

Reaching Out Wednesdays

Topic: Parents & Discernment Groups

1. What do other Vocations Offices do for parents of men entering the seminary?
Are their parent orientations or workshops?
 2. What do other offices do for discernment group discussions?
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Portland (OR):

1. I give the parents of our seminarians a copy of "A Priest in the Family" by Fr. Brett Brannen. At the moment there are no parent orientations or workshops.
2. For discernment group discussions I use "To Save 1000 Souls" by Fr. Brett Brannen for younger men who are new to discernment. We follow the Melchizedek Program found in the back of the book. For those who are a bit further along and are looking for something different we have a monthly meeting at our House of Discernment where we pray Evening Prayer, have a meal, and just have an informal discussion on the priesthood and current events in the Church. This night is for those who are 21 and older.

Austin:

Re. discernment groups:

Our HS men's group discusses a chapter of To Save a Thousand Souls each month.

Our young adult men's group gets a talk from me each month, alternating between general discernment/prayer and aspects of priesthood.

Seattle:

When we have new seminarians join our program, we give the parents a copy of the book A Priest in the Family by Fr. Brett A Brannen. We also host several seminarian parent gatherings, usually attended by the Vocation Director and the Archbishop or Bishop. Parents are also given each other's contact information and encouraged to reach out to each other for support and answers to questions.

Hartford:

The Archdiocese of Hartford does not have much in place for parents of seminarians at this time, but I am making it a point to try and meet the parents of applicants individually (if the situation permits) and explain general policies (especially regarding the mutual freedom of the man to leave formation at any time if he discerns that God is not calling him to this vocation, as well as the Archdiocese to ask him to leave if we discern that is the right step). I find that hearing come from my mouth gives them more reassurance that their son isn't "Signing his life away" like a military contract. The other thing we are starting this summer is a family picnic. A local Knights of Columbus council was generous enough to volunteer to do all the cooking. The Knights will bring their families and we are encouraging the seminarians to bring their families as well (parents, grandparents, siblings in most cases). We will start with some "tailgating" games like Frisbee, cornhole, bocce, etc. then make our way to the chapel for Vespers and Benediction followed by the picnic food. We hope this will create an opportunity for some synergy and maybe even some friendships among seminarian parents.

For our discernment night, we move it around to different parishes in the Archdiocese. It is usually from 6:00-8:00. We start with evening prayer followed by pizza or some other simple dinner. Then we move into a vocation story from a priest or seminarian (depending on whose available), a discussion usually started by a short article or a lesson from the "Is Jesus Calling You to be a Catholic Priest?" Guide (prepared by Fr. Richter), and then some Q and A if the Spirit so moves us. The last 20-30 minutes is devoted to Eucharistic Adoration in the church. After Benediction, I hang around for as long as needed if anyone wants to talk privately.

Attendance has been pretty shabby lately so I am still trying to figure out how to get the word out more. I am hoping that with the summer coming and some of the young men begin home from colleges that may help us...

Fort Worth:

We have a dinner with parents at the beginning of the year in August.

Then once in the Fall and once in the Spring, I invite parents to a Holy Hour for Vocations followed by going to dinner together.

Fr. Wilcox

Fargo:

For Families: We provide the book, A Priest in the Family, once a young man has told his family of his discernment as one way to help them understand what he is considering. We have social dinners 2-4 times a year where the parents/families of our seminarians are invited to attend – giving them the opportunity to meet and visit with other parents and to see the other seminarians, especially their classmates.

For Discernment: We have a few Melchizedek Project groups offered over the last six years.

St. Paul & Minneapolis:

The parents of new men are sent a letter from the VD along with the book, "A Priest in the Family" by Brannen. They are also invited to a reception with the Archbishop and Auxilliary Bishop in the fall of the year.

Winona:

1. The only thing we do now is to give Fr. Brannen's book for parents. I hope to begin an annual picnic for parents this year.

2. I use a few different discernment group styles. I think the most effective is the Melchizedek Project with "To Save a Thousand Souls," but we also use the NCDVD booklet "Is God Calling You to be a Catholic Priest?" We meet twice a month and the men are to read before arriving so we can focus on discussion. I also have a prayer group, which is not specifically priestly discernment, but I believe will help those who want to consider priesthood in greater depth to do so. Finally, I utilize Vianney Vocations' monthly vocations newsletters for men who are in high school or spread out. We have a Facebook chat where I ask periodic questions for the men to respond to.

Peoria:

We have a parents of priests and seminarians group that has a retreat every summer. Many of them connect in that retreat and become good friends and stay in touch throughout the year. At one point on the retreat, there is a time for parents to ask the vocations director and other parents anything they want to know - from what kind of clothes a new seminarian should have to how to plan a first mass for the parents of a 4th year theologian.

Arlington:

Vocation Director meets with parents at latest during application process if not earlier. Most of the time this meeting is in person, occasionally ally by phone. At the end of every summer, we have a picnic sponsored by sera club and knights of Columbus. It is mandatory for all seminarians, bishop attends. Chance to meet all the newly accepted seminarians and family's and strongly encouraged to attend. We get 75% family attendance at this.

First night of our seminarian Christmas convocation we have a big dinner for all family of our seminarians, begins with a social with horsderves and then evening prayer followed by dinner. Bishop is there to greet each family. This is very well attend.

