



Ten ways to Foster your Child's Vocation

A vocation is not a 'job.' It is a life commitment to a person, to people. It is a love relationship defining one's entire being, giving life to others. In the Church we usually identify four broad categories of vocation: marriage, priesthood, religious life and single life. For a vocation to be nurtured and recognized, children need to grow up breathing in an atmosphere of faith, love and generosity of heart. Here are ten things a family can do to help create that atmosphere.

1. Live your own vocation well

This obviously applies to married couples in relating to their children. It also applies to parents, aunts, uncles, siblings and godparents who are single or celibate. Your own life commitment is the best advertisement for what's desirable and possible. Live it with passion!

2. Model a robust faith

Even when things aren't going well—in fact, especially when things are difficult—the witness of a strong faith will have a profound effect on your children. E.g., confronted by the death or divorce of your spouse, pray more, not less; draw closer to the Church, not away; choose forgiveness, not bitterness.

3. Foster a spirit of generosity

A vocation grows from a generous heart. Teach your children what it means to willingly go that extra mile for a family member or for a neighbour in need. Volunteer for a parish apostolate. Give generously to a charity. Support worthy community initiatives. Stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone.

4. Lead a simple lifestyle

It's hard to hear God's call if the channels of our hearts are clogged up with material concerns. Be happy with simplicity and delighted to share your wealth with others in need. A heart for the poor is a greater gift to your children than the latest computerized toy.

5. Celebrate life

Vocation is about fullness of life. Be open to life. Consider gifting the world with another a child, whether through birth or adoption. Openness to life is also about lifegiving attitudes like joy, laughter, love, hope, affirmation of gifts. Open yourself to Jesus who is Life.

6. Pray as a family

Make prayer part of your lifestyle. Let your prayer as a family be seen, heard, felt in every room of the house: a crucifix in the hallway, a bible in the living room, grace at meals, spirituality magazines on the kitchen table, formal and informal prayer. Honour Sunday by gathering at the parish Eucharist.

7. Introduce the saints

The saints are heroes and heroines of our faith tradition. Feed your children on inspiring stories of their lives: books,

DVDs, Internet sites, bedtime stories, table discussion, feast day celebrations. God will work through the story, you just have to ensure the story is told!

8. Celebrate commitment

Talk positively about the commitment in people around you: people devoted to their spouse, their children, their parish, their mission. Celebrate wedding anniversaries, baptisms, renewal of vows. Take your child to an ordination ceremony. Invite a missionary to a family meal. Affirm a child's steps in commitment.

9. Present all options

Make 'vocations talk' a discussion topic in your family. Talk about what it means to be married (don't assume it's obvious). Present all vocational options, don't just assume your child will marry.

10. Relax. Trust. Let go.

While doing your best for your children, remember that their lives are ultimately in God's hands. At the end of the day, relax. Trust. Let go. The mystery of Christ's death and resurrection—the ultimate story of life and love—is bigger than all of us. Surrender to the mystery.

Helpful Hint

Children are powerfully formed by the influence of their home environment. And yet, a child is never a programmed product of a parent's desires and priorities. He/she is a unique child of God, with the gift of free will. Two truths in creative tension. Ponder them in prayer as you help lay the foundations of a child's vocational journey through life.

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