

## Home Grown Vocations

March 23rd, 2009 by [Rachel Watkins](#)

With a daughter off for religious life I've been asked, "How do you do it? How do you raise children open to religious life and willing to pursue it?" Wondering myself, I asked other moms and dads we know who have sons and daughters either in religious life or discerning. I asked priests and religious their vocation stories. The results are in. We have no idea.

Seriously, each parent raised his or her child differently. Each family is unique in size and make-up. Several families are large in anyone's eyes — 10 or more such as mine. Others are large in society's eye — four or more and others have smaller families. Some families were committed to Daily Mass, a family rosary, novenas, the scapular, or other familiar Catholic devotions. Some families did all of them, some practiced a few and, surprisingly, a few religious tell me their families did none of those devotionals. Some families might be described as rigid in these commitments while others might be seen as more lax. Again, each family was unique.



How then?? In a sentence: They were called. Plain and simple, they were called by God to come and love Him completely and totally, forsaking all others for Him. In addition, just as in Matthew 20 when the landowner went to find workers for the vineyard they also found themselves called at a variety of hours. For some the call came for at a young age — the first hour, so to speak, as "the landowner went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard." Others were called at the last hour. However, they all heard Him call — at Adoration, during a family Rosary or walking on a beach after a long night.

So, with a lack of uniformity in family experience one might assume that it doesn't matter how you raise your children to help foster a religious vocation. You may even say, if God is going to call them regardless of what you do, why bother?? Well, there are several very important reasons why you should.

First, He asks us to. Scripture is full of advice and admonitions on how to be holy. The simplest, and yet so complex, is the call to be like Christ. Read 1 Peter 2 as an outline of the life of a Christian in a hostile world.

Second, the Church asks us to. The Church makes quite clear the expected

responsibilities of its members, including Mass attendance, frequent reception of the sacraments and more. Check out the Catechism if you have questions here.

Third, Our Mother asks us to. “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).

Fourth is that it easier to recognize His voice if you’ve been tuning in to God’s voice all along. This fine-tuning comes through prayer, Mass and the sacraments on a regular basis. Teaching yourself and your kids to keep their hearts and minds tuned to Christ makes it easier to hear Him call for both the little stuff, “be reconciled with your brother” (Mt. 5:24), and the big stuff, “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt. 4:19). Keep your souls tuned to Christ and hearing the call is much easier.

Fifth, seek the support and example of families worth modeling. In our home, on a daily basis, my husband and I offer our children up to Mary and Joseph to raise. After all, they did pretty good with their boy Jesus. All kidding aside, we rest and rely on their intercession for our family. We get as unsure and afraid as everyone else when it comes to raising good kids in a seemingly increasingly bad world. Their protection and prayers give us strength, comfort and guidance. We ask the Holy Family every evening to help make us a holy family. But we also seek out like-minded families for friendship, barbeques and play dates. We aren’t living behind stone walls hiding from the world but helping our kids, with the help of others, to learn to navigate it safely and surely.

Lastly, offer your children to God. Simply put, God prefers what is generously offered. Children who are raised in a family that openly welcomes and supports a religious vocation do much better in their formation. Don’t worry about those grandchildren you may not have (not that you were guaranteed them anyway) or what the neighbors may say in the rebound from the scandals. When your child talks about having a vocation, don’t dismiss it, ignore it or tell them they’re too young, not smart enough, or not holy enough. I have spoken to many priests who have said that “good” parents have stopped their children’s vocations because they refused to see in them what God saw in them.

My children are not perfect, far from it. Matt and I liken ourselves to Mr. and Mrs. Idiot living on Stupid Island. We have fits of temper, selfishness and laziness. Nevertheless, God looks beyond us as sinful parents. He is a perfect Father who can work as a potter with any clay He’s been given. But He has to be given it. Let Him work His miracle on you and your child and you might discover your little hothead becomes the next Damian of Molokai or your clotheshorse the next Clare of Assisi.

And on a final note, if you hope for a religious vocation and one is not given it never means that you did something wrong. Raising good and holy children who will transform the world from behind a desk or at home with a baby is just as necessary for God’s plan of salvation. Just continue to pray for wisdom to help your child pursue with an open heart whatever God wills for them. After all, if your child becomes a parent, you get the grandchildren you always wanted... and one of them may enter religious life.