

Wanted: Hispanic families that promote vocations

By Mar Muñoz-Visoso

Some time ago a bishop met with Hispanic groups in his diocese. They presented many concerns, including one from a married couple who asked him, “Bishop, please send us priests who understand us and will take care of us.” With a smile the bishop replied, “Of course. Give me your sons and I will send them to the seminary to be trained. I don’t have sons. Vocations must come from you.”

The intelligent response was not a way to wash his hands—this man has gone to great lengths to make sure his Hispanic flock is cared for. Rather, it highlighted a key truth: If we want Hispanic priests and religious men and women, we Hispanic families have to generate them!

Praying for vocations is important, but so is being open to the possibility that the Lord will bring forth vocations from within our own family. Priests and sisters are a highly regarded and often beloved figure in Latin American culture. However, how many times have we prayed for vocations but have secretly thought: “but please, not my Johnny or my Doris. They have to be doctors or engineers and give me grandchildren!”

The truth is only 15 percent of seminarians nationwide are Hispanic. The number is even smaller for religious communities. It seems that an appreciation for this type of vocation has been lost in our families—who once saw this call as something desirable and positive for our children, as well necessary for the Church.

Last fall, Bishop Daniel Flores, auxiliary bishop of Detroit, in his address to the National Association of Hispanic Priests spoke to the fact that family plays an essential role in generating vocations. “The encounter with Christ’s love comes to us by means of the family and the Church,” Bishop Flores said. He insisted that it doesn’t make much sense talking to a young person about vocation if he or she “has not *entered*, at least a little, into the logic of Jesus Christ.”

Experiencing this “logic” means knowing firsthand the beauty that comes from following the way of generosity, commitment and fidelity that should be part of the family experience. It is about making sure the young person grows up in a context where he can later understand the “language of Christian vocation.” Related to this is the role parents have in the religious development of their children. This is vital in the context of an immigrant family subject to the processes of “mestizaje” (the mixing of cultures) and cultural assimilation.

Bishop Flores says the religious crisis moment in immigrant families often happens during the first few years of their arrival. “If parents do not find ways to link themselves to the life of the Catholic Church in their new country, with time they adapt to a secular way of living, and establish family customs and a community orientation devoid of religious content.” Or they respond to constant invitations from other religious denominations.

Many other factors come into play in developing vocations. Bishop Flores does not bypass them in his excellent analysis that is worth reading (http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/Vocaciones_EnglishTranslation2009.pdf).

As Catholic families, what can we do to help foster vocations? Perhaps, talking to our children about the important roles that priests and religious play in our communities—of how necessary they are for the Church’s own vitality, of the generous life of sacrifice most of them lead. Direct and frequent contact with them is also important if we are to offer them as models. Being open to a vocation discernment process on their part is also vital. And of course, praying often for vocations—and not only from the neighbor’s home.