

TOGETHER

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IMITATE THE BETHLEHEM SHEPHERDS: GO TO JESUS

Merry Christmas! No one knows Jesus' true birthday, but he *was* born, and we celebrate *that* fact because he's the founder of our religion, the inspiration of our Catholic church.

Some people, when they hear reference to the institutional church, are ready to dismiss Jesus as a life-leader because Catholics haven't always put their best foot forward.

We, not Jesus, are to blame, guided more by empire than by the Gospel when structuring the church, and for giving into a sinful, worldly desire for money, power and pleasure.

Reports of those sins, or how women, divorcees and gays are treated, or how ready we are to use the rod of punishment, well, it's a slender thread that keeps people in the Church.

And the tie that binds is that we are first and foremost followers of Jesus, whose teaching and example are like day to the institutional *night* of the Catholic church.

Not too Christmassy, huh? But hark, the herald angels sing ho-ho-ho, inspired by Jesus' revelation that, unlike Santa, God doesn't put people on the naughty list; God loves!

He teaches us to respond by loving God, and that the best way to do that is to love our neighbor, which is anyone in need, which the Bible says is THE practice of true religion.

Jesus welcomed and included all, eating and drinking with those who kept the rules and those who didn't, with sinners and those who had repented from sin.

He preached mercy and charity, forgiveness and service to everyone, even if they don't say sorry and ask pardon, or say please and thanks, or if they aren't aware or don't care.

And there was no service beneath him, and no sacrifice too great, even giving his life to save us from hell and for heaven.

If Jesus is our life-leader, that's how we're supposed to be too. As individual Catholics and as an institutional church, we've a long way to go. Maybe our next good step is...

To imitate the Bethlehem shepherds: Go to Jesus, kneel in adoration, and share tidings of comfort and joy with others, especially the poor. Merry Christmas!

PRAYING FOR VOCATIONS



By Cassie Bird

Archdiocese of Dubuque parishioners gathered at Holy Spirit Parish in Dubuque on the evening of November 8 to pray for more vocations with a Holy Hour for Vocations. The event was part of the celebration of National Vocation Awareness Week.

The Holy Hour was led by Vocations Director in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Fr. Mark Murphy. Seminarian Steven Kessler also spoke, sharing his story of discernment.

According to the USCCB, National Vocation Awareness Week (NVAW), celebrated in 2022 from November 6-12, "is an annual week-



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long celebration of the Catholic church in the United States dedicated to promoting vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life through prayer and education, and to renew our prayers and support for those who are considering one of these particular vocations."

The celebration began in 1976, when the bishops in the United States designated the 28th Sunday of the year for National Vocations Awareness Week. NVAW was moved to its current annual date during the first full week of November in 2014.*

Fr. Mark Murphy organized this particular regional Holy Hour, in conjunction with Holy Spirit Parish. Fr. Murphy said about the Holy Hour for vocations, "One of the mission priorities for the Archdiocese of Dubuque is promoting vocations in general, and priesthood in particular. Our discernment events answer this mission priority, helping people discern how Jesus is calling them to follow Him with their lives. I think, overall, our discernment events have a double focus."

"One focus is on inviting men to actively discern priesthood in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. We do this through PITA dinners. PITA is an acronym that stands for Pray, Invite, Talk About It, and Appreciate. Priests invite young men to these dinners with Archbishop Jackels where they have an opportunity to pray, reflect on the invitation to a priestly vocation from Jesus and His people, talk and ask questions about priesthood and seminary, as well as appreciate the mystery of God's call and the gift of vocation Jesus wishes to share with us," Fr. Murphy said.

"Another aspect of inviting young men to actively discern priesthood is the Thinking of Priesthood Day sponsored by all four dioceses in the state of Iowa. The Archdiocese of Dubuque has hosted this day the past few years, and it serves as a 'crash course' in priestly discernment for men who attend. Men discerning priesthood may also visit St. Pius X Seminary at Loras College in Dubuque where we have seminarians in formation for priesthood."

During the Holy Hour, Fr. Murphy also gave a homily after the reading, speaking about his own story of discerning his priestly vocation. In addition to this ministry served through these dinners and Holy Hours as opportunities to consider vocations, there is another focus as well.

"In addition to focusing on inviting people to a vocation, our second focus is on praying for vocations, as Jesus says, 'Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest' (Matthew 9:38). We do this by hosting Holy Hours for vocations, where we have a chance to pray before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for vocations in our archdiocese. These holy hours include Scripture and often a reflection from a seminarian on his own discernment," Fr. Murphy remarked.

Steven Kessler, a current seminarian attending St. Pius X Seminary at Loras College, spoke during the Holy Hour, also sharing witness to his experience of discernment.

When asked what he would say to someone who has contributed to the seminarian education fund through ArchdioceseOne, Steven shared, "THANK YOU! Your support is truly appreciated, and I hope the donors know they are supporting the future of the Catholic Church. Without seminarians there will not be future priests and the church desperately needs more priests."

"Not having to worry about how to pay for our classes and room and board helps to free seminarians to discern more deeply about what God is calling us to do," Steven continued. "It also lets us focus more intensely on our formation which I personally believe will make us better priests if we are ordained. Even if someone discerns the priesthood is not their vocation, the formation they receive will make them a better disciple."

Fr. Murphy also spoke about how the seminarian education fund, and support for the fund through ArchdioceseOne, help to



Attendees at the Holy Hour for Vocations pray together at Holy Ghost Church. The gathering last month was part of the local celebration of National Vocation Awareness Week, which was marked November 6-12. The annual observation of this week focuses on promoting vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life through prayer and education, according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).



Cover photo: Steven Kessler, a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, speaks about his calling at a November 8 Holy Hour for Vocations at Holy Spirit Parish in Dubuque. Seminarians pose with Father Mark Murphy (far right), Vocations Director for the archdiocese, in front of a statue of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. The event took place in Holy Ghost Church, one of the parish's worship sites. (Photos by Cassie Bird)

prevent the cost of higher education from being a hindrance to men considering the seminary.

Priestly formation, going to seminary, is a full-time commitment for a man. He has classes, a prayer life, he has expectations to be involved in the community whether that is a parish or hospital or some other type of ministry. He does not really have time to work to support himself," Fr. Murphy remarked. "Additionally,

the cost of seminary formation is equivalent to a private college education. Depending on where the young man is in discernment, seminary cost alone could prevent a man from further discerning the call to priesthood. Without financial stewardship from the people of God to support the seminarian education fund, allowing seminarians and future priests to support the Church and the world, I don't know how we would be able to form future priests to help us all continue the mission of Jesus in the Church."

When speaking about being asked to be a part of the Holy Hour, Steven said, "It truly meant a lot. I am very passionate about vocations and had been even before I entered seminary. I hope my story will inspire others to discern what their own vocation is. God has a vocation for all of us, but we have to be willing to say yes to what He is asking of us. My goal was to give glory to God for how He has worked in my life. I hope by doing this that I have helped people to pray a little more deeply and to open their hearts to whatever God has planned for them."

* Information from the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (usccb.org)

Update on ArchdioceseOne Progress:

So far, over \$12.2 million has been raised for the ArchdioceseOne special appeal. Of which, \$5.9 million of this amount is unrestricted, and over \$2.2 million has been restricted for Seminary Education.