



In Joy and Hope

by

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Make a world of difference: Church vocation

Throughout the United States this week, the church celebrates National Vocation Awareness Week. Last Sunday's Liturgy of the Word summarized well the challenge that National Vocation Awareness Week offers to all members of the church.

Three imperatives from the Scripture capture the theme of what a church vocation asks of us: (1) Wait for the vision; (2) fan into a flame the gift that God gave you; (3) call yourselves God's servants.

The church today needs people who are ready to share their vision and enthusiasm, their hands and their hearts as lay ministers, religious men and women, and priests. On the day of our baptism, God calls us to a life of loving service. Whatever way of life we ultimately choose – single or married, religious life or priesthood – we do so in a covenant with the One who calls.

Wait for the vision

The prophet Habbakkuk told us last weekend that the vision of God's presence in our lives will surely come if we wait with faith and hope. There is definitely a hunger present in the lives of countless people who want to see more than meets the eye.

I believe there is a strong cry for a deeper spirituality among people today. This was the message we heard over and over again last year in the preparation of the vision statement for the Church in Western Washington – "A New Wind and Fire."

The vision God asks us to see is our awareness of God's life within us, and the need we have to increase that life and to share it with others. When we respond to this vision in ministry, we take time to discern what God is asking of us. What gifts do I have that I can share with others? How can I help the kingdom of God come more alive in the world today? Do I recognize the needs in my own life and in the lives of others for the presence of God?

These are questions that help us wait for the vision with hope.

Fan into a flame the gift God gave you

Centuries ago, St. Paul wrote to one of his young followers: "I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

God offers all of us the same challenge today.

Each one of us has gifts that can make a difference. We need to assess our gifts, and to determine ways in which we might use them within the church today. We respond to this challenge not in isolation, but in the context of the church to which we belong.

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People need to ask how they might grow in their understanding and appreciation of their faith so that they may share it with others through lay ministry.

Young people must begin to ask about their deepest passions and dreams, and consider whether a vocation to religious life or priesthood might help to fulfill their dreams. All of us as baptized people need to fan into a flame the gift of faith that God has given to us.

Call yourselves God's servants

At the heart of any church vocation is the willingness to serve others in God's name. The primary focus of a church vocation is not ourselves, but the people whom we serve. It is a living for others in order to have the reign of God grow in today's world. In a world that emphasizes the need to respond only to one's own agenda and self-satisfaction, a church vocation creates a unique opportunity for fulfillment, joy and the satisfaction that comes in the service of others in God's name.

Frederick Buechner wrote, "The place God calls you is the place where your deepest gladness and the world's great hunger meet."

This is the meeting spot for people to engage our God. It is the sacred space of discovering that the divine economy enriches us in incredible ways when we take the risk of sharing our gifts of life and talent with others.

Thank you to all in church vocations today

As an appeal is made to people to consider a church vocation today, it is only right to acknowledge as well the laity and religious, deacons and priests who serve us in our parishes and local church.

Thank you to the countless volunteers who provide our parishes with educational, liturgical, and social ministries that make a difference.

Thank you to the professional ministers among the laity and religious who give their lives in service to the church on a full-time basis in so many dimensions of the church's ministry today. Their competence, education and commitment are gifts we should never take for granted in our parishes, schools, social service agencies, health care, and in archdiocesan leadership positions.

Thank you to the religious women and men who enrich our church by their presence and the witness to the charism of their respective religious communities. They are a gift to all of us. Thank you to the deacons, as well as to their wives and families, whose ministry of service, charity, and liturgy help build up the kingdom of God among us.

Thank you to the diocesan and religious priests who serve us in so many ways in our parishes and schools, as chaplains and in specialized settings. The priest is essential for the life of the church as he proclaims God's word, celebrates the Eucharist and other sacraments, and serves as leader of God's people.

As I express my gratitude to all those who live out a church vocation, I pray that others may also hear the call to a church vocation as well. I would ask all of us to listen again to God's word in last Sunday's liturgy: "Wait for the vision. Fan into a flame the gift that God gave you. Call yourselves God's servants."

May we respond with faith and hope to the call that God offers to each of us. May God's gifts of grace and peace be yours in abundance.