

Programs to ‘adopt’ women in formation seen as way to help vocations

WASHINGTON – “Adopt-a-seminarian” programs to support and encourage young men studying for the priesthood are pretty common in U.S. dioceses, and programs like that for young women could help foster vocations to religious life, said Benedictine Sister Michelle Catherine Sinkhorn.

Sister Michelle is co-director of vocation ministries at the monastery of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Ind.

“Parishes will contact us and ask if they can adopt a sister,” said Sister Michelle.

“St. Martin Church in Chrisney, Ind., was adopting a seminarian, so they decided they would also like to adopt a sister in formation. We’re more than willing to do that,” she told Catholic News Service.

While in formation, Sister Michelle herself was adopted and found it to be a valuable experience.

“The people who adopt you pray for you and keep in touch. They want to hear what stage you’re at in your formation and how you’re doing. A program like this is something our community should consider initiating with local parishes,” said Sister Michelle.

Adopt-a-seminarian programs typically match seminarians with families interested in supporting and communicating with the seminarian. Some programs ask the family to financially support the seminarian. Other dioceses simply encourage prayer for the seminarian and support for vocations in general.

The adoptive family often stays in contact with the seminarian through letters and e-mails. In return, the seminarian prays for the family.

Recognizing the importance of such a program for both men and women in formation, Grand Knight Luigi Baratta of the Knights of Columbus council at SS. Simon and Jude Cathedral in Phoenix, initiated the first adopt-a-sister program in the state of Arizona.

The Knights hosted a pasta dinner fundraiser to raise money for scholarships for two seminarians and one sister in formation.

“We always support seminarians. They visit us and e-mail us, and we send them money. This year, I suggested we adopt one of our own parishioners by adopting a sister (in formation),” Baratta told CNS.

The Knights regularly support the sisters at their parish in Phoenix, but it was the first time they adopted and provided financial support for a sister in formation. Baratta said they will continue to support sisters entering religious communities.

Some dioceses promote a more individual approach to supporting consecrated life. The Archdiocese of Detroit sends posters to schools and parishes with pictures and information about men and women in formation. Individuals and families can then decide how they want to help the seminarians or sisters in formation.

“In one of our parish schools, each of the classes has been assigned a seminarian to adopt, and they try to follow the same gentleman throughout his years in formation,” said Jan DeFour, the vocations coordinator for the Archdiocese of Detroit.

During National Vocations Awareness Week each year, the vocations office in Detroit encourages schools to invite a religious sister or brother into the classroom to talk to the students. Parents also are encouraged to try to nurture vocations in the home.

“We want them to do more on an individual basis. We even encourage them to invite a brother or sister into their own homes for dinner,” added DeFour.