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New Ways to Hear the Call

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LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Vocations Awareness Week is Jan. 11-17, and that awareness comes in more forms than ever. We'll look at three: an Indiana family's popular game, a new Internet video made by seminarians in Rome, and the Serra Club's Elijah Cup initiative.

When young J.J. Newcomb said he wanted to be a priest, he inspired his mother, Michelle, to create The Priest Game for J.J. and the family. Unplanned and unexpected, it soon began spreading nationwide for families, older children, and even adults, as an entertaining way to learn about the Mass, priesthood and the faith (*Tom and April Hoopes recommend it in this issue's "User's Guide to Sunday," page B4*).

It's one of several new initiatives that are helping boys to start thinking about the priesthood.

"I thought the game would be a neat way to teach him his colors using priest's vestments," said Michelle, a mother of six children, age 4 to 14, and one foster infant.

Father Timothy Alkire, the Newcombs' pastor at St. Boniface in Lafayette, Ind., agreed to let her photograph him in vestments in the sacristy.

"That's when Providence began molding and shaping this to be what it is," said Newcomb.

She got permission to take pictures of all the vestments, beginning with the chasubles (the focus was still on colors), then soon added the other vestments and vessels for Mass and worship, like the chalice, paten, censer and monstrance.

Newcomb expanded to six boards with 12 sides and 96 pieces. For different pictures on each, other priests consented to have their photos taken. One board has the diocesan vocation director. On another, Lafayette Bishop William Higi became the focal point, along with a bishop's vestments.

The photos form pieces which are "won" by a spinner in the game, explained Newcomb.

Quickly, the game spread to the parish, then to a neighboring one, then to others.

"We wanted to show our openness to the call for our son — we're hoping that that comes out of this, mainly," said Ken Newcomb. "It was a teaching aid for him. Then we thought a lot more people could benefit from it. There's a lack of good Catholic educational games for children."

To have several made, the Newcombs met with a game company president who told them "he normally never looked at a project like this, but he saw God's hand in it," related Michelle. He printed them into quality products.

Players now learn far more



THE PRIEST GAME, created by a Catholic family, teaches about the Mass.

than colors because Newcomb added cards with photos on one side and explanations of the vestments, vessels, sacraments, liturgical colors and the meanings for everything on the other side.

Spreading Popularity

Soon, a parishioner moved to North Carolina and introduced The Priest Game to home-schoolers there. They wanted their own copy. Another mother of six, Traci Yoder of the Indianapolis Archdiocese, discovered the game and ended up getting and selling three cases to home-schoolers she knew.

"It made the Mass terminology like everyday language for

the kids," said Yoder, "and they quickly learned what a monstrance is, for example. They have a lot of fun playing and learning what the names are."

Father William Vath of the Lafayette diocesan tribunal appears on one board and was one of three priests who reviewed the game before the final version.

"The game is unique. It's really needed because we lost two generations of catechetics with pop psychology," he said. "The adults, let alone the kids, know very little about the Mass and what's involved in it, but if they take the game seriously, they'd learn a lot."

Orders have now come in

CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

from 33 states and Canada. Some people are buying the game for adult siblings going through Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults classes. A vocation director in a Texas diocese got one. And members of the Serra Club in California are using it to train altar servers.

Michelle Newcomb is still amazed. It appears providential that the game was completed on Holy Thursday. "I just get the sense that God is trying to glorify his priests and the Mass through this," she said.

Why Not?

But vocations are not all fun and games. When Legionary Brother Vianney Châtillon and Brother Jorge Ranninger considered the vocations problem, they thought, "Why not an Internet video to motivate vocations?"

The result is WhyNotPriest.org, a video and website available in not one but several languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and German).

In short clips, a number of Legion of Christ seminarians hailing from countries around the world sum up their joyful and upbeat reasons for studying for the priesthood. They're models of those responding to Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who both have urged young men to be not afraid to say Yes to the Lord's call.

"For quite some time, Brother Jorge and I have wanted to do something for vocations, to be able to share with the other young people in the world the

joy and happiness we've found in the 'Yes' we've given to God," explained Brother Vianney, who, like Brother Jorge, is a student in Rome. "We all want to be happy in this life, and so, the happy need to share their reasons for happiness."

Beginning in June 2008, both men tackled the job of editing the video and decided to produce it in multiple languages.

Said Brother Vianney, "We wanted to show that Christ has not only come for a particular race or society, but for the men of the whole planet."

The response has been extraordinary.

The video has had some 20,000 Internet viewers in less than three weeks, after being posted in late 2008. Because the web page allows questions or concerns about discernment, many viewers have responded or commented. Many speak of not just the priestly vocation, noted Brother Vianney, "but the vocation that God has for each one of us, be it marriage, the priesthood or consecrated life."

Messages are even coming from as far away as China, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

"Our great hope is that some young people may begin this discernment process thanks to initiatives like this Internet one," he said. "Let's hope that God's call reaches many youth through this little video."

The makers of The Priest Game also see the potential of video; the game includes a three-part DVD on the Mass, which Father Alkire made and gave to the Newcombs to include. He walks through the

Mass and explains the mysteries and instills deep reverence for the Eucharist.

Elijah Cup

Games and videos alone don't make vocations, of course. Also needed: serious dedication to prayer.

Serra Clubs provide that with a new initiative called the Elijah Cup.

The concept is simple. According to Bob Fink, president of the Serra Metro Atlanta Club, families sign up on a voluntary basis to accept an Elijah Cup at Sunday Mass, take it home for the week, and pray daily for an increase and perseverance in priestly vocations, using the cup as the focal point of their prayers. It becomes a visual reminder that if we pray for vocations the "cup" — like the one Elijah blesses in 1 Kings 17 — will never run dry; God will provide priests.

"In Atlanta, we usually average 50 seminarians at one time and usually eight to 10 ordinations every June," Fink said, pointing out that there are three Serra Clubs in the Atlanta region. "We think the prayers with the Elijah Cup work for the vocations."

In fact, he's heard from young priests, several of whom went to college or employment first, who said that knowing people were praying for them helped in their discernment process.

In participating parishes, after Communion, a family receives the Elijah Cup, which is usually a real chalice — sometimes the one used at that par-

ticular Mass.

Fink believes "it adds more significance, especially for the children, because it actually contained the blood of Christ during the Mass."

The influence can't be underestimated. Patricia DeJarnett, who recently moved to Colorado from Atlanta, still remembers what one boy said about the chalice.

"He said that by the end of the week he figured out they weren't only praying for other people, but praying for themselves, too," explained DeJarnett. "After that little boy spoke, you wouldn't believe how many priests signed up for the cup that night."

Staff writer Joseph Pronechen is based in Trumbull, Connecticut.

For More Information

The Priest Game:
CatholicKidsGames.com
WhyNotPriest.org
SerraAtlanta.org/elijahcup