

St. Paul tells us in the scripture, “In [Christ] who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything.” I am not sure if St. Paul ever ran a convention. Back at the vocation office, at home with my family, there are days when I don’t feel very strong. There are days when I feel very tired, and as I look out among you, I think it is fair to say that you have those days, too.

I pray that our time together this week will leave us all refreshed and renewed in our commitment to helping those men who hear the call to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. We are very excited to have among us the seminary rectors and seminary personnel. I want to thank Msgr. Jeremiah McCarthy for his words, and please know that we are looking forward to working both formally and informally with the seminary rectors and continuing the conversations that are going to begin this week well past this convention.

As I prayed on what to speak to you about this evening, one theme kept coming back to me, *speaking about who you are*. So, who am I? Because I know there are some of you who do not know who I am.

I am a happily married woman, who as matter of fact will be celebrating my 24<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary to my wonderful husband, Gary, next Monday. And let me tell you, he is thrilled that next year we will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary while at the 2011 convention in Detroit. I mean who needs Hawaii? But, Fr. Peter, if the Diocese of Honolulu would like to put us up, we would be happy to oblige.

I am also the mom of four amazing children. Two colleges aged boys, and two beautiful daughters, one in high school the other will graduate from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the parish school this year. They all attend catholic school.

I am very privileged to say I am the Executive Director of NCDVD. And I thank my members for permitting me to continue to be their voice.

Some of you may not know that I have been in vocations work going on nine years this January. When I first started I was lost; I did not know the language of vocations and wasn’t sure how I was ever going to learn it. I had to really trust God; it was that simple, and it was that hard.

There has not been a day since the first day I walked into the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in New York, to work for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, that I have ever felt as though God has called me to do anything else other than support vocations to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Recently, I traveled to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, with some members of the NCDVD Executive Board to meet with Archbishop Gomez, a member of our Episcopal Advisory Board. Following our meeting with his Excellency, I had an opportunity to sit and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. As I sat there in prayer, I became acutely aware of just what the Lord was asking of me. *Be there for my sons. Be there for my sons.* And I began to cry. “Lord, out of everyone you could have called to work with your sons and your discerners why did you call on me?” And I was quickly reminded of two things.

First, the theme of this convention – *Thy will be done*. Our Lady said yes to becoming the Mother of God. I just had to say yes to being a support and a council for all of you, and so I had nothing to compare. Secondly, I was reminded of my first days, nine years ago, when I needed to simply trust God. I then understood that my role in NCDVD would be just that simple and just that hard.

So, who am I really? First light of the morning till prayers are said at the end of the day, I am a mom. And so in speaking with Fr. Len and some of my other priest friends, they suggested I speak to you this evening from my unique perspective of being a parent and a laywoman who loves her priests and works in vocation ministry.

One of my sons is discerning, and I will not mention his name. I want you to go back and remember when you first heard the call from God, your conversations with your parish priest or perhaps your high school chaplain. Remember that first conversation with your family, and perhaps, for some of you, that was harder than for others. Now, imagine your mother works in the diocesan vocation office, and now, imagine she is the Executive Director of NCDVD -- no pressure HA! Hence, no names. But, seriously, I wanted to take just two minutes of your time and invite you to see life from the perspective of a parent whose son might be called to priesthood.

Hear me before I speak. That is what a parent is asking you, the vocation director, asking you, the seminary rector. Hear me, understand me; understand that I am not the enemy trying to undermine your relationship with my son, but respect that he had a relationship with me first. Together, you and I, we are walking on this journey with him.

I recently read something that said - *The hardest part of raising a child is teaching them to ride bicycles. A shaky child on a bicycle for the first time needs both support and freedom. The realization that this is what the child will always need, can hit a parent hard.* And there is no workshop for new moms as there is at NCDVD for new vocations directors.

Support and freedom – it's a tricky balancing act for a parent, one that we never really master. But our children have been lent to us by God to raise in such a way that they will grow to become all that He has intended for them to become. If we, as parents, take our called vocations seriously, then we are going to want to be there for our sons.

Bill Cosby once said: *In spite of the six thousand manuals on child raising in the bookstores, child raising is still a dark continent, and no one really knows anything. You just need a lot of love and luck—and, of course, courage.* And he was only referring to the everydayness of parenting; he wasn't referring to the courage a parent will need to turn her 20-something-year-old son over to a vocation director or a seminary rector.

Demystify seminary for me. Help me understand the process; help me understand that you not only have the best interests of the church to consider but that you are going to do the best you can to continue what I have started in helping my son become the man God has called him to be.

I have a unique perspective because I am a parent, I work in vocations, and I have an extreme privileged insight into the life and the happiness and the joy, the overwhelming joy that I see everyday in the priests that I am privileged to know, work, and serve.

I was sitting in the vocation office last Wednesday when Fr. Barr, Vocation Director for Rockville Centre, was moving into the seminary. The NCDVD Office was working at full speed preparing the last minute details for convention, and Angela knocked on my door with that look that said to me, "You are not going to want to hear what I am about to say." As she walked into my office, she said, "Rose, there is a young man here with his mom, and he thinks he might have the call to priesthood." There, standing in my doorway, was a young man, who probably had graduated from high school a few years early. In my head, I said, "Not today, you have the call to priesthood! You couldn't have had the call priesthood last week? You can't have the call to priesthood in October? No, you had to have the call to priesthood today!" But, of course, out of my mouth I said, "That's wonderful, please come in." I excused myself to call Fr. Barr.

Father came down to the office and took the young man, and I offered his mom a cup of tea, and we sat down for the next hour, hour and half as I listened to all her concerns. *If he goes to college seminary, when will I ever see him again?* Oh, you will see him more than I see my sons. *What if he starts and doesn't like it?* Then, he can leave. And we went through the process.

I said to her, "Let me ask you something mom to mom. You want your son to be the best Catholic man he can be, don't you?" And she said, "Absolutely." "Do you want him to get a college education?" And she replied, "Of course I do." "Do you want him to live in an environment where he is not embarrassed to be in love with Jesus Christ? Where he is going to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass with his rector and seminary community everyday. Where he is going to learn to pray the Office of the Hours; be able to talk and discern and argue with his brother seminaries?" And she said, "Yes." "At the end of four years, with the help of his rector, and his spiritual director and his vocation director, perhaps God is not going to call him to priesthood but God will have planted that seed that perhaps, someday, he will go on to become a father of his own and someday, his son will be knocking on the vocation office door and saying, 'I think I have the call to priesthood'." She began to cry. I told her priesthood is an amazing thing and if God is in fact calling your son to the priesthood he will be as happy as the day you said I do to your husband and more joy filled then the day you first held him on the day he was born.

Fr. Brian returned to the Refectory with the young man and said, "Okay we're done." And the mom asked me to take them into the chapel, and we said a prayer together. I shook her hand, and I told her, "Anytime, anywhere, you have a question, you can call me." There was a moment as they were walking out of the seminary, as anxious as I was to get back to working on convention, on name tags, on transportation, and as anxious as Father was to getting back upstairs to unpacking, it occurred to me that no speaker that could come before you, no workshop that we could offer you, would ever be more important than that hour and a half because we can train you the best we can, but if we forget what we are really here for then this convention is for mute. God was reminding me why He called me to be work in vocations.

Last year, I closed with this prayer – and in doing so, I was speaking to the priests who were sitting before me.

I close with it again speaking to you, priests who have renewed my faith and love in Jesus Christ, whom I love and am privileged to support and serve, but I also speak to all the sons of all the moms who may some day soon be calling their sons FATHER.

“I give thanks to my God every time I think of YOU- which is constantly, in every prayer I utter – rejoicing, as I plead on YOUR behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the Gospel from the very first day.” (Phil 1:1-11)

I thank you for the privilege of being your Executive Director, and I thank you for reminding me and my sons how joy filled and happy you are in your priesthood.

Thank you and God Bless.