

Awareness team fosters vocations

Auburn parishioners pray, host, publicize

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Joyce Cavanaugh is a eucharistic minister at St. Mary's Parish in Auburn, and she's concerned about the future availability of the sacrament she distributes to her fellow parishioners.

"The Eucharist is the crucial part of our Mass, and no laity can do it," she said.

Rather than sit around and bemoan the decreasing number of priests available to celebrate Mass, Cavanaugh has decided to do something about it as co-director of the 15-member St. Mary's Church Vocations Awareness Team, founded in January 2002. Although the team started at her parish, she noted that other Auburn parishes have contributed members and support.

"We're not the only ones who need priests," she said of St. Mary's. "All the parishes in Auburn need it."

For that matter, so does the universal church, she noted, adding that her committee encourages Catholics to pray for an increase in priestly and religious vocations.

"You don't have to be on committees and go to meetings," she said. "You can just sit in your home and pray for vocations."

The committee meets three times a year, she said, and has hosted meals with diocesan seminarians, as well as encouraged Auburn-area Catholics to write them in support of their vocations. The committee has also corresponded with a young woman considering the vowed religious life, she said.

The committee has encouraged families to pray for vocations using prayer books, or breviaries, that they receive at Masses. For example, she said, a parish will designate a family to be given a breviary to use for a week. At a Sunday Mass the next week, a different family will be called forth from the congregation and given the breviary, she said.

"We have received a lot of complimentary comments about this," she said of the family prayer practice. "(The families) thought the prayers were beautiful, and they got a lot out of praying for the vocations."

She added that the committee has created a banner and put together

bulletin briefs promoting vocations, and also has written lengthier bulletin articles about the priestly life. One such article told the story of Father Brian Cool, currently director of the Newman Community at the University of Rochester, whose varied career has included ministering to migrants and serving in parishes.

"For me, I'm a priest," Father Cool said in the bulletin article. "I love God, and I love people, and this is a great opportunity to bring them both together."

A man moving closer to his vocation as a diocesan priest, Deacon William Coffas, was instrumental in founding the vocations team. Deacon Coffas (see related story on page 4) was ordained a transitional deacon on April 5 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., where he is currently attending Theological College at Catholic University of America. He served at St. Mary's from May 2001 to May 2002, and several parishioners from Auburn-area parishes traveled to Washington to witness his ordination, Cavanaugh said.

Among the bulletin articles Deacon Coffas put together was a series on priests who had come from St. Mary's. Deacon Coffas added that the team helped fulfill his goal of highlighting vocations.

"It's coming out of a realization that we are in need of priests," he said. "It's important to remind people that this is a wonderful life option."

Cavanaugh believes more priests as well as religious brothers and sisters are needed because they present an example of how a person can be devoted totally to God. She noted, for example, that two nuns who are friends of hers work at secular jobs and quietly serve the Gospel through their interactions with co-workers.

The St. Mary's team is part of a growing trend by lay people in the diocese to actively promote vocations, according to Patricia Finnerty, diocesan director of vocations awareness. Parishes in Greece and Webster also have such teams, she said, adding that other parishes are planning to start them.

"I think as people are realizing, or have seen for themselves, the priest shortage, they're realizing that vocations are all of our responsibility," Finnerty said. "It's not just the priest or the sister."

Vocations Invite

Young people say individual contact with religious men and women is the most effective form of invitation to a religious vocation.

Most Effective

- Sharing stories
- Visiting a community
- Being with others
- Personal relations
- Living in community
- Considering vocation

Least Effective

- Vocation posters
- Radio or TV ads
- Mail information sites
- Printed ads
- Internet information

From 1998-99 survey of 482 young adults in southern Indiana.



Source: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
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