



Written By

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4 Ways to Promote Priestly Vocations in Your Parish

Being a seminarian, I'm surrounded by other seminarians and I've heard a variety of vocation stories. What always amazes me is how the Lord calls each man differently to the priesthood. Some felt urged to explore this vocation through promptings from the Holy Spirit, others heard the Lord while in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, still others were inspired by the examples of priests around them (if you're interested, here's my story).

A survey of the men who were ordained to the priesthood this past year in the United States highlights a point that we cannot overlook. **Four out of five men who were ordained in 2017 were urged to consider the priesthood by someone else**, most often through their parish priest, a friend, or another parishioner.

"That statistic should motivate all the faithful to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit, who may wish to use them to extend the invitation to ordained ministry," Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark said following the release of the survey.

We need to encourage vocations in our schools and churches, as men who decide to pursue the priesthood are likely to be involved in some faith-based activity in these places. On average, the survey reported that the recently ordained men first considered the priesthood at the age of 16 (incidentally, so did I). However, in many cases, they ultimately joined the seminary several years later. This shows **that the first seeds that were sown in their hearts needed time and nurturing to bear fruit** (all this sounds way too familiar).

Here are four ways that you can promote priestly vocations in your parish:

1. Start a 'traveling chalice' in your parish

A traveling chalice is a great way to introduce the idea of priestly vocations in your parish. How it works, is that each week a different household receives a chalice to take home. While the chalice is in that home, the people there commit to praying for vocations daily. In some parishes, this program is taken a step further through providing not just a chalice, but a bag filled with stuff to make the experience more dynamic – a poster of the local diocesan seminarians to hang up, prayer cards, stationery to send notes of encouragement to seminarians and priests, etc. While in some cases, families that sign up for this program simply pick up the chalice from the sacristy, other parishes hand the chalice to the household at the end of Mass. The latter method is a more effective one because the priest handing over the chalice to a different family each week becomes a visible sign of the support for vocations within that parish.

2. Invite a seminarian or a local vocations director to speak at your parish at least once a year

The idea of studying at a seminary for several years can sound quite scary. Inviting a seminarian to share his vocation story, as well as his positive seminary experiences can be very fruitful. Similarly, calling a vocations director, either from your local diocese or from a religious order, to talk about the process of formation towards the priesthood can also help. Doing this on a regular basis gives young men an opportunity to speak to someone who is used to answering questions about pursuing the priesthood. Videos like 'Fishers of Men', which give an overview of what the priesthood is all about, can also be played at your church in conjunction with such an event. I remember watching this video at the first vocation come-and-see event I attended, and I know first-hand how it stirred something deep in my heart.

3. Organize a day out with your parish priests or a group of seminarians

If you can rally either the altar-servers, youth or young adults of your parish, plan an outing for them with your parish priests or a group of seminarians. Setting up events for young men to be around priests and seminarians in 'typical' environments is crucial to plant the seeds of vocational discernment, as it gives one an insight into the man behind the collar. Since most people rarely interact with priests outside Church-based activities, it's important for these young men to see that priests are just regular people who like to hang out and have fun, whether at a barbecue, playing sports or watching a movie. Priests certainly try to keep the fire of Christ burning in their hearts at all times, but ask them yourself, and they will quickly tell you that they don't have halos or move around floating on air.

4. Get help with promoting vocations

If you think this whole endeavor will be an uphill task, **get help from people who are in the business of promoting vocations.** Organizations like Serra International exist to promote and foster vocations to the priesthood. If possible, talk to your parish priest about starting a local chapter of one of these groups, or at the very least, talk to these groups and ask them how they support and advance priestly vocations.

The bottom line is that the strategy to promote priestly vocations ought to be prayer, asking young men to just think about it, and to show them how the priesthood is a regular vocation. Too many men drop the idea of joining the seminary because they are poorly informed – either about the process of becoming a priest or understanding what the priesthood is actually all about. If there is a young man in your parish who you think should consider the priesthood, don't be afraid to make the 'ask' and suggest that he does. Chances are, he may say no... But there is a chance that he may say yes, or at the very least, you may have sown a seed that could bear fruit later... Wouldn't that be fantastic?