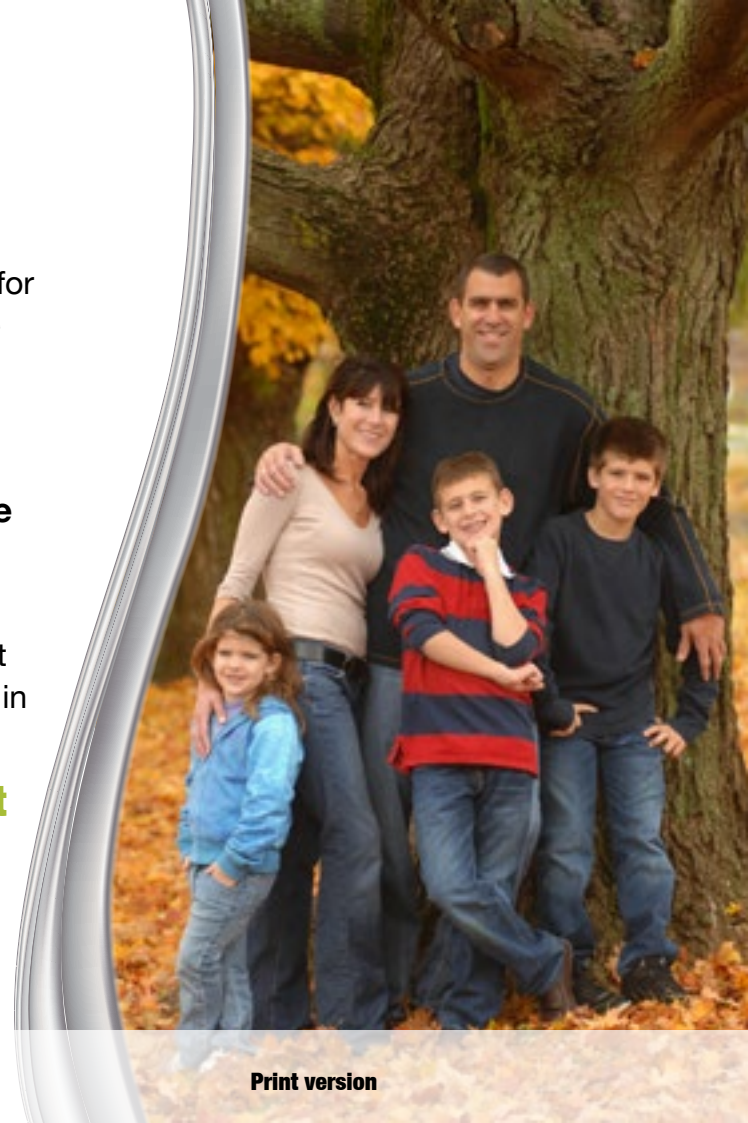
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However, this is not the only story about vocations. There are a number of religious orders that are flourishing and dioceses whose seminaries are at capacity. And this is not only happening in the developing world where many postulants wait years for a place at the seminary or novitiate, but also in some western nations too.

What are these dioceses, parishes and orders doing differently and why are vocations flourishing in their shadow while vocations wilt elsewhere?

Before we look to the bishops and ‘the church’ (whoever that is!), to solve the vocations shortage, let us look to ourselves... ordinary, lay men and women in families raising children.

After all, priests nuns and brothers don't grow on trees, they grow in families!



“At a parish confirmation dinner I asked the Bishop what the Church was going to do about a lack of priestly vocations, expressing my real sense we were losing a key part of who we are as a Catholic community. “How many priests has your parish raised up in the last twenty years?” he asked. When I answered none, he replied, “You have three sons. Have you ever told them how important this is to you?” I never forgot that moment; it has impacted how I talk to not only my own sons, but other young men who ask my advice on their career and vocational calling.”



Orders Getting it Right

The Sisters of Life

Founded in New York by Cardinal John O’Conner in 1991, the Sisters of Life are one of the youngest religious orders and have rapidly grown to over 100 fully professed sisters. Their charism is to protect and nurture human life, in a city where 50% of pregnancies end in abortion. Their missions include providing shelter for pregnant women, running post-abortion healing retreats and praying and fasting for human life.



The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

This young order founded in 1987 is an offshoot of the capuchins. Beginning in the Bronx of New York, their apostolate is to live a life of visible poverty, contemplative prayer and service to the poor and destitute. They do everything from counselling drug addicts, running catechism classes, to producing rap albums with a difference!



Discalced Carmelites

Tracing their foundation back to the reformers St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, the Discalced Carmelites have been in Australia since the late 1800s. They are a contemplative order dedicated to prayer, fasting and community. Their convents and monasteries are powerhouses of intercessory prayer and mysticism.



Print version

Marriage and Family: the birthplace of vocations

Every priest or religious came from a family, almost all from a family of faith. But clerical and religious life is not the only vocation in the Church; there are many others of which marriage is the most common of all vocations.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York noted the link between marriage and vocations to the priesthood and religious life:

**“We have a vocation crisis to life-long, life-giving, loving, faithful marriage. If we take care of that one, we’ll have all the priests and nuns we need for the church.”
August 13, 2009**



Your marriage is a vocation, a calling to deep communion with God through your spouse. You and your marriage are the first experience of vocation your children will have. It is also the primary model that your kids will have for marriage.

“Don’t worry that your children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.”

- Robert Fulghum

The best way to communicate the importance and value of vocation, is to live your own really well! Your marriage is the bedrock of your family, and a vocation of marriage lived in all its joyful (and messy) glory creates the space in which children can hear God’s call in their lives and provides the support to answer it.



Five of the surviving daughters of Blesseds Zélie and Louis Martin became nuns and one of them, we know and love as St Therese of Lisieux. Their family life was not a picture of perfection, nor was their marriage. They lost two daughters and two sons under the age of 5. They struggled to balance two businesses, raising their family, being active in their parish and serving the poor. Zélie died in 1877 from breast cancer leaving Louis with five daughters one of which was abused by a nanny. What characterises their spirituality as a couple was their radical openness and acceptance of God's plan, one that bore exceptional fruit in their daughter St Therese.

Fruitful Families

Three ways to create a fruitful atmosphere in your home

1. Pray

You hear it consistently in many vocation stories from priests and religious; a family that prays together gives birth to vocations of all kinds.

“Dad would tell me, ‘...Our Lord’s got a plan for you, a vocation: I don’t know how or to what he’s going to call you, but when he does you’ll know.’ Every night Dad would have us pray a little aspiration asking God to let us see His will.”

- Seminarian, Sydney Archdiocese

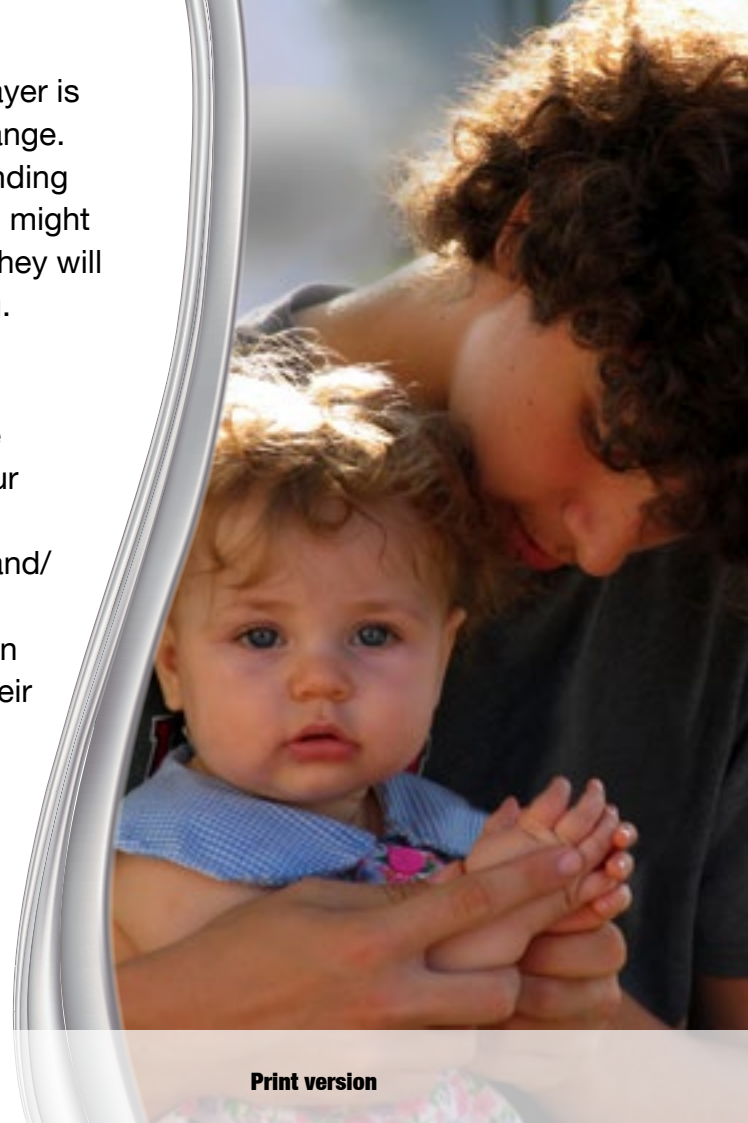
Some kind of regular family prayer ritual is critical to fostering your child’s emerging relationship with God. Some families say a whole Rosary after dinner, some have a routine bed time prayer. Others read scripture stories together or adopt faith activities like those provided in CathFamily.

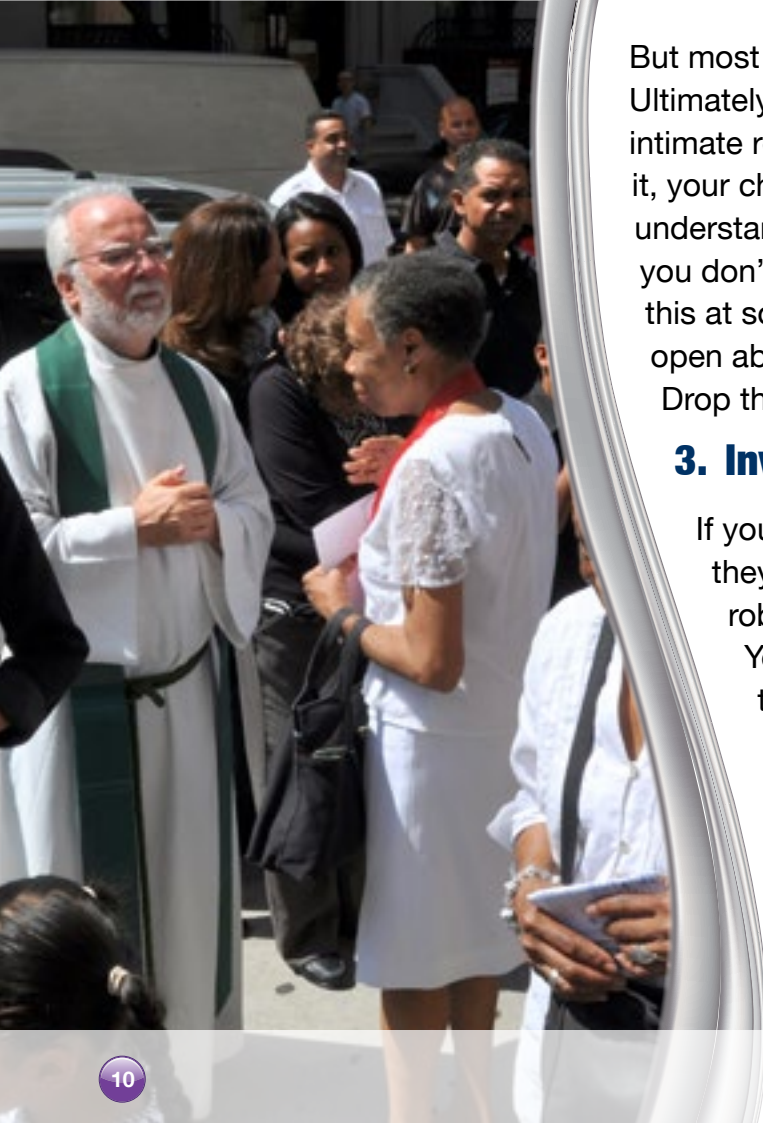


If you have young children, establishing a habit of prayer is often easier as they will be less likely to resist the change. The best way to get older children praying is by extending an invitation and going ahead with or without them. It might take a couple of weeks, but if you stick to a routine, they will notice and be influenced by it, and may even join you.

2. Talk

Talk about your vocation discernment. It could be the moment you knew when you were going to marry your wife/husband. Maybe you considered a calling to the priesthood or religious life before you met your husband/wife. Tell stories about the priests, nuns, brothers, married and single people who have had an impact on your vocation. Talk about your favourite saints and their life and vocation. Talk about the saints you may have named your children after and why you chose that particular saint.





But most of all... talk about your relationship with Jesus. Ultimately, the foundation of any vocation is a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus and if you don't talk about it, your children will have much more difficulty knowing and understanding their vocation. If you don't talk about it because you don't have one... that's ok, everyone has to grapple with this at some point, but do something about it! Be honest and open about the ups and downs, the joys and the struggles. Drop the J-word! Don't be afraid!

3. Invite

If your children only get exposure to priests at Mass, they will assume that priests are sacrament dispensing robots... Invite your parish priest over for Sunday lunch! You may be surprised how few invitations he gets. Is there a visiting priest? Invite him too! Are you lucky enough to have a convent near you? Invite the nuns over also. The casual and relaxed atmosphere of a family meal with guests not only instills a spirit of hospitality and welcome in your children; it gives them the opportunity to get to know people living different vocations, hear their stories and ask questions.

An invitation to love

You can't love what you don't know. We try to give our children every opportunity in life and run them around to music lessons, tutoring, sport games, dance classes, band practice etc.. All of these things are good, but our children's vocation needs to be nurtured just as much as their gifts and talents. Regular exposure to different people with different vocations will do more to expand your kid's horizons than you might imagine.

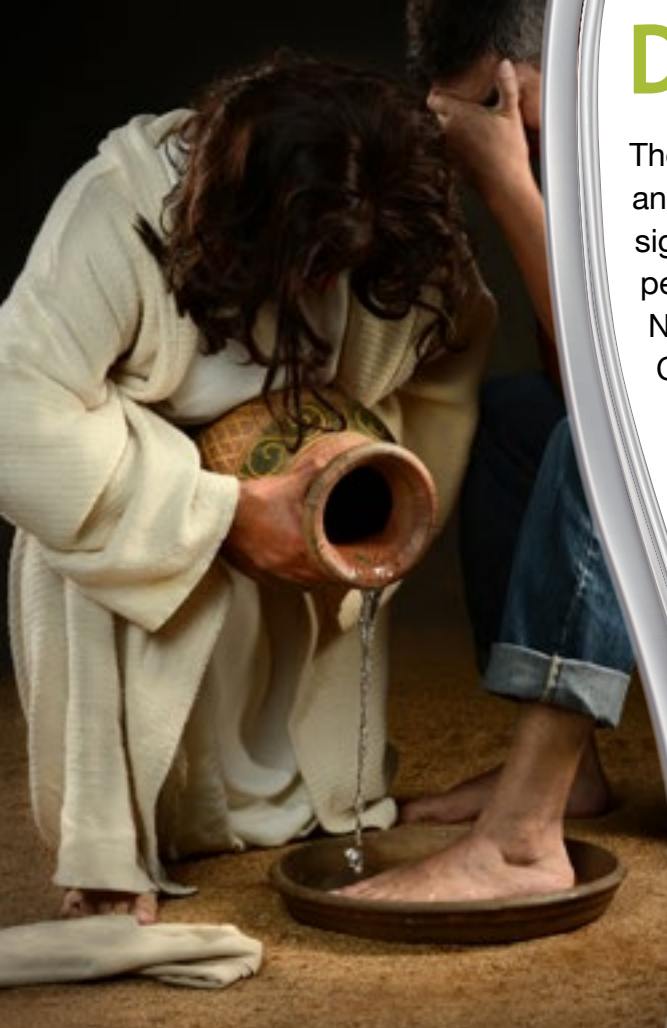


Discipleship

The vocations crisis goes deeper than the decline in religious and priestly vocations. There is also a crisis of discipleship, a significant dearth of ordinary people knowing and being in a personal relationship with Jesus. This is what our task is in the New Evangelisation, to not just raise our children to be cultural Catholics, but to raise disciples.

A vocation (to marriage, single, priesthood or religious life) is a supernatural mystery that emerges from a sustained encounter with Jesus. As parents, your key role is to facilitate both your own and your children's spiritual growth. Jesus loves you and has a plan for you, your husband or wife and your family. By nurturing your own discipleship, you will be able to then nurture discipleship in your children – a fundamental part of their capacity to discern their vocation whatever it may be.

Recommended Reading: Pick up a copy of *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry A. Weddell. This insightful book gives a thorough and thoughtful explanation of discipleship and how activating parishes is bearing incredible fruit across the world.



Made for Heaven

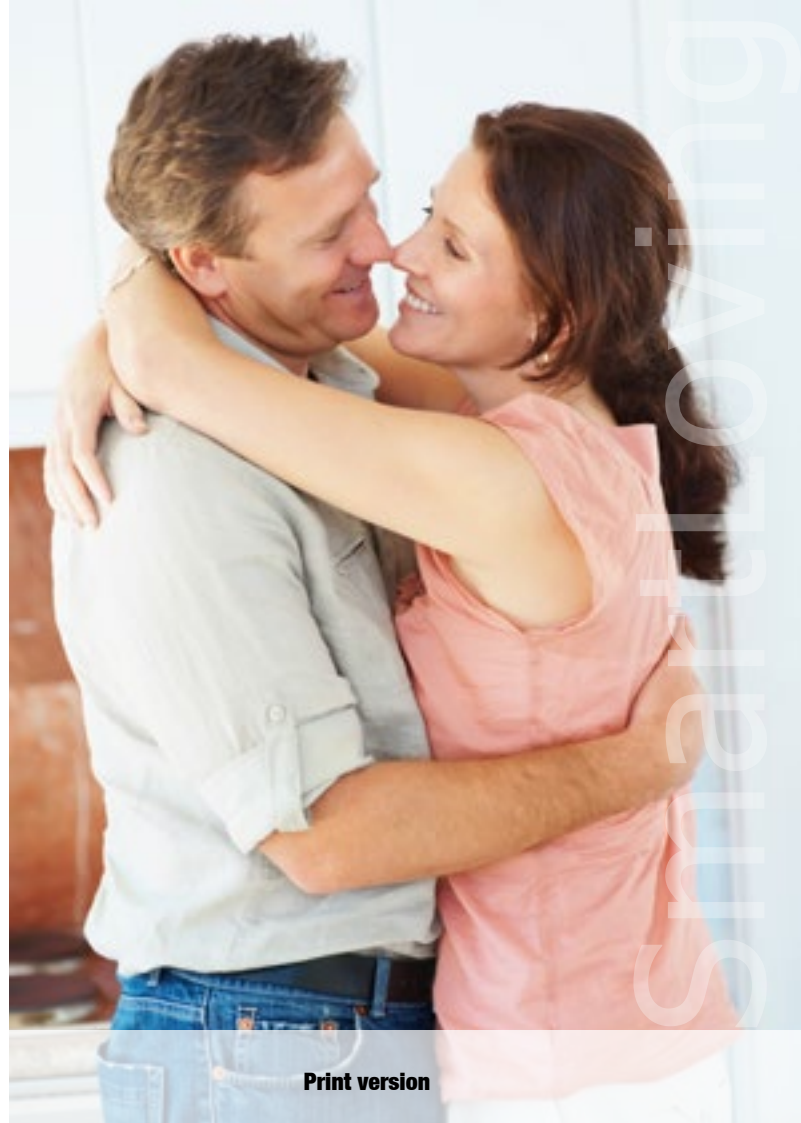
Francine & Byron Pirola

There's a difference between marrying in the church and at the church. When we marry at the church, often it's just a venue with no real connection to our faith. When we marry in the Church, there is a sense of grounding our relationship in a covenant understanding – that is, that our commitment is a sacred pledge made to each other, to God and to the community of believers. It's a pledge that we will do all in our power to assist each other in becoming saints.

Couples who live their marriages within this awareness are truly vocational - they have embraced their lifestyle as having meaning and purpose beyond their mutual fulfilment and satisfaction.

This covenant is a pledge to freely give themselves in love to each other, totally, faithfully and fruitfully their whole life long in imitation of Christ.

These couples however, do not undertake this sacred covenant on their own. Through their engagement with their faith community they have access to the prayer and practical support to guide them and support them in their journey of growth.



With so much public discussion about marriage in the wider community, the difference between a secular understanding of marriage and Matrimony as a Catholic vocation is becoming wider. With the exception of the essential prerequisite of being ‘freely entered’, on almost every other dimension there has been a divergence of values as illustrated in the table.

Catholic Vocation of Matrimony

Pre-marital chastity

Begins with the Wedding liturgy

Freely entered into

Between one man and one woman

Life long, permanent

Total, unconditional commitment

Faithful and exclusive

Openness to procreation

Willingness to raise any children as Catholics

Covenant between the spouses, God and the Church

Sacrament that serves the Church

Secular Marriage

Pre-marital sex and cohabitation normal

No substantial (or legal) difference to cohabitation

Freely entered into

Between two or possibly more people of any sex

Able to be ended by one or both

Conditional, independence can be maintained

Fidelity negotiable

Children are optional

No obligation to raise children in any faith

Private commitment with legal recognition

No obligation for religious commitment



The key differences could be summarised as Secular Marriage moving in the direction of a self-serving institution, one that fosters a transactional mindset: that is, “Am I getting as much out of this relationship as I am putting in?” In contrast, a vocation to Matrimony explicitly promotes an outward looking, service mindset, one that asks: “How can I make a gift of myself to my spouse and family?”

Secular Marriage and Matrimony are fundamentally different: the first is oriented towards personal happiness and fulfilment and the second towards a desire to serve God and to grow in holiness.

Questions for Reflection

1. On how many of the twelve features above do you come under the vocation of Matrimony vs secular Marriage?
2. Which aspects do you see as being most critical for your spiritual growth as a couple?
3. What is your reaction to the idea that vocations to the priesthood and religious life rely on the vocation of Matrimony?

Family Prayers

A routine of regular family prayer is critical to fostering vocations. If you don't know where to start or need something a bit different, check out these two prayer cards we've put together, one for vocations and one a simple daily family prayer.

More Resources

imagesisters.org

This awesome website is a new online initiative to help foster and support women's religious vocations.

smartloving.org | livinginlove.org

The go-to website for all things marriage. SmartLoving runs seminars and workshops for couples across Australia. Living in Love is its US counterpart.

wordonfire.org

The web-hub of Fr Robert Barron's evangelising ministry with youtube videos on everything from movies to the latest encyclical and his stunning *Catholicism* series.



