

# Awareness not just for those discerning priesthood

People have a tendency to forget the term “vocations” includes sisters, deacons and brothers. Actually, people are inclined to forget it includes priests as well, said Father Gerard Francik, director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

“The only thing people talk about to young people is marriage, generally, especially parents,” said Father Francik.

That’s one of the reasons the archdiocese partakes in Vocations Awareness Week, a promotion planned annually in which vocations – including single life and consecrated life – are highlighted to raise awareness of serving God.

Although it is not his busiest time of year, Father Francik will be occupied in this endeavor January 13-18, the week named by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and promoted by the National Conference for Church Vocations (NCCV), kicking off with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

It’s an opportunity for the vocations office to “build up what’s coming for the rest of the year,” said Father Francik who will speak on vocations at several venues, such as St. Clement I, Lansdowne, and St. Joseph, Cockeysville. There he will sermonize in Spanish during an evening Mass in the hope “to raise awareness not only for those called,” he said, “but for all others – parents, aunts, uncles, teachers, friends – to be supportive and encouraging.”

The vocations director will address a group of fifth graders and their parents Jan. 12 at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore, during the “Way to Grow with SSND Day” at the School Sisters of Notre Dame motherhouse. Parents will attend sessions on today’s ministries of the School Sisters and on family faith formation and vocation awareness, presented by Father Francik and Sister Kathy Jager, S.S.N.D., vocation minister.

Girls from 11 schools administered to by SSND sisters are invited for a “fun day” said Sister Kathy, which will include a tour of the Villa and the sisters’ rooms, an art

session, learning about their foundress, Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, and hearing a story from a sister who has worked in another country.

“This isn’t necessarily about attracting vocations as it is introducing the young girls to who the sisters are, what we do today ... and how we live,” said Sister Kathy. “I think parents realize that kids today aren’t used to being around sisters as before, and this is a nice opportunity ... to cultivate vocation awareness ... whether to marriage, religious life, etc. Parents play a critical role!”

Although the age to enter the SSND community is 20, continued Sister Kathy, research has shown that, developmentally, young people shift in their way of thinking in terms of “what I want to be when I grow up” at specific ages in their lives – 11 years old, 11th grade and as college sophomores.

“They can’t factor religious life into their choices and dreams if we aren’t even on their radar screen!” she said.

Parishes and schools are urged to plan individual awareness activities, supported by a NCCV e-mail packet sent from the vocations office to all parishes, pastors, priests, pastoral life directors, and Catholic school principals. It contains petitions, homily suggestions, liturgy guides, bulletin announcements and clipart. As well, they are invited to take advantage of vocations office programs throughout the year.

A two-day archbishop’s retreat Jan. 4-5 set the tone for vocations week with a Mass, holy hour, rosary, reconciliation, and a talk by Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien about priestly service and joy.

In ongoing awareness efforts, affiliates’ meetings are held monthly (every first Friday) at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, for men ages 17-50 discerning diocesan priesthood. Under discussion are prayer, a priest’s life, how to recognize God’s call, celibacy, obedience, seminary life, and studies.

A discernment dinner set for Feb. 21 is open to those candidates interested in meeting and eating together while listening to Archbishop O’Brien tell his vocation story, as well as the associate vocations director, Andrew Veveiros, who will relay his experience of a marriage vocation.

“The archbishop is our number one support in all efforts!” said Father Francik. “He constantly invites young people, parents and grandparents to encourage, support and nurture vocations.”