

New director of vocations hopes to show others the joy he finds in being a priest

When Father Steven Roth was a child growing up in Scranton, Pa., he would turn his room into a church, using Necco Wafers and a tabernacle he built from Legos to “celebrate” Mass.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and theology, and a master’s degree in counseling – all from the University of Scranton – and attending St. Mary’s Seminary in Roland Park, his dreams became a reality. In 2012, he was ordained as a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

As the archdiocese’s new director of vocations, he is dedicated to helping others understand the joy he finds in being a priest.

“As long as I’m vocation director, I want to make sure that no one ever says, ‘I thought about being a priest, but I just didn’t have the courage to say ‘yes,’” said Father Roth, who is currently transitioning from his role as pastor of St. Isaac Jogues in Carney. “I want to do everything that this office can do to help people to say ‘yes.’ I don’t want anyone to miss out on what an amazing life this is.”

Father Roth hopes he will help all find their true vocations, but his office primarily works with those discerning the call to the diocesan priesthood. For those men, he encourages prayer and concrete steps, such as reaching out his parish priest, or contacting the vocations office.

“We (the vocations office) have the ability to meet the individual where they are,” Father Roth said.

The office is prepared to help candidates through the application process. It offers a variety of resources and events designed to help discerning men find their vocations.

“I really think that there are a lot of vocations in the archdiocese and it’s just a

matter of finding them,” Father Roth said.

Once he switches to the director of vocations role full time Aug. 1, he hopes to spend weekends preaching at different parishes about vocations. He also plans to institute two pilot programs that will look at the best ways to encourage vocations in the African-American and Hispanic communities.

While out in force, reaching the closest and farthest points in the archdiocese, he hopes to make it easy and comfortable for men to take the first step in vocalizing that their consideration of priesthood.

In addition to fostering new vocations, Father Roth is looking forward to working with Baltimore’s 39 seminarians.

“They are really top-notch, very talented men,” he said. “Every time I encounter them I am just so inspired by their willingness to serve, their dedication to the church and the sacrifices that they make to be in formation.”

He hopes to use their advice, and that of his fellow priests and parishioners, to make improvements in his new role and to learn what would best help discerners.

One of the hardest parts of discernment, Father Roth said, is realizing that no one is worthy of the call.

“We look at ourselves and we realize that we’re not perfect, we’re broken in a variety of ways,” he said. “And yet, somehow, God is still calling us to this life that is just beyond what we could expect and beyond what we really deserve.”

Often times, he said, the nudge into a vocation comes from a friend who asks if the person has ever considered the priesthood or a religious vocation. Father Roth hopes to encourage the faithful to invite others to consider the possibility.

“Imagine if every single person just asked one other person if they’ve ever considered priesthood,” he said. “We just never know what power that invitation can have. ... We can look to the example of the Gospels. Jesus simply said, ‘Come and follow me,’ and it worked.”

