

things. Thus too, they will never see another person as a **means** or an **object** but rather as another Christ whom it is their privilege to serve.

4. Instill an appreciation of beauty, whether it be in nature, literature, music, or art. The books, magazines, videos, musical instruments, and art that you have in your house, the television shows that you watch together, and the family excursions that you take will prepare them to appreciate the goodness of the material world that God has created and redeemed. They will also understand and despise by contrast the **culture of death**, which kills both the body and the soul. Beware of leaving your children alone with the television or computer, particularly as regards games and the Internet. They should be considered as **dangerous substances** easily subject to abuse and thus closely supervised and controlled. All of this will prepare them, as they mature, to be more reflective, and contemplative thus more able to wisely discern and answer God's call.

Take special care with their formation outside the house. Encourage them to have a wide variety of friends with whom they can share the joy of your own family life. By the time they graduate from high school they should have an excellent grasp of Catholic teaching in its doctrine and morality and be able to give an account to others of the hope that is within them. This is your **primary** responsibility.

Every family has different financial circumstances and choices. It may be home schooling, the parochial or private school, or even the public school. It is not simply a question of choice, however. Christian parents have a serious responsibility to improve all

varieties of education, always insisting on the primary responsibility of parents for their children's education.

If need be, you may have to teach them the Faith yourselves. Introduce them to the saints as their role models while also encouraging them to imitate the virtues of the great men and women of history. Remember you are preparing them for a life of service and dedication to God. You may also want to encourage them, gently, to participate in Catholic programs for youth that are sound, demanding and fun. It may be there that they first come in contact with those other mentors and new friends who will introduce them more concretely to the possibility of a life of total dedication.

These are just a few ideas. Nobody knows your children better than you do or loves them more, save God Himself. Vocations are a supply-side phenomenon. Supply creates demand. If you supply (offer) your children to God through your prayer and careful preparation, He will match you by taking them through His grace and their collaboration. Don't forget the shortcut of entrusting them to Mary, the Mother of God. If our Lady takes a special liking to them, her Son will form them into the new evangelizers. You will lift a hymn of thanksgiving to God for rewarding your generosity by calling one of yours to be a special one of His. And if your children don't receive a divine vocation don't worry, your grandchildren will. You cannot outdo God in generosity.

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Seedbed of Vocations: The Family

Father John McCloskey

We know that the core teaching of the Second Vatican Council is the radical call of all to holiness. However, we also know that God calls a chosen few to follow Him even more closely in a life of apostolic celibacy for the kingdom of God, whether it be as a priest, religious, or layperson. The family is the seedbed of vocations.

Saint John Bosco was reported as saying that one out of every ten Catholic men has a vocation to the priesthood. Perhaps this is the Lord's way of assuring a total tithing of His children. He has no interest in money but has a total commitment to His children as a loving Father.

One of the greatest hopes of any Catholic family should be to have one, or more, of their children to be chosen in a special way by God for His service. Traditionally, this has meant a vocation to the diocesan priesthood or one of the religious congregations. In a specific sense we are referring to the priesthood, the religious life, *or* to one of the various movements and institutions for laypeople that enable them to dedicate themselves totally to God. These new institutions are highly favored by the Church as a

means of complete dedication to the apostolate. However, it is no secret that generally, with few notable exceptions in some dioceses and religious congregations, vocations have been in sharp decline in Europe and North America over the last forty years while on a steady but unspectacular rise throughout the rest of the world during the pontificate of John Paul II. There are a variety of reasons for this decline in the West. We could cite contraception producing smaller families, lack of catechesis, the general confusion in the Church, the sexual revolution among young people, the sad example of tens of thousands of married couples and priests and religious who have not been faithful to their commitments to God, the Church, and each other. However, the example of holiness is a much more powerful influence on young people if they are brought up in such a way as to appreciate it. Witness the impact of St. John Paul II, St. Teresa of Calcutta, the new Doctor of the Church, Saint Therese of Lisieux, St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei and so many others.

The family atmosphere in which vocations are bred, nourished, and readied for fruition is what any serious Catholic parents would want to create for their children in preparing them for holy marriage and to give a Christian witness in the world. They should be preparing their children to be responsible, faithful adult Catholics and family persons who will build up the Church, society, and culture.

Catholic parents who want to produce vocations for the Church have to be ready to be heroically counter cultural. Putting it mildly, the world appears designed at the moment to thwart people, particularly young people, from even entertaining the thought

of complete dedication to God. Here are three particularly strong influences on young people today: One, the general culture; two, the educational system; three, the family environment. The secular educational system, from top to bottom, as presently constituted, represents the ideology of secular humanism as the norm; the general culture appears designed by a demonic intelligence to destroy any notion of beauty or truth in any young mind or heart. This leaves the family which is under unprecedented attack left alone to fend for itself. However, John Paul II told us that as the future passes through the family, I, with him, bet on the family. It has a long track record of survival.

What can parents do to create an environment where one or some of their children will discern a specific call from God to follow Him completely? They should want to foster a family life where it is natural to be generous and to make a sincere gift of oneself to others. Here a few ideas:

1. Parents must be their children's best friends. To win and keep children's friendship is a daunting but joyful task. You must show your trust for them and respect for their freedom from an early age trusting that the Holy Spirit is already at work in their soul from Baptism. You may sometimes be disappointed but your children will realize that your love is unconditional. Speak positively about the Church and the greatness of being called to a life of dedication in it. Never speak negatively about persons who have dedicated their lives to God no matter what their human failings might be. Your children should know that you pray for them every day that they be holy and happy and generous to what-ever God calls them.

They must know that while you are concerned with their education, health, achievements, career prospects, these are all secondary to their being virtuous and happy in this life and saved in the next.

2. Foster a simple life of piety in the home adjusted to the condition and ages of the children. It should leave the children asking for more, not begging for less.

What is most important is their seeing you lead a more devout life than they. They will watch you pray, go to Mass, go to confession, read the Sacred Scripture, pray the Rosary, and so on. They will also see you make sacrifices in order to do so. Pleasing God, not men, will thus become the priority in their life also.

3. Teach them to value poverty and detachment. Keep them short on money. Do not let them indiscriminately acquire things or to measure people by the amount of their possessions. Teach them to make things last and how to go without, happily. Teach them how to share cheerfully. Make sure they spend their summers productively. That oftentimes will mean they work and/or spend time in generously serving others less fortunate than themselves.

Expose them according to their age and ability to soup kitchens, nursing homes, and hospitals for children. These should be places where, over time, they feel comfortable. One of the most effective ways to assure this quality of generosity is simply to have a large family and to treasure the children God has sent to you. This will help them to place the **person** and not the **pleasure** or object at the heart of their moral universe. Persons are not