



It's not your job to turn your son into a future priest. It's your job to teach your son to answer God's call, whatever it might be.

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We hear a lot of noise about praying for vocations, and sometimes it sounds like we're all hoping the Vocations Fairy will sprinkle Magic Vocation Dust on our dioceses, causing priests to pop up in the lawn like mushrooms after wet weather.

Priests don't grow in the grass. Priests grow in families. They are born to parents (a subject treated elsewhere, but not to be underestimated in its importance). As a Christian parent, it's not your job to wander through your son's childhood helplessly, hoping the Vocations Fairy will cause your boy to be transformed into a well-formed young man able to answer his calling. It's your job to oversee his formation, teaching him some very specific skills that will help him become a man of God.

1. Teach Him to Pray

You do this about like you teach him to eat: Prayer should be a part of your family life from the get-go. It's something you help him with when he's a baby, but that gradually he does better and more independently as he ages. Like family meals, you never completely quit praying together.

Prayer ought to be at least as important in your own life as food is; when he's a teenager and eating you out of house and home, that's when you start praying all the more voraciously. Don't worry—he'll naturally inspire you that way. It's what kids do.

2. Teach Him Self-Control

You're raising a man, not a slave. He needs to learn that he doesn't have to have everything he wants. He needs to learn to deny himself now in order to do what needs to be done. He needs to learn to seek the genuine good of himself and others, not the fleeting pleasure of the moment.

So do you, probably.

3. Teach Him Responsible Obedience

Obedience is a courageous act of love. It requires doing without complaining things you don't like but which are morally acceptable, and refusing to carry out immoral orders even when it would be much easier and more pleasant to get along and go along. Most of us absolutely stink at this, so you and he can grow together in this regard.

4. Teach Him What Good Liturgy is Like

How open would your son be to marriage if the only girls he ever met were shallow, vain, and boring? Your son needs to meet a Mass that you'd want for a daughter-in-law: Intelligent, reverent, and a pleasure to spend time with day after day, week after week, year after year. She doesn't need to be perfect, but she needs to be a keeper.

5. Teach Him to Sing

They aren't going to cover this in seminary. The people of his future parish thank you in advance.

6. Teach Him How to Fix the Roof

He'll also need to know about drywall, tile, plumbing, electrical, computers, good financial management and accounting—both tax and audit. He doesn't need to be able to make a living at those (though it won't hurt), but he should at least be conversant enough in the basics to make good decisions and hire good help.

7. Teach Him to Do Enjoyable Good Things that He Loves

God gave him talents and interests, and he should pursue those. Some will be a source of specific help in his vocation; some will provide ways for him to relax and unwind when life gets tough. But most of all, hobbies and sports teach a boy that he can learn to do new things. All his life, he's going to have to learn to do new things.

8. Teach Him to Choose Good Friends

Solitude in proper measure feeds a vocation, but loneliness corrupts it. Fill your life with decent Christian people who are fun and interesting to be around. Because you yourself cultivate a strong social network of intelligent, caring, emotionally-healthy friends, family-to-family friendships should be par for the course. You and he should be spending time with a variety of men, women, boys and girls of various ages and backgrounds who help you grow in the faith; he and you should both also have a few close same-age-same-gender friends who are a source of camaraderie and steady support.

9. Teach Him Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills

Two words: Parish. Council.

10. Teach Him to Love God with All His Heart, Mind, Soul and Strength

Would you settle for a fifth-grade math education for your boy? Don't settle for a fifth-grade theology education either. Your young man needs to learn how to use his body to do the corporal works of mercy until he's tired enough to climb into bed and sleep for twelve hours straight. He needs to fall in love with Jesus so that his faith isn't just a bunch of rules and habits. And he needs to satisfy his intellectual hunger for spiritual knowledge, or else that part of his brain will form a giant black hole that he'll fill with something else on offer at Atheist U.

Tip: He will learn all this primarily by the example you set for him.

11. Teach Him to Make God's Plan His Plan

Parents don't choose their sons' vocations. God's the one who does the calling, and He calls whom He will, when He will. It is not your job to turn your son into a future priest. It's your job to teach your son to answer God's call, whatever it might be. Conveniently, every single thing that helps a boy prepare for the priesthood is something that also helps him prepare for the other vocations. Good fathers of all types are made from the same stuff.

