

How to Promote Vocations in Your Family

1. Speak of Christ in the home: Speak often of Christ in terms that endear your children to him. Let his name be part of the family vocabulary.
2. Pray for your children's vocations: Pray for your children and for whatever vocation God is calling them to, and teach them to do the same. The greatest and deepest wish of every parent for a child is that he or she discovers and does God's will for his or her life. This is your child's greatest guarantee of happiness, and your major concern. Pray is necessary, since there will always be the tempting mirage of an easier way shimmering invitingly on the horizon for your child.
3. Pray as spouses for your children: Find a prayer that you can say as husband and wife asking the Lord to consecrate your family to him and to the Mission he has for you. Some couples compose their own prayer and pray it regularly. If a couple can pray together, the witness of united prayer speaks untold volumes to the children.
4. Pray with your children: Nighttime prayer is a natural time to teach prayer to children and to develop in them this important habit. When you pray the meal prayers, use a variety of prayers and prayer forms including spontaneous prayers from the heart. Teach them how to bring their concerns and needs to Jesus in prayer. They will learn only what you model for them.
5. Teach Bible Stories: Especially when the children are young, introduce them to the hundreds of stories in the Bible. Begin with a children's Bible and give them Bibles through the years that correspond to their understanding of the Faith.
6. Teach the Lives of the Saints: Help your children grow, according to their age, in their relationship with God and knowledge of the Faith. The lives of the saints are a great source of inspiration for children - and adults.
7. Teach devotion to Mary: Many families pray a decade or the whole Rosary as part of their prayers at home. Teach your children how the Rosary is like a photo album of the life of Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles. By meditating on the Mysteries we come to reflect on the mysteries of Jesus' life and mission and how he calls us to an ever deeper discipleship and mission with him in community with others.
8. Bless your children: A custom we had as children was to have our dad bless each of us children at night with holy water. He would make the Sign of the Cross on our forehead with the words, "God bless you," and then he would say our names. This ritual went on for many years. You will find this a wonderful way of integrating parental love and affection with spirituality. It would also be good to have a holy water font somewhere in the house where the children can bless themselves and be reminded of their baptism and commitment to Jesus.
9. Speak to your children openly about God's call for them in their lives: Remind your children often that God has created them in his image and likeness. He loves them so much as his son or daughter! As our Creator, he designed each of us for a purpose. Invite them to pray about God's call for their career - what they are to do with their lives, as well as their state in life - whether God is calling them to marriage, single life, priesthood, or consecrated life. Teach them how to allow the Lord to make the call in their lives.
10. Enthrone your family and home to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: By having a picture or statue of the Sacred Heart in your home, you witness your faith to those who come to visit, but more than that you are reminded as a family that Jesus is the center of your family. It is common for families to have pictures of family members in their homes. The same should be true about our spiritual family. Place a crucifix in the rooms. Have several statues of the Blessed Mother and the saints throughout the house.
11. Teach your children how to love the Mass: I cannot remember a time in which my parents purposely missed Mass. This witness impressed up me how essential it is to come every Sunday to receive Jesus who said, "Unless you eat my Body and drink my Blood, you have no life in you." Even if you are on vacation, *especially* if you are on vacation, take your children to Mass. Dorothy Day, who served the poor in this country for forty-five years used to say that at Mass during the Consecration it was as if the Lord was saying to her, "This is My Body broken for you. Will you let your body be broken for Me and for others today?" At the consecration of the wine it was as if he said, "This is My Blood poured out for you. Will you let your blood be poured out for Me and for others today?" If we understood the Mass from this perspective, would we ever miss? Or could we ever say it is boring?
12. Adoration for Vocations: I was advised by Father Burke when I entered seminary that I would find my vocation in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. Mother Teresa taught her Sisters to pray before the Blessed Sacrament three hours a day so that, once filled with Christ's presence, they would be instruments of his presence to others. Find time to make Holy Hours and to encourage your children to make visits and to spend time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

13. Teach your children the importance of conversion through regular Confession: If a person cannot apologize, it will be very difficult to grow in friendship or intimacy with others. Similarly, if we do not learn how to reconcile ourselves with God through the Sacrament of Penance (confession), there is a level of intimacy with the Lord which we will not attain. Model for your children the need for this sacrament by your own practice.
14. Pay special attention to your children's use of the media: It is especially important to monitor your children's access to the internet. Give them reasons for limitations and teach them responsible use of this medium and all media. For as good as the internet can be, it can often lead young people astray. Internet pornography tragically is becoming epidemic among people of all ages. Spiritually, it divides their hearts and they cannot grow in prayer or friendship with the Lord thus making it impossible to discern one's vocation in life.
15. Aim high: My father asked me in high school not to simply seek an easy life. He said, "Don't ask God for an easy life. Ask God for the grace to do something difficult with your life for him and for others."
16. Camps and retreats: As your children get into middle school, introduce them to camps and retreats. Young people need more and more integration of faith with experience within a faith community. These experiences help young people to move beyond the family and parish experience of Church and to grow in their awareness that we are a universal Catholic Church.
17. Enable participation in outreach, service, and missionary work: This participation is very important for young people. It is here that they will see how much Christ and the Church call them to move beyond themselves to serve the needs of others. They will begin to understand how much they have received and how much they are being called up to give in return. This can include visiting the elderly in nursing homes or helping aged relatives or neighbors. Later this can include mission trips to soup kitchens or other missions. Through the diocese or parish, there may be mission trips to more distant locations.
18. Don't push, but don't be silent: Do not push priesthood or consecrated life on your children, but don't be silent either. Answer questions and at times, bring them up yourself and raise possibilities, but do so always with a sense of freedom and love. Talk openly and support the possibility of your child choosing to be a priest or sister. Look for opportunities to visit a seminary or convent. That can only learn to love that which they know.
19. Write a letter or card to each of your children at least once a year at a special occasion in which you share with them your unconditional love and also share something of your faith and your prayer that they continue to listen to and follow God's call for them in their life.
20. Speak positively about bishops, priests, and consecrated persons: Your respect for those in the Church will witness to your children the need to respect those dedicated to God's service and to the spiritual mission of the Church. We live in an era of anti-authority. Showing respect to those whom God has given to guide us in the Church will go a long way to teach your children how to respect your own parental authority, as well as to teach them how to place themselves under the mission of God in their lives.
21. Have a well-rounded concept of the education of your children: Do not neglect the formation of character, self-discipline, human virtues, perseverance, and physical health. You are creating the fertile ground for God to act. Besides faith, you will want your children to have the strength of character to be able to do what might be difficult, to overcome peer pressure, and to be faithful to what is right.
22. Develop the minds and sense of beauty and joy in your children: This includes, but is not limited to, the knowledge of the Catechism. Help children develop their critical sense, awareness of objective truth, and appreciation for music and the arts.

Christ asks you to be a holy parent, not necessarily a perfect parent. Seek to sanctify your spouse and children by your loving and nurturing - God will do the rest. Trials will inevitably occur within your family. You preach your most powerful sermons during times of difficulty. The saints have said that a holy family is a struggling family. When the Apostles were in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus told them not to be afraid. If we have Jesus in our boat - home life - he will get us through. Your witness of trust in those times will speak a thousand words.

"...The modern world boasts of the enticing door which says everything is permitted. It ignores the narrow gate of discernment and renunciation. I am speaking to especially you, young Christians ... Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but go to the heart of things! And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands."

-Saint John Paul II