

The Highways and Byways

It is advice the Master Himself offers: Go out into the highways and byways and invite!

This past year, thanks to the initiative of our indefatigable Vocations Director, Father Jerry Francik, what encouragement I have experienced to travel the highways of the Archdiocese to seven homes – all a good distance from headquarters here in Baltimore City.

Hosted by strong and committed Catholic couples, the two-hour exchanges involved teens and very young adults with varying degrees of interest in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. And what impressive support and involvement there have been on the part of our priests and religious!

The sessions begin with the telling of my own call to the priesthood, followed by three or four other such vocation stories. Then follow the questions and concerns, invariably candid and refreshing:

“How do you pray? How do you know if you’re called to marriage or the priesthood? Do friends treat you differently once you become a priest? I really want to do this, but am afraid my friends will change in the way they treat me.”

One of our more recent gatherings took place in Anne Arundel County and involved a buffet dinner (there’s always food, plentiful and delicious) with 25 very enthusiastic young ladies and a half dozen women religious. We were told that were it not for an exceptionally busy sport and social night in the local high schools, a dozen or more additional girls would have been on hand. I greeted all present and left the meeting to enable the participants to set their own direction.

Next day comments on Facebook included:

“It was cool to hang out with the nuns. ... Can you imagine a Friday girls-night-out-with-the-sisters! Sisters dated! (Before entering). ... We want to do this again – they’re really great!”

And we will do it again for young ladies, this Friday, March 19, at 6:00 p.m., with a generous family from St. Mary's Parish, Annapolis.

A real bonus for me, following the sessions, was the opportunity to gather with some of the parents who had arrived to take their sons or daughters home. Most were intrigued, not only by their teen's interest in a special vocation, but also by some of the discussion that had taken place. It was also a good opportunity to answer parents' questions regarding vocational objections, such as how to support and not 'push' a vocation, how and when a young person might start the process, and what more can be done on a parish level to encourage vocations.

To date, we've encountered some 175 young Catholics unafraid to give evidence of their love for the Church and their interest in our message. Great promise for the future!

How fortunate we are to have parents, religious and parish priests modeling so effectively their response to Christ's call to follow.

Many highways and byways still to be travelled. Anyone interested in attending or hosting such an event? Contact Father Francik at 410-547-5426 or gfrancik@archbalt.org, or visit www.becomeapriest.org.