

Sister Mary Anne Schaezner Vocation Story

I went to Catholic School and had School Sisters of Notre Dame as teachers most of my years of Grade School, High School and College – We have a college, now a University, in Milwaukee.

In part I was attracted to teaching at a very early age. I am not sure what attracted me about the Sisters in particular, though I usually got along well with them.

I was in 6th grade when I began to seriously consider the religious vocation. That does not mean that I did not also think about marriage or even about a medical vocation, e.g. I did think about being a doctor and connected that with the Maryknoll community.

I grew up at a time that the Mass was in Latin and then the Gospel would be read in English. Particular words of the Gospel would get my attention. Of course, I cannot explain how that would happen except that it was a call that I became sensitive to at an early age.

Advice - This is what is most important. I think that it is important for even young girls and boys to have a chance to know that there are such people as Religious Brothers, Religious Sisters, even Priests that belong to Religious Communities. It is important that they have a chance to ask serious (not just silly – though that can be part of the growth in even talking seriously about spiritual vocations, such as marriage, religious life, priesthood, single life) questions. And that they receive serious responses – not just that it is wonderful or beautiful or etc. Every way of life has sacrifice connected. It just does.

I think that adults should not avoid the topic of religious/priesthood with their children – when they begin to ask what they think that they would like to be when they grow up, but to mention not only the kinds of positions that may be high- paying (and I am not saying that they should not do that) but also the ways of life that are considered in the area of various religious vocations.

And, I think that if there is thought about religious vocations of any kind then a wide variety of possibilities should be provided for consideration as there are many, many communities and vocations within those communities to be considered. It should not just be a matter of what they

wear, but how do they serve and how is Jesus calling this person to serve – what is his/her unique vocation/calling?

I would also encourage asking questions, lots of questions. Asking questions does not mean that you are going to be a Sister, or a Brother or a priest. It does mean that you are seriously discerning what vocation you are being called to – and maybe you are being called to be holy parents. What do you sense that Jesus is asking you to do with your life that has been given to you by God and your parents?

I thought it would be a good fit because I felt called by Jesus. That does not mean that I always felt that so strongly. There were many times when I needed to continue discerning what I was experiencing and what was I being called to do.

Even in writing this – if the adults in the lives of the children are not bringing up religious vocations as part of the choice, how can the children, the young adults, even have the opportunity to discern and to choose. (Sometimes, talking about religious life/priesthood is more of a fill-in than a serious topic.)

I will close with this experience – which surprised me a little and which I do not practice a lot myself. But I think that asking this question can plant a seed for discernment.

I was at a conference in another state a few years ago. We were in a hotel and I was sitting in the front row of a section, so the aisle was right in front of me. After I received Holy Communion I noticed a young man several chairs to my right, with an empty chair next to him. I had the sense that I should ask him if he had ever thought of being a priest. I got up, went over, and sat down next to him – a very young adult male. I said that I had the sense that I should ask him, “Have you ever thought of being a priest?” He revealed to me that he was not Catholic, but had felt called to come to this conference, and that in fact he was in the Seminary for his Church. (Afterward, I thought something like, “Wow. That was close.”) Now those were not the words but it is the sense. I was very surprised.

A week later, in my parish, I was near an exit area, where I do not usually spend time. I saw a young adult man. I got that same sense that I should ask him, “Have you ever thought about being a priest?” I went over to him, struck up a conversation and asked. I think he was surprised. He told me that he was in discernment and that he had one more year to complete his physical

therapy training. He gave me a small wooden cross to wear. (I still have that cross. In fact, I wore it this summer while he had some time at home after taking his first vows in a religious order out east.)

I think that one thing adults can do is to ask younger adults or their own children if they have ever thought of being a priest or religious – just to plant the idea alongside marriage and single life. How beautiful if people are making choices about their vocations and not just drifting into them.