

Trading cards featuring priests designed to promote vocation awareness

OMAHA, Neb. - "I'll trade you one archbishop for two priests."

That's how Melia Vankat suspects a conversation will go between children collecting St. John Vianney priesthood cards, a project Vankat and three other home-schooling moms in Omaha are developing to honor and promote the priesthood.

The cards feature photos and statistics of priests serving in the Archdiocese of Omaha.

"We wanted to take something secular and put a holy twist to it," said Diane Anderson, another of the moms involved the project. "We wanted to make it personal, something fun, but something holy as well."

Vankat and Anderson, along with Lori Mellender and Cathy Hula, said they wanted a fun way for children, particularly boys, to not only participate in a popular hobby, but also learn about local priests and pray for them. They also hope the cards will foster vocations to the priesthood.

Priests - active and retired - have been asked to provide information for their card. Questions are related to favorite prayers, patron saints, desired charism, ordination date and hobbies. Cards, however, will not be made without a priest's permission.

Custom-TradingCards.com, a website created by a Denver graphic design studio, is printing and packaging the cards, which are being sold in packs of eight at local

Catholic bookstores and through card project coordinators. Packs sell for \$1.

Each pack includes a card with a picture of St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests, and a prayer for priests.

Mellender got the idea to create the cards in February after a conversation at trivia night at St. Peter Parish, where she and the three other women are members.

She was sitting next to a nun who was talking about the Year for Priests “and lamenting there wasn’t a lot going on to celebrate the year,” Mellender said in an interview with the Catholic Voice, newspaper of the Omaha Archdiocese.

The nun mentioned trading cards, and Mellender took the idea to her friends.

The women, who have 17 boys among their 25 children, said their own children are excited about the project.

“My 6-year-old has a shoebox full of trading cards – football cards, baseball cards, racing cards and holy cards – and this has inspired him to pull out his cards and get out all of his saint cards and refile them and see which ones he has,” Anderson said.

The project’s goal is to encourage children to collect every priest’s card, as well as open their hearts to the call to the priesthood, Mellender said.

“We want them to understand that God calls ordinary men to do something extraordinary,” she said.

The idea of a vocation is somewhat philosophical, Anderson said, so making note of the humanity of each priest may help boys relate and aspire to be a priest.

“We need more vocations within our archdiocese, and I personally think that the younger you start to talk to boys about the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood,

the more open they are to it," Anderson said.

The women plan to create a blog featuring all participating priests to help collectors keep track of which cards they need. Additional information on each priest also will be featured on the blog.

The project is costing the moms nothing; they are relying on sponsors of each priest card to pay for the printing and packaging. The proceeds of the card sales will go to the Archdiocesan Seminarian Fund.