

7 ways to help children be open to religious vocations

As parents, John and I try to find ways to help our children understand that God might call them to the religious life one day.

Obviously we don't constantly talk about vocations, but we do drop pebbles into conversation from time to time, encouraging our sons to consider the possibility.



If you are trying to introduce the conversation with your family, here are a few ideas:

1. **Tell stories.** John and I often speak about priests we know or have known. John shares memories of Msgr. Anthony Sauerwein, and I tell them about my mother's uncle who was a Jesuit priest. I love telling our boys about Fr. Tom Pietrantonio, a Franciscan priest, who told us how he realized God was calling him to the priesthood—and to the Franciscans. At 11, he was sitting in a chapel watching a Franciscan open the windows with such reverence that he felt the first tug of his vocation. I want our children to know that a calling doesn't necessarily come with fireworks.



Our friend Fr. Tom

2. **Help them see priests as people.** Talk with the priest after Mass. Visit a local monastery or convent. We talk about the priests beyond church, how one grew up in the same neighborhood Mama did, how another has a brother who is also a priest. Priests are real people, and we want our children to realize that you don't need a halo to be called.

3. **Make the religious life feel accessible.** Whenever we drive past St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, I explain what it is. I hope they feel that if there is a school where you can learn to become a priest, it's not as if it's some unreachable goal. Yes, they need to be called first. But we want them to be open to the possibility.



4. **Watch movies with priests and sisters as characters.** Maybe seeing *Boys Town* and *The Keys of the Kingdom* isn't going to affect our sons much. But we watched *The Return of the Jedi* last night, and today they were battling with light sabers. It's

worth a shot.

5. Help them learn to listen for God. We don't know whether our children will be called to the single life, the married life, or the religious life. So we are trying to help them build a relationship with Jesus—and learn to listen. That's a lifelong goal, of course, but we can certainly start now.



6. Pray together for them to grow to be all God created them to be.

7. Stay out of their way. We are their parents, of course. But parents' wishes and hopes for the future could so easily interfere with their child's calling. They are our children, but God is the one who created them. He knows them better than we ever will.

This morning at Mass Daniel, who is 5, was watching the priest closely and I whispered, "I wonder whether you will be a priest one day."

"I don't know," he whispered back. "I'll wait to see what God tells me I can do."

So will we.

How are you introducing the conversation with your family? We are always looking for ideas!



I'm joining Gina for a conversation about vocations at Someday Saints.

***You might also enjoy this post I wrote after speaking with a Jesuit about vocations:
Talking vocations with a Jesuit and a kindergartener***