

## How to Stop Religious Vocations In One Easy Step (And What to Do to Encourage Them!)

You know the scenario: a friend has gone to a seminary enquiry day or a visit to a religious house. They have made a very brave and courageous step. But one they do not wish to share with the world. Yet. A vocation to priesthood or consecrated life is something every young Catholic should at least consider. But what about when they take the next step?

Maybe you hear about this from a friend of a friend. Somebody spots them in a car park or sees them talking to a priest or religious. The “young Catholic network” goes into overdrive. “Sam visited the seminary!”; “Melanie was at the convent!” They are full of excitement for their friends, and for the Church. Their zeal is well intentioned. But they have done one thing wrong: **they have talked about it to others.**

The time of discernment and praying and enquiring is exhilarating, but it demands tact. Most of us like to think and pray privately for some time until we are ready to tell others. **The pressure (usually unintended) that comes from others (and usually well intentioned) can play havoc with the discernment process and the freedom needed to make a decision.**

### So what is the proper response? Let me suggest a few things.

**Firstly**, if you hear on the grapevine that a friend or acquaintance is discerning a vocation, keep it to yourself. It is their business, not yours, or anybody else’s. They need the space, the time and the freedom to properly discern without feeling like the whole world is watching them. And it can feel like that.

**Secondly**, pray for them. Intentionally and regularly. This is the best thing you can do for a friend who is discerning their vocation. Prayerfully accompany them as they seek to follow the Lord and listen to the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit in the depths of their hearts.

**Thirdly**, if they do share their discernment with you, treat this knowledge with reverence. They have shared the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their life, and of their generous response to this call. This is holy ground. Please treat it as such.

**Fourthly**, keep this knowledge to yourself, hard as it is! You are so excited for them. But remember, it is their call and their vocation. It is their life. {snip} Let them share it with those whom they wish to. You are filled with excitement and joy for them and the Church. But let them share their news with whom they wish, and when they wish. Eventually, the news will become public and then it is the time to celebrate together and to support them in the decision to say ‘yes’ to the Lord.

The Catholic youth world can be a small, close-knit community. You support each other in your common pursuit of holiness of life. It is natural that some from this community will hear the voice of the Lord at some time. When they do, think about the best way to support them and to help their discernment. Telling the world (or even just twenty BFFs!) is not supportive, and it’s not helpful. Please respect their privacy and their time of discernment. They will thank you for it, and so will the Church in the years to come.

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