

Young women explore religious life, meet Archbishop O'Brien

HARWOOD – Ever since the 6th grade, Andrea Norwood has been thinking about becoming a religious sister. There's something appealing about dedicating one's life to God and service, she said.

"God kind of planted this seed of nunhood in me," said the 16-year-old junior at St. Mary's High School in Annapolis, who is drawn to the School Sisters of Notre Dame as a possible community to join. "Recently, I accepted the fact that I should look at it – even if it's just starting out and seeing if I'll be happy there."

Norwood's exploration brought her to the Harwood home of Kevin and Tammy Doring for an informal March 19 dinner with Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien and several Little Sisters of the Poor and Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia. She and 24 similarly-minded youths learned about the religious life and asked questions on everything from celibacy to what nuns do for fun.

"I think we are about to realize a rejuvenation in women religious," Archbishop O'Brien told the young women, "and when I say a rejuvenation, I mean a return to an enthusiastic group of young people who know what they're doing, have a specific mission, have a great life in community, know Jesus Christ and love Jesus Christ and want to see Jesus in the lives of every heart and soul. This gathering tonight just confirms that conviction."

The archbishop said he found joy in the priesthood. Clergy live off the goodness of the people, he said.

"The same could be said of all the sisters who teach in the classroom," he said, "or who visit the room of the elderly man or woman who just lights up when they see Sister coming."

Archbishop O'Brien encouraged the youths to pray and be open to the possibility of religious life.

“Whatever God wants, he’s going to get – as long as you’re generous and open to the call,” he said.

Responding to a question about celibacy and whether she misses not having children, Little Sister of the Poor Constance Veit said she enjoys a kind of spiritual motherhood taking care of the infirmed elderly at St. Martin’s Home for the Aged in Catonsville.

Sister Constance noted that the call to religious life can come in unusual ways. As a teen, she recalled that she had zero interest in helping the elderly. She only volunteered at a Little Sisters’ home to have something good to put on her resume.

“But when I started working there, the Gospel came alive to me,” she remembered, “and I wanted to be part of it. It shows you that God can work in very mysterious ways.”

Twenty of the teens who attended the gathering were from St. Mary’s, while others were homeschoolers. There were also some college students in attendance.

Casey Edmondson, a 15-year-old St. Mary’s sophomore, was struck by the humanity of the sisters she met at the dinner.

“They are so open and warm,” she said. “They seem so happy.”