

# Family life nurtures responses to God's call

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Although they don't quite stack up to the Klems, the Zimmers are among a vanishing trend in the Rochester diocese.

Few families currently send multiple members into what was traditionally considered "vocations." The Brown brothers — Father Timothy Brown (1988) and Father Michael Brown (1989) — are the only example of brother-priests ordained in recent years.

In trying to ascertain why so few "vocational families" are emerging today, it is helpful to look at what helped to encourage them in the past.

The Cosgrove family of Hornell's St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish produced two priests: Father James Cosgrove (1951), and Father William Cosgrove (1955).

"Our family practiced the faith," said Father William Cosgrove, pastor of St. Dominic's Parish in Shortsville. "I remember if I told my mother on a school morning, 'I don't feel well,' she'd let me stay in bed, even if she thought I might be faking."

"But if I said that on a Sunday," Father Cosgrove continued, "she'd say, 'Get out of that bed.'"

"It was an average home," noted Father James Cosgrove, pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Waterloo. "My parents were good Catholics."

"I think it was just the example of deep-seated faith in the family," recalled Sister Barbara Zimmer, currently the parish visitor at St. Mary's Church, Bath.

She noted that her father was the head usher at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish. In addition to serving as organist at the parish, her mother was involved in numerous Catholic groups.

"They just lived good, Catholic lives," observed Sister Mary Agnes

Zimmer, religious education administrator at St. Mary's. "We were taught to love God and to love others."

"Growing up like that," she added, "just led you to want to serve."

Despite their parents' involvement, however, Sister Barbara reflected, "We never thought of ourselves as being something different, something special."

That sentiment was echoed by Father William Cosgrove.

"There was a sense that faith meant something to (my parents)," the Shortsville pastor observed, "but that wasn't that unusual."

Indeed, members of both families noted that their home environments encouraged devotion to the church, rather than emphasized clerical or religious vocations. Even their siblings who opted for married life have remained active members of their respective parishes, they said.

"There was never any pressure in the family (for vocations)," Sister Barbara observed. "There was never any discussion about it."

"If there ever was any pressure, I'm sure that would have been the parish," Sister Barbara added. The pressure there was not overt, she explained, "But you just had the constant reminder of religious life."

For the Zimmer sisters, their influence took shape at Our Lady of Mercy High School. Although they had thought of becoming women religious early in life, they both decided to become Sisters of Mercy due to their high school teachers' examples.

Influence outside the family also came from priests' examples, Father William Cosgrove noted. In fact, both Father Cosgroves cited Father John O'Mally, assistant pastor at St. Ann's in Hornell from 1936-43, as helping to inspire them.

"He's the one who made me think of

the priesthood," Father William Cosgrove said.

Family, parish and school influences, however, did not of themselves produce vocations to the priesthood or religious life, Father William Cosgrove noted.

"It was a call from God," he explained. "For some reason, God said, 'I'll take those two Cosgrove boys and make them priests.'"

"You could have just as good a family as one that produced 'vocations,'" Sister Mary Agnes pointed out, "but the desire was not there. What creates that desire is the Holy Spirit."

And now, Father Zimmer remarked, the church's understanding of "vocation" is not the same as it was when he was growing up. Vatican II emphasized that each person has a vocation, he said.

"I would like to point out that my three brothers' 'vocations' to marriage are as important to the church as the religious vocations," Father Zimmer declared.

As for the dearth of "vocational families" today, Father Zimmer said,

"There are no vocations. There aren't even single vocations from families."

"I think it's because there isn't the same sense of sacrifice," Sister Mary Agnes speculated. "I think you had a sense you were giving up a lot. The girls who are thinking now of coming in, there isn't the same sacrifice."

Nor is there the support at home, Father William Cosgrove suggested.

"I think today if a young man told his parent he was thinking of being a priest, they would say, 'Why do you want to do that?'" he said.

Therefore "vocational families" may become even less common in the years ahead due to the same pressures affecting all vocations to the priesthood or religious life.

But people remain in ministry in their vocations as lay people, Father William Cosgrove said.

"I think since the Second Vatican Council, there are more ministries in the church for the lay people," the pastor remarked. "Maybe that's why we don't have as many priests today; to allow lay people to do these ministries."

## Hiking priest

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Father Brown, who performs his missionary work 13,000 feet above sea level, said that daily life in the Andes Mountains can be very challenging.

"Only 40 percent of the children were registered for this school year. They don't have the money for shoes, notebooks or textbooks."

Returning to New York gave Father Brown the opportunity to enjoy the conveniences that most U.S. citizens take for granted.

"We don't have any washers, dryers or telephone in Peru; and there's been a

terrible drought," said Father Brown.

With so much potential adversity built into each day, Father Brown encourages the Peruvian natives to keep an upbeat perspective by thanking God for His gift of life.

"I say, 'Come on, guys, God has been good to us. Let's appreciate every new day; life is beautiful.'"

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Those interested in supporting Father Brown can mail donations to Immaculate Conception, 6 Maple Ave., Wellsville, N.Y. 14895; or St. Ann's, 31 Erie Ave., Hornell, 14843. Father Brown requests donations to be limited only to cash or checks, since he might encounter difficulty getting other gifts through customs in Peru.

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