

# From sons to Fathers: A mother's perspective on vocations

**By Erik Zygmunt**

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FREDERICK - Legend has it that after Margarita Sanson, mother to St. Pius X, kissed her newly installed son's papal ring, she then gently prompted the new pope to kiss her own wedding ring, because the commitment behind it had helped him rise to the papacy.

It's an extreme example of the critical roles played by mothers in religious vocations. Stephanie Rubeling of Frederick, who has two sons pursuing the priesthood, is a contemporary, local example.

Michael Rubeling, 26, will be ordained a transitional deacon at the end of May, and, "God-willing," his mother said, will be ordained to the priesthood next year. Peter Rubeling, 20, is in his third year studying at The Catholic University of America and St. John Paul II Seminary, both in Washington, D.C., and hopes to enter major seminary after he obtains his bachelor's degree.

Both young men - who are two of Gary and Stephanie Rubeling's 10 children - plan to serve as priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"We've always been open to our children discerning a religious vocation," Rubeling said, "and I've always prayed that they at least would be open to it."

That is not to say that she pushed the idea.

"We tried to be intentional about it - at least making it an option - and, after that, kind of backed off," Rubeling explained. "I tell people that a vocation, when it's developing, is like a delicate flower. Give it too much water, and it dies. But if you do nothing, it dies, too."

In Rubeling's family, the "just right" nourishment was eucharistic adoration.

"It was a requirement," she said, "just to spend time with our Lord and develop that relationship and prayer life. ... I feel like that's been huge in helping them sort out all the loud voices in our world today to hear what God wants them to do."

The world's "loud voices," she said, are those that highlight medicine or law as aspirational fields for children, while leaving out the priesthood. Or those voices that "just assume that you're going to be on the road to marriage."

"We've always taught that marriage is not a given thing," Rubeling said. "It's not what you have to do."

Many parents, she speculated, may not actively encourage vocations because they imagine priests to lead lonely lives.

"It's a real sacrificial life," Rubeling said, "but it's a joyful life."

Some parents fear a lack of grandchildren, she added, acknowledging that, with 10 children of her own, it's a fear she can't fully comprehend.

"Parents need to know that they're going to receive so many blessings they never expected (if a son becomes a priest)," Rubeling said. "The Lord always gives back more than we give him."

She has seen it in her own life.

"It's not like I got married and thought, 'I can't wait to have 10 children,' " she said, adding that her large family is a result of being "open to life."

"But it didn't just bring us more children," she said. "It also gave us a God-given generosity, which didn't come from us. I'm not the same person I would've been if I had only two children; I had to be stretched so much to be open to the 10 he gave me."

For her two sons working toward the priesthood, Rubeling hopes that they will be happy as priests "and ultimately glorify God."

"That's what we're all called to do," she said.

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