

Guest column: Catholic singles for Our Savior

The Catholic Review

My thanks to Sharon Dougherty, a parishioner of St. Gabriel in Woodlawn and facilitator of its young adult group, Spirit of Truth Young Adult Ministry, for writing about the vocation to Catholic single life, often an untapped resource of valuable gifts and charisms for the parish and archdiocese in building the kingdom of God.

We come together at Mass to celebrate the holy Eucharist, which is undoubtedly the pinnacle of our beautiful faith. We may also come to receive instruction on how to live so as to stand out as examples of the faith we hold dear. At times, we hear messages from the pulpit geared toward loving one another in marriage. Other times, we hear of the importance of considering a religious vocation, and the graces that such a lifestyle bestows. Yet there is a growing population in the Catholic Church that may appear to be overlooked, and that is the single population.

Being single is as much a vocational calling as is entering marriage or religious life. The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism defines vocation as follows:

“(T)he inclination toward a particular state of life that the Christian accepts as a call from God.

“Vocation has a general and a particular meaning in Catholic parlance. In general, the term refers to the call of Christ, offered to all the baptized, to follow him and to become signs and witnesses of the reign of God. In this sense, all Christians share a common vocation. The word, however, also has a particular meaning. It refers to a specific state of life to which believers understand that God is calling them. Some people are inclined, by God’s grace, to follow Christ as husbands and wives. Others feel called to the single state without seeking Holy Orders or taking vows as religious women or men. Still others hear God inviting them to become sisters, brothers, priests, or deacons. No one vocation is superior to another. Each leads to a

manner of life and specific tasks that are essential for building up the Body of Christ and the reign of God."

Whether by choice or by circumstance (through separation, divorce, loss of a spouse, etc.) we are single, and we are hungry to be fed. It is just as important for us in our singleness to recognize our individual worth, as we have worth simply because we were created by God, as well as our ability to contribute to the world. Opportunities for service and spiritual growth abound and are waiting to be embraced.

For starters, we can look to holy men and women who have exemplified lives of generosity, service to God's people, and dignity. St. Benedict Joseph Labre, referred to as the patron saint of single Catholic men, begged for and healed the homeless. St. Agatha, referred to as the patron saint of single Catholic women, preserved her purity in life. These can be our models of strength and perseverance.

Also, we can proactively seek out areas of opportunity within our own parishes. The bulletin is a great resource in each parish, as it tends to draw attention to acts of service within our particular area. Additionally, simply serving as liturgical ministers within our parishes can help to spearhead a desire to serve even more. Finally, focusing on nurturing supportive friendships and finding other groups that offer support and encouragement to us in our single journeys will fuel us for undertaking God's work.

St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is man fully alive." We must live every single day to the fullest, not as if we are awaiting fulfillment. Our fulfillment is in Christ our lord. We do not have to go through life on "pause" until a spouse or a vocational calling comes into play. Learn to rejoice in solitude, as it sets the stage for growth in prayer, meaningful reflection and discovering what God has for each of us to accomplish in life. As Catholic Christians, with heaven as our goal, not a single day can be wasted!