

REACHING OUT WEDNESDAYS

Topic: Middle School Vocations

Archdiocese of Omaha: The Vocation Office conducts each year a 6th grade Vocation Awareness Day where we invite all sixth grade students from the urban Catholic schools to gather for a day of learning about the diocesan priesthood and consecrated life. Archbishop Lucas celebrates the mass along with other priests that have come for the day to present. I've attached a few items that best describes the day. We had close to 1200 students and 100 volunteers present for one day. One of our local Catholic high school is not in session on the 3rd Friday of October each year, so they let us use their entire school. Seems to work real well. This is repeated in the rural area as well, only on a smaller scale with around 300 or so students. Some of our seminarians are excused from seminary to come home and help with the day. It is a great witness for 6th grade students to see and visit with a young man in seminary. I've also attached a few photos of last October's Vocation Awareness Day.

We also hold each summer a camp for 5-8 grade boys. It's a 2 ½ days for 5-6 grade and 2 ½ day for 7-8 grade. This has been going on for about 15 years now. Seminarians run it, under the supervision of the Vocation Director.

Diocese of Tulsa: We gather all the 5th graders from our Catholic schools at one school (about 350) for one day during the week of Vocation Awareness (Baptism of the Lord). At that time, we have a couple of large group presentations by priests and religious, sing some praise and worship, have a skit or two. Then, half of the students are broken into manageable groups of about 12-15 and sent to individual rooms, boys with priests/seminarians/male religious and girls with women religious. The religious tell their vocation stories and field questions from the students. The other half of the students go to a large room as a group and, by school, try on clerics (guys) and veils (girls). Their chaperones (teachers) take pictures, and the students take the pictures back to their schools to put together a poster to enter in a poster contest to promote vocations. The Serra Club of Tulsa puts up cash to the winning class/school. After 30-40 minutes, the groups switch so everyone gets an opportunity to hear a vocation story and try on a religious outfit. Students brought their lunch which is distributed around noon. Another large group presentation happens after lunch (this year, Catholic Jeopardy) and the Bishop celebrates Mass to end the day.

We repeat something similar on a Sunday afternoon, later in the month of January, for 5th graders who attend Parish Religious Education. Attendance is smaller, but it remains a great opportunity to begin the cultivation of seeds.

Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix: In our small Eparchy, we have found very positive response to a retreat experience called "Alive in Christ." We refer to it as an "ascetical boot camp." This summer we will conduct our 8th such event. Here's some further information:

What: "Alive in Christ" is a spiritual retreat camp conducted by the Vocations Office of the Holy Protection Eparchy of Phoenix. The camp aims at helping young men mature in their Catholic faith and a life of authentic Christian discipleship. Fed by Byzantine spirituality, the camp engenders a fervor that will deepen personal awareness of a boy's share in the Life of Christ, that will sustain him as he grows into adulthood in an ever-increasing secular world, and that will assist him in discerning well his God-given vocations and charisms.

Theme 2011: "Proclaiming Perfect God and Perfect Man."

Who: Invited are young men and boys, ages 7 to 17, who are in good standing with their Byzantine Catholic parish for at least 6 months prior to application. Each boy who is 7 to 10 years old during the camp requires

his father or legal male guardian's registration and attendance. There are no exceptions to the age requirement. 7 and 8 year olds should also have made their first confession. All fathers are encouraged to attend and fully participate in the camp. This year's retreat camp can handle a maximum of 32 boys. As attendance is limited, spaces for accepted applicants are filled on a first-paid-first-registered basis.

Any vocations staff wishing to see an overview of how the camp is scheduled and conducted, I'd be happy to respond to requests made to rmp.byzcath@juno.com.