

Priests recall ‘The Call’

Reaching the decision to spread God’s word as a Catholic priest comes to each member of the clergy in a different way.

Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien has urged students in Catholic schools throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore to listen for “the calling,” God’s appeal for leaders in the church.

Some priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore explained how they noticed the calling.

Father Michael T. Martin, O.F.M. Conv., president of Archbishop Curley High School, Baltimore: “There was no voice in a dream, or a vision from on high, just the simple persistence of God who opened my heart and mind to consider his call, and the right people to foster it. I know that there are a few critical components of my own vocation discernment that allowed me to enter religious life as a Conventual Franciscan priest. First was an atmosphere in my home where faith was honored, as was the possibility of pursuing your dreams. Second was the deep spiritual impact of my pastor, Father Jack Callopy, who witnessed Christ in so many ways to me, and often told me that he thought I’d make a good priest. Lastly were the friars at Curley who gave me a wonderful witness of religious communal life, and who very directly asked me to consider joining the community. In the midst of all of that, I had other plans for myself. But I found that as hard as I tried not to think about being a friar, it was as much as I couldn’t stop thinking about it.”

Father Adam Parker, vice chancellor of the Archdiocese of Baltimore: “I remember clearly the day it happened. I was 19 years old, a freshman in college, studying mechanical engineering. What happened that day would change my life forever. I’m referring to the day that I finally realized that God was calling me to

become a priest. I use the word ‘finally’ because I don’t believe that it happened all at once. It’s not as though angels appeared in the night and said to me: ‘Adam, God wants you to become a priest.’ The call to the priesthood was more like a culmination of a series of events as well as prayer experiences. When I made that realization as a freshman in college, I had to admit, at least to myself, that there had been many occasions in my life where the call to priesthood made itself known. And I had even gotten pretty good at ignoring that call - always thinking that I’d rather do something else: get married, have a financially lucrative career, have weekends off! But eventually, it seemed that the more I dismissed the call to priesthood, the more God persisted in making his will known. Guess who won? Actually, I’d have to say we both did.”

Father Thomas A. Pesci, S.J., president of Loyola Blakefield, Towson: “It was in high school that I gradually became more clearly drawn to priesthood and the Jesuits. I especially liked the great variety of activities and places to which Jesuits were missioned. Father Walter Cizek’s book, ‘With God in Russia,’ was another powerful force for me. But above all it was the interest and support of the young Jesuits that helped me begin to set my sights. Religious formation was an opportunity to ‘test’ that call and begin to experience the myriad ways in which the people of God call and affirm priesthood in those called to orders. The rest is history for now nearly 40 years. I have my bad days, but overall I feel that I have been privileged to share so many powerful, even precious experiences in the lives of others and myself - it all makes sense. One of the gifts of ages is the ability to look back over one’s history and see just how God was working all along. It’s a great occasion for gratitude. I believe God is calling many young men and women. We need to learn how to invite them to share those ‘inklings’ and encourage them to find God’s hand at work in their lives.”

Father Patrick M. Carrion, administrator of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ijamsville:

“Growing up in a family where your uncle is an archdiocesan priest and your great aunt is a cloistered nun, the ‘voice’ is always there and you know that one day you are going to have to answer it. I always ‘sort of’ knew, and then finally decided to answer the voice.”

Monsignor Jeremiah F. Kenney, judicial vicar of the Archdiocese of Baltimore: “I realized that God was calling me when, after many years of attending Mass, I felt drawn to Christ, my Lord. I wanted to do something special for him. I grew more aware of his gift of himself for me. I felt I could do no less than to give myself completely to him.”