

Are you called? Signs of a religious vocation come in various forms

If a young person feels a deep sense of peace when he or she prays and thinks about the possibility of entering religious life, that's a strong sign he or she may have a religious vocation, according to Sister Lourdes Marie Miranda, vocations director for the Little Sisters of the Poor.

"If your heart tells you that you want to go to Mass, pray and get in touch with the Lord, that's the big thing," said Sister Lourdes, who is based at St. Martin's Home for the Aged in Catonsville.

Sister Lourdes warned against expecting some spectacular, miraculous sign from God.

"Some people think an angel is going to come to talk to you," she said with a laugh, noting that it's more likely that God will communicate in quiet ways "through the heart."

When others frequently point out qualities in an individual that would make him or her a good priest, brother, sister or deacon, Sister Lourdes said, that's another possible sign of a religious vocation.

Those who feel called should seek a spiritual director, Sister Lourdes said, who can help them in discerning God's will.

"So many young people don't want to take that leap forward," she said. "They're afraid. But (St.) John Paul II always said, 'Don't be afraid.' "

Little Sister of the Poor Angela Conti, who grew up in Holy Trinity Church in Glen Burnie, knows that sense of fear. Even though she felt drawn to the ministry of the Little Sisters, she was hesitant and worried that the ministry would be too much for her.

But after working with the elderly in her college years, talking with the Little Sisters

and working with the elderly at St. Martin's Home for the Aged, she joined the religious community. She will profess her first vows in July, Sister Lourdes said.

Sister Angela told the Catholic Review in a 2015 interview upon entering the Little Sisters that she felt God calling her to a life of "pure charity." Once she said "yes," she was at home and unafraid.

"When I started telling friends my news, they'd scream and react in the same way as if I told them I was engaged," she said. "It's been really neat and humbling having everyone behind my back."

Sister Lourdes said it's important that those thinking of a religious vocation visit religious communities to get a sense of the prayer life and ministry of various orders. Some communities may be devoted to contemplative prayer, she said, while others have ministries in teaching, parish work, health care or social justice.

The Little Sisters of the Poor offer a program called "Pray and Serve" that allows college-age women to live with, pray and work with the sisters for five weeks at St. Martin's Home. A hospitality club is also offered for girls 13-17 to share their joy with the elderly, Sister Lourdes said.

"Today, people are waiting longer to answer the call to religious life," she said. "I always say 'don't wait too long.' You want to give God the best of you, when you have the energy to work for him."

Sister Lourdes was quick to add, however, that "it's never too late for the Lord."