

The Lord's call to discipleship

At the end of every celebration of Mass, all who have participated are commissioned and sent. The new translation of the Roman Missal offers the priest or deacon several options, all of which emphasize this "sending." "Go forth, the Mass is ended." "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord." "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." "Go in peace."

To be called by God is also to be sent by God, and there is no Christian disciple who is not asked by the Lord to make his or her life a proclamation of the Gospel. In fact, the baptismal grace that God gives us to respond to his call, and all that he offers us in the Church through his word and the sacraments, are given that we might first be "evangelized" and thus be transformed into "a living Gospel" wherever we go.

This week, with every diocese in the United States, we are observing Vocation Awareness Week. This annual observance invites us to focus on God's never-ending call to certain members of the church to serve the rest of the church in ordained ministry and consecrated life. In a large and growing archdiocese such as ours, vocations efforts are crucial to the work of evangelization, our spiritual well-being and our very future.

It has always been so. I love to read about the early days of Catholic evangelization in the Pacific Northwest, because I come to know the heroes and heroines who accepted God's call to make Jesus Christ their very life, their hope and the driving force behind everything they did.

They arrived in this part of the country after arduous journeys from Canada and other parts of the United States with the sole mission of establishing the Church here — which



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means that their sole mission was to proclaim Christ by word (proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the faith) and deed (caring for the poor and sick) and offering the sacraments to God's people.

'Called' and 'sent'

Their stories fascinate and inspire me. And they remind me that the work of evangelization is never finished, because each generation of Catholics is "called" and "sent," and because there will always be others in our midst who hunger for God, even without knowing it.

I often reflect on the fact that since God has redeemed us at the price of the blood of his Son, it makes sense that he would want to offer his beloved, redeemed people the spiritual nourishment and care they need to keep living in Christ and experience always the graces of being part of his body, the church. God would never abandon us, and so from our very midst he chooses men and women to dedicate their lives to him — and to us, to our spiritual care and to the care of his beloved poor.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council by Blessed John XXIII. Of the many blessings that continue to flow from the council is the vital presence of lay ministers in the church.

Since ordination to the priesthood in 1978, I have had the privilege of

recruiting, forming and working with hundreds of lay ministers. Since my arrival in Western Washington, I have been impressed again and again by the many ways the people of the Archdiocese have responded to the call to ministry. What would we do without them?

At the same time, even as God vitalizes the church through lay ministers, he continues to call from our midst men to be priests, deacons and religious brothers; and women to be religious sisters. Everything — and everyone — works together for the good of the church, by the grace of God.

A life of joy

You may have noticed that I often mention the importance of issuing the call to priesthood and religious life, and I plan to make our vocations promotion a continued priority in the archdiocese.

The specific witness and ministry of the consecrated life (men and women who serve the church as sisters and brothers) and the ministry of the ordained (priests and deacons) are central to the life of the church, and in fact it is everyone's responsibility to create a spiritual climate here in which our young people will not only listen for God's call but also feel our support in discerning that call.

It is easy for me to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I know from the experience of almost 34 years as a priest that this is a life of joy — a challenging, busy life, and a life of joy. I cannot begin to describe the blessings I have received by serv-

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ing God and his people, preaching his word, and especially celebrating the sacraments.

I love this vocation so much that I have no difficulty challenging young men to join me. Since one of my sisters is a Dominican sister, I also know firsthand the joyful witness of religious life. She is not only "my" sister — like

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all consecrated religious, she has become everyone's sister because she has given herself to Christ as his spouse.

The Lord Jesus continues to call all the baptized to give their lives to him in

discipleship and to give witness to their faith in the world. And from among the baptized he calls men and women to particular vocations of ordained and consecrated service.

I ask everyone in the archdiocese to work toward creating an atmosphere in which our young people will not only be encouraged to listen for the Lord's call to the priesthood and religious life — but also find support and prayer as they answer him.

There is no doubt such vocations are in our midst! I meet them every week.

