



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

Dear Co-workers in the Vineyard,

We know that for most dioceses in the United States the luxury of having a priest full time as a vocation promoter is quickly disappearing. Most priest vocation promoters today are also expected to carry the pastoral weight of at least one and sometimes even multiple parish assignments and pastoral responsibilities at the same time. I found myself in the same situation when I was appointed the Director of the Office of Vocation Promotion for my diocese and was also tasked with pastoring four churches and a Newman community. For a time, I was at a loss as to how I was going to approach vocation promotion in my new role when I knew that there were only so many hours in a day. It became very clear to me that I had to quickly learn how to work smarter, not harder.

After much prayer and discernment and a lot of soul searching, I realized that the only chance I had at effective vocation promotion in my diocese while maintaining my many other pastoral responsibilities was by empowering the laity to be the first vocation promoters on the front lines. I began to see the laity as a sleeping giant in the work of vocation promotion in the 21st century. I knew I had to surrender my preconceived notions of vocations work and trust that the Holy Spirit was in this watershed moment that could potentially effect the ability of our young people to say “yes” to God’s call for years to come.

And that is when I reached out to Rhonda Gruenewald at Vocation Ministry, and I explained my situation. I was surprised to hear that Rhonda was already about this work of empowering laity to be the first vocation promoters on the parish level. She herself is a living example of the power that comes from an authentic lay witness of a deep passion and love for vocations and the future of our Church; and her passion is contagious! We started by inviting Rhonda to present at our annual priest convocation, in which she quickly reinvigorated our priests’ enthusiasm around calling forth vocations from our parishes. She then presented to our laity at a diocesan Vocations Summit whereby she rallied 181 lay people from 79 of our parishes around this effort, and gave them solid tools to begin a Vocation Ministry team in their home parishes. Rhonda’s Vocation Workshop ignited a powerful momentum, and created a tidal wave of vocations activities within our diocese in the year that followed.

With the help of Rhonda at Vocation Ministry, we ended up training over 200 lay people representing 90 (out of 119) parishes in our diocese. Every single Catholic school administrator, principal, and teacher received formal extended training on how to create a culture of vocations in our Catholic schools. We hosted trainings for all of the Youth and Young Adult Ministers of our diocese, our Catechetical Leaders, our college Campus Ministers, and our Chancery staff. Lastly, we had 52 parishes as well as all of our Catholic high schools agree to host a traveling vocations Icon of St. Joseph, which means that there has been a Holy Hour for Vocations as well as a Rosary for Vocations offered every single week in our parishes for over a year in our diocese without pause, and these rotating parish Vocation Holy Hours still continue today!

I would wholeheartedly recommend Rhonda at Vocation Ministry to any diocese and all vocation directors searching for a solution to the rapidly changing landscape in our dioceses today. She is paving the way for a bold new era of vocation promotion for our Church in the United States and beyond. Instead of engaging in a desperate search for more seminarians, I would invite you to pause and dig deep down into the roots of the issue before us. I have seen the initial impact of Vocation Ministry on our diocese and I am confident that this will bear abundant fruit in the years to come. Deep roots produce great fruit. Get to work.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Father Jason C. Hage

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