Msgr. Bill's Weekly Letter...

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let us be quite frank: the ability to cultivate vocations to the priesthood and the religious life is a sure sign of the health of a local Church. There is no room for complacency in this regard. God continues to call young people; it is up to all of us to encourage a generous and free response to that call. (Pope Benedict the 16th in his address to the United states bishops in 2008)

Vocation Ministry — Creating a Culture of Vocations — is a non-profit organization that trains, equips, and encourages priests, laity, and educators to light a fire of vocations in parishes and schools through awareness and prayer. It is committed to the goal of creating an environment in every parish, school and family that encourages and allows men and women to easily say "Yes" to God's call in their lives to the priesthood, consecrated life, or the Sacrament of marriage. Vocation Ministry has held over 135 diocesan-wide workshops for priests, parishioners, and educators in over 50 dioceses.

Vocation Ministry published a nation-wide analysis on the quantity of active priests in dioceses around the nation. Our Archdiocese is in Tier 1 [dioceses with 700,000 Catholics +). We are the 5th in number of Catholics in our Archdiocese behind Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Boston, and then us.

In this Tier 1, the average number of parishioners served by an active priest is 7,000. The average percent of ordinations in 2017 – 2021, on a base need ordination rate, was 39%. The percent of total seminarians versus base need seminarian rate is 37%. As you see, we are falling behind.

Thus, we need to step up our ministry to build a culture of vocation, not just priests, but of religious (sisters and brothers), of permanent deacons, and strong marriages. We need to make a special effort to be men and women, young and old, who pray regularly for our young people to say yes to God's call.

Here in our parish, we are restarting the practice of the traveling crucifix for vocations. Beginning this Sunday, I am asking three families to receive one of these traveling crucifixes. In the box is a small crucifix on a stand and some prayer cards for the family. I would ask every family at the breakfast table or the dinner table to say a few prayers for an increase in vocations. When the week is up, you bring the traveling crucifix to the church office so that on Sunday, a different family can take the crucifix and pray in their own home.

When I was growing up, boys and girls were regularly encouraged to pray whether they had the vocation to the priesthood or religious life. To this day, I remember very vividly, that my parents would talk about our parish priest. They enjoyed his homilies and his leadership. They didn't say to become a priest like him, rather their respect for the priesthood was apparent. The other person who helped me discern the priesthood was my uncle George, God rest his soul. Whenever we would go down to Jersey for vacation or Thanksgiving, he would always ask me if I thought about becoming a priest. I would always say no. But that didn't stop him. Every time I saw him, he put that idea in my head. I did not become a priest because he said those things to me, but I thought about it because he said those things. You know the end of that story.

I believe that we should change the question, "*What do you want to be when you're older?*" or "*Did you ever think about becoming a priest?*" Our culture pushes our youth to look out for yourself; it's my life I can do want I want; and so on and so on. Many have lost the ethics of the common good. Our life is NOT just for me, but for others.

Let us change the question we ask our children about their future to, "*What do you think **God** wants you to be to when you are older?"* They may say, *"I want to be teacher or a soldier, or nurse, or a doctor, etc."* When that happens respond with, *"Any of those are good and noble, but what do **you** think God wants you to do?"*

They may say, "*I don't know what he wants me to be."* As someone who loves their child could say, "*My dear one, I think you ought to spend some quality time with him. After all, you are his child first, and he will lead you to happiness."*

pace – bene,

Msgr. Bill