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Father James Hughes with members of the Serra vocations organization. Vocations must be discussed regularly if a “vocation culture” is to take root in parishes and homes, says Father Hughes.

‘Vocations culture’ begins at home *by Fr. James Hughes*

If marriage and the family are the foundation of all vocations, then it is vital that the lay faithful encourage more vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

As much as it is important for priests and religious to model for others their own vocation, it is critical that Catholics, single or married, help to rebuild in our Church and families a culture that goes out to the apostolic mission. A world that realizes the dire need for God and requires visible signs of His work.

St. John Paul II reminds us in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40, “Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’ which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone.”

If we witness to the next generation the requirement of sacraments

and sacramentals, then this only argues the requirement for more priests and religious who are the “labourers in the vineyard.”

How can the lay faithful help rebuild this culture for vocations to the priesthood and religious life for the next generation? Here is an excerpt from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on promoting a culture for vocations to the priesthood and religious life:

PRAY for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

TEACH young people how to pray. Pope Benedict XVI said that unless we teach our youth how to pray, they will never hear God calling them into a deeper relationship with Him and into the discipleship of the Church.

INVITE active young adults and teens to consider a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life. A

simple, sincere comment should not be underestimated. An easy way to do this can be remembered by four letters: ICNU. “John, I see in you (ICNU) the qualities that would make a good priest, and I want to encourage you to pray about it.” It is a non-invasive way to encourage *openness* to a religious vocation.

Vocations must be discussed regularly if a “vocation culture” is to take root in parishes and homes. This means, first and foremost, that people need to hear about vocations from priests through homilies, prayers of the faithful, and classroom discussions. Vocations kept out of sight are out of mind.

I hope that you will find this edition of our newsletter on the support of vocations to the priesthood and religious life an opportunity to inspire you to join our team in rebuilding a culture for vocations! ♦



Contributed photo

Father James Hughes at the first meeting of the Fraser Valley West Serrans around 2001.

Serrans share their vocations stories

Serra International is an organization created by Catholic laity whose objective is to foster and promote vocations to the priesthood and all religious vocations in the Catholic Church, as well as encouraging the laity to fulfill their Christian vocation to service. Serra is named after St. Junipero Serra, a Spanish Franciscan missionary who played a leading role in early missionary work in Mexico and the United States. Below, local Serrans share their experiences.

I joined Serra over 20 years ago, wishing to be a part of those eager to promote vocations. The outcome is the opportunity to know seminarians in their place at the abbey, the several times we can convene at Holy Rosary Cathedral to support our faith, and in our activities to be together for the greater glory of God. — *Mike*

I joined Serra shortly after I was baptized and confirmed in the Church. The organization was instrumental in helping me to build my faith over the last 20+ years. The fellowship and purpose of Serra kept me engaged with the Church. — *Ben*

“Just as a number of Catholic mothers pray, I too prayed that my son would have a vocation to the priesthood. When I realized the priesthood was not his vocation, I joined Serra so that I would have Spiritual Sons who would become priests - thereby making me a Spiritual Mother of priests.

Ethelyn

My passion now is to promote vocations, particularly to the priesthood, so when my time comes I may have a priest to celebrate my funeral Mass.

What I have been doing with the Serrans: Since 1981, I've been instrumental in starting the club in the Fraser Valley West, started the Serrans in Kelowna,

established a Kamloops chapter, organized Stations of the Cross in the Fraser Valley West every Friday of Lent for the FVW deanery (Surrey), and got the traveling Chalice for Vocations that goes to homes promoting vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated religious life.

As a result of the above experiences, I am at St. Ann's Abbotsford re-establishing a parish vocations committee/ministry. — *Leo*

I know that the celebration of the Eucharist can only be done through a priest, and as the Holy Eucharist leads us to eternal salvation, praying for priests is a priority. When I heard Serra Club had this as their main objective, I knew it would be a good fit for the priorities in my life. My desire for the Eucharist and my relationship with Jesus has become more fervent since joining Serra. — *Marcy*

In the Propedeutic Year, the Lord strengthens his encounter with the seminarian. Candidates for the priesthood begin to understand the incongruent - even laugh at the humor of God in the call. In the silence of reflection and accompaniment, Jesus reveals his intentional plan. What one thinks they have lost by sin is regained by Christ's mercy. The priesthood is the fullness and joy of Easter! — *Cecilia*

After many years of struggling with my two sons, they decided not to pursue the priesthood and my heart was broken. I lost all my desires in my life until I joined Serra Club where I encountered seminarians. Therefore, I am not only a mother of two sons but also a mother of all the seminarians, to whom I share my heart, and pray for their vocations. — *Cathy*

The Serra Club ignited my awareness that priests are vital to Christians' lives to holiness. The extraordinary life of St. Junipero Serra and immersion in prayers and activities for priestly vocations, priests, and religious enlightened my focus, with God's love and mercy, on the road to holiness. — *Lucy*

I joined the Serra movement in 1984. I must state that it is the most significant step taken. It exposed me to the foundation of the Church that is serviced by priests, deacons, and consecrated religious. I feel spiritually content in pursuing the noble goals of the Serra movement in encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life and in affirming those who have dedicated their lives to the service of God and his Holy Church.

Vila Nova

The most inspired I've been by Serra is when Father James and Father Mark brought basketballs into Mass when we toured all the high schools. Somehow, they brought the Gospels to life! I'm sure the Gospels were never the same again for all those kids. — *Tom*

As a catechist in the Atrium of the Good Shepherd, I became a member of the Serra Club in Kamloops, realizing the connection in what was happening in the Atrium and vocations and our call to holiness. As a relatively new Serra club in Kamloops with many changes over the past few years, we continue to grow, to learn, and to pray together, 'always forward,' being continually reminded to trust in the Lord of the harvest and in his time and goodness. — *Susan* ♦



Contributed photo

Father Patrick Le and his family at his ordination.

Parents of priests said 'yes' to God by Rave Quidasol

"Faith is God's gift, received in baptism, and not our own work, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop," writes Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*). Here, parents of priests in the Archdiocese share how they witnessed their sons' vocational journeys.

FR. PATRICK LE

Mr. Tong Lê and Mrs. Mai Nguyễn (Le) are the parents of recently ordained Father Patrick Le, now an assistant pastor at St. Matthew's in Surrey. They are long-time parishioners of St. Patrick's in Maple Ridge. Both Mr. and Mrs. Le credit the parish and Father Richard Au for their crucial roles in their son's discerning to join the seminary and become a priest.

What was Patrick like as a boy?

Mr. Le: Before the seminary he was really picky. He wanted to do things his way. Even from the way he ate, he asked his Mom to cook a different meal every day.

Mrs. Le: I'm a hairstylist and when Patrick was 4, I would bring him to work. He always brought his



Contributed photo

A young Patrick and his parents on a family vacation.

notebook and a pen. One day I asked him, "What are you writing in the book?" He said, "I'm writing the Bible." He showed me and there were drawings of different shapes, a square or a dot, things like that, then a heart and a cross. I asked him, "What is this for?" He said, "It's a heart for the mother. Mother Maria. And the cross is Jesus." In my mind, I thought this boy is going to become a priest. But I kept it to myself. I just kept praying.

How did you react to him going to the seminary?

Mrs. Le: He was in Grade 6 and

we said, "No, no." We thought he was too young to think that way.

Mr. Le: Then one of my wife's customers, a former seminarian, came to us for a haircut. He just asked one question: "If your child wants to play soccer, would you tell him to wait until he's 25 years old to start playing? Or would you let him play right now?" Only a simple question like that caught our hearts. I said, "Okay, we should let him go."

What have you learned as parents witnessing him become who he is?

Mr. Le: Do simple things. Pray. A little bit of reading the Bible at night. Pray before meals. In restaurants, at home, by yourself. Pray or make the sign of the cross. I think God responds to our belief, and he answers with what we need. For parents considering sending their children to the seminary, don't discourage them. From there they can learn discipline, how to associate with their friends in a nice way. If your kids want to join a seminary, encourage them.

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FR. RICHARD CONLIN

Brian and Monica Conlin are the parents of Father Richard Conlin, currently in Rome for two years of theology studies. They are parishioners at Christ the Redeemer in West Vancouver but belonged to St. Joseph the Worker in Richmond for over 30 years. Mr. and Mrs. Conlin mention Father Fernando Mignone of Opus Dei, Kamloops Bishop Joseph Nguyen, and Vicar General Msgr. Smith as instrumental in supporting their son through his vocational journey.

What was Richard like when young?

Mrs. Conlin: Richard grew up in a practising Catholic family. Certain events enriched his faith journey. I brought him to daily Mass when possible and consecrated both our sons to the Blessed Virgin Mary when they were in elementary school. We both believed it was very important to raise our sons in Catholic schools.

What changed in the pursuit of his dream?

Mr. Conlin: He loved sports, to compete and win in every sport he played. When he discovered golf at the age of 9 he found his passion and love. When he started to win tournaments, he focused on going to



Contributed photo

Richard at his first Communion.



Contributed photo

Father Richard Conlin and his family at his ordination.

the U.S. on a scholarship and secured one at St. Mary's College in California. He was living his dream.

Mrs. Conlin: In his last year of school, a girlfriend enthusiastically introduced him to a book, *Heaven is for Real*. Richard read it and called me to say, "Mom, you must read it! I stayed up all night reading this book!" That year, I asked him to go to confession for my birthday in March. When he came home in June, the first thing he said was, "Mom, I haven't gone to confession. Who should I see?" I had joined Opus Dei, and I knew they would take care of not only Richard but, more importantly, his soul. He went to Father Fernando. Going to confession changed his life. He had a completely new beginning. He started reading Catholic books and watching videos. We saw interest in his faith increase and, eventually, a vocation to the priesthood.

Mr. Conlin: Richard read a lot of Catholic books to defend his faith too. He had some friends

who were atheists and challenged him on his faith. That summer, he wasn't working and was able to go to daily Mass and read two to three books a week.

Were his desires to pursue his vocation easy for you to accept?

Mrs. Conlin: Very easy. One thing I never wanted to do was to stand in the way of the Lord. It was beautiful to watch his journey and how God eventually brought him back home to the Catholic Church and then to the priesthood.

What has been your favourite part of witnessing his journey?

Mrs. Conlin: My favourite part was seeing first-hand the growth in his faith, his commitment to his Church, and his personal growth ... which all led him to say "yes" to joining the seminary.

Mr. Conlin: The change of Richard as a person, as a leader and as a priest at Corpus Christi parish in serving his people. ♦

Hands of a priest *by Nancy Simms*

“Let me see your hands,” I said to my three-year-old son after he had finished a large piece of birthday cake.

I took his chubby little fingers in my hands and with a warm cloth wiped away the sticky mess between each finger. Before I was satisfied that all the icing had been wiped away, he was on the escape and rushing to play ball with his older cousins and younger brothers. It was just a fleeting moment in time, but a moment that I cherished and held onto. I knew how quickly time would fly by and just as he had escaped my motherly gestures in that moment he would soon be escaping into the world to find his own way in school, in work, in life.

“Hold your hands tighter on the bat,” the baseball coach yelled to my now 12-year-old son. Sitting beside my husband in the small stands, we, along with all the other parents, called out encouragement to our young, energetic ball players. I watched my almost-teenage boy grip the bat as he swung and connected with the ball that had been pitched to him. The stands erupted into cheers as he slid safely into first base. Just like baseball’s first base, he would soon be sliding into high school.

“Wake up, they’re not home yet,” I would sometimes say to my husband, nudging him awake. During the busy years of four teenagers, we had a hard and fast rule in our home; it didn’t matter what time of the night each of the kids came home, but they had to come into our bedroom and let us know they were okay. My side of the bed was closest to the door, so the kids would come and talk to me, sometimes just to say they were home and other times sit on the side of the bed and talk for hours about things happening in their lives. On one of these nights, our now 19-year-old son stared down at his trembling hands and shared with me his desire to enter into the seminary and, if God willing, become a priest.

This had not been on my radar at all. Our son was in his first year of business administration at university, and I knew he had been thinking of applying to larger universities in Vancouver. This meant he would soon be moving away. But this news sucked all the

breath out of my lungs. I never thought about any of our children going into religious life, it had never really been a topic of conversation in our home.

As our children were maturing and finding their own voices, I was also growing alongside them and accepting the changes that were happening in our lives. This acceptance on my part only came with the help and grace of God. My heavenly Father has always been my best friend, my constant, unchanging One that I can cling onto, but in that moment I felt a gut-wrenching betrayal. My God, my best friend from my earliest memories, was now going to take my son! I honestly do not remember what I said that night, but I know I cried. And for many nights after I cried. Nothing was ever going to be the same. God was taking my son.

God did will that our son enter the priesthood. One month before his 26th birthday the palms of his hands were anointed with the sacred Oil of Chrism, symbolizing his hands working in participation with Christ who has offered the one and unique sacrifice.

My hands are raised in grateful praise. God is so good. Life did and has changed, but for the better. Our son became and continues to strive to be the person God has always called him to be. Isn’t that what we are all called to?

When was the last time you looked at a priest’s hands? Those hands tenderly hold our dear Lord during the consecration. Those hands hold the elderly person’s hand and offer comfort while visiting the hospital and administering the anointing of the sick. You may see those hands giving a high five to a three-year-old, or officiating and blessing a newly married couple. His hands joyfully pour the waters of baptism, and may within the same day bid farewell to a longtime parishioner and dear friend who has made their journey to heaven. They are hands that absolve and welcome all who enter the church.

Nancy Simms is the mother of Father Paul Simms of the Diocese of Kamloops.

Read more at bccatholic.ca. ♦

Under the leadership of Archbishop J. Michael Miller, the St. John Vianney Fund was established in 2015 at the annual Archbishop’s Dinner. The fund has since raised over \$1 million to form holy, intelligent, competent, and pastorally-engaged men who strive to continue the work of Christ in their vocation as a priest in the Archdiocese.

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