

What is God Whispering?

Although I have visited all our parishes – however briefly in most cases – and a couple of dozen elementary schools to date, I’ve managed so far only a handful of high schools. In celebrating Mass for the students at Mount St. Joseph, Archbishop Curley and Calvert Hall, I have come to realize that the Archdiocese is rich in Catholic high schools, each of which is rich in tradition.

I celebrated Mass twice this year for Bishop Walsh School (kindergarten through 12th grade) in Cumberland, some 2.5 hours west of Baltimore. My first visit there was during the week after my installation and I made them a promise to return before the end of the school year should they accept a very significant challenge. The reason for the return last week was to receive a kind of “report card” on the results of that challenge, which centered upon our efforts to encourage vocations to priesthood and consecrated life. Too often we rely solely upon programs conceived from above, that is, by vocation offices and the like. In our case, our ongoing vocations programs are excellent – creative, rich in theme and responsive to young people’s needs.

But last October, I challenged the Bishop Walsh students to put their heads together and to come up with ideas for peer-to-peer activities that could be undertaken to promote vocations here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. I invited the faculty and staff to do the same.

And so I returned last Thursday to receive a very encouraging update, which indicated that the whole Bishop Walsh community took my challenge seriously. Here are some random responses on the high school, middle school and elementary school levels:

- Tuesdays became “Vocation Tuesdays” for high school and middle school students with special emphasis on vocations. Each week, Brother James Kirkpatrick, F.S.C., broadcasts an inspirational message on the call to priestly, religious, single or married life followed by a prayer for vocations.
- A day was put aside each for a visit by a woman religious, a male religious and an

Archdiocesan priest to speak about vocations.

- Students composed prayers for vocations, read at their desks daily and to the full class in rotation.
- French and Spanish classes offered vocation prayers in their new language.
- Every elementary school class, kindergarten through fifth grade, had weekly vocation emphases featuring lives of the saints (lay, religious and clerical), and sang songs and hymns reflecting themes of calling and service.
- Visits to religious communities allowed the students to see the different communities in action.

My thanks to Bishop Walsh School president, Sister Phyllis McNally, S.S.N.D., to the principal, Mr. Samuel Torres, and to all the faculty for their enthusiasm in encouraging our young people during such impressionable years: to think through in a concrete manner the various calls to serve God and neighbor that students even at these young ages might already be experiencing.

In addition, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize a number of other groups, such as our Baltimore seminarians for some excellent thoughts on peer-to-peer vocations outreach. Then there are those three students at Mount St. Joseph's High School – Brad Batstone, Matthew Breitenother and Vince Gutierrez – who put together their own video on vocations as a result of my challenge offered during my visit there. Well done!

I close with a challenge from the warm and reassuring words of Pope Benedict XVI to the youth at St. Joseph's Seminary in New York: "Friends, again I ask you, what about today? What are you seeking? What is God whispering to you? The hope that never disappoints is Jesus Christ."

The challenge to each of you, especially to parents, is the same one I made to the students and staffs of the schools. I ask you to reflect on what we can do to encourage vocations, to help our young people to hear what God is whispering. I challenge you to speak to those young men and women you think would be good priests and religious and invite them to consider a life of service in the Church.

Most, of all, I ask you to pray that God will open further the hearts of our young people to hear and answer his call.