



I'd like to encourage you to speak to your children about their future vocation. Try to assure your children that God has a vocation to some way of life to which he will invite them. Pray with them about it and encourage them to pray and think about it themselves. This doesn't need to be an overwhelming process. As one of our current seminarians told us: "Dad would tell me, 'Our Lord's got a plan for you – a vocation – I don't know how or to what he's going to call you, but when he does you'll know.' Every night Dad would have us pray a little aspiration asking God to let us see His will."

Thank you for taking the time to read this. If you have any questions I would be happy to answer them. I can be contacted at the Vocation Centre on (02) 9390 5280 or at michael.destoop@sydneycatholic.org

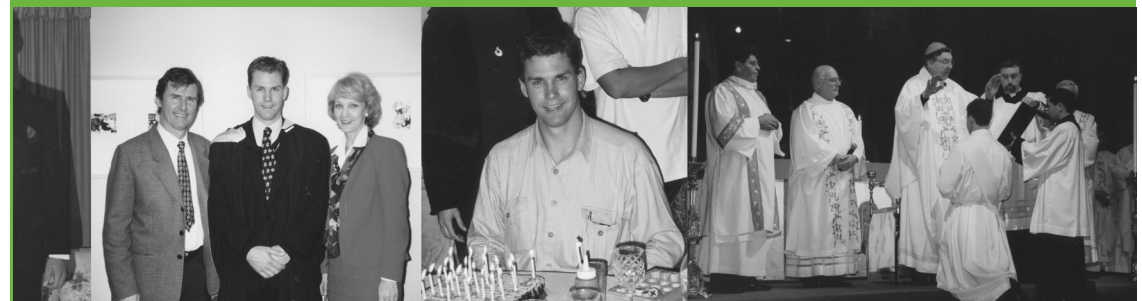
God bless!

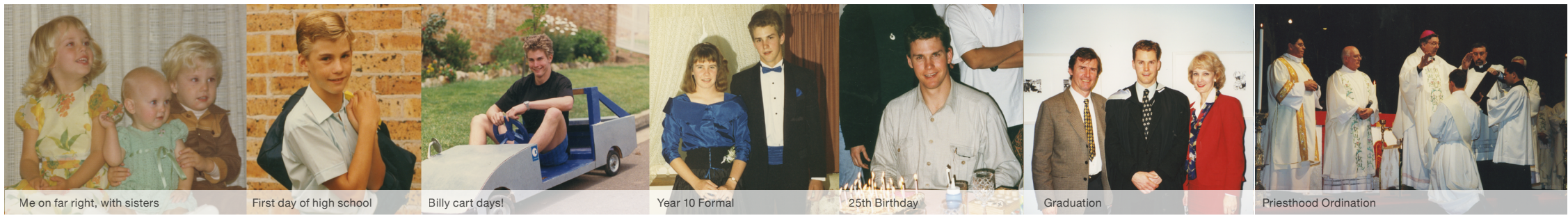
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A Letter to Parents

From Fr Michael de Stoop





Me on far right, with sisters

First day of high school

Billy cart days!

Year 10 Formal

25th Birthday

Graduation

Priesthood Ordination

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you today about your child's future.

Everyone has a vocation. That is to say, God calls each person to live his/her Christian call to holiness in a particular way. You and your spouse have been called to the vocation of Marriage. Someday each of your children will be called to Marriage, the Priesthood, Religious Life, Lay Consecrated Life or to remain Single.

As a married person you have lived both the joys and the challenges of a vocation to married life. I wanted to share with you briefly my experience of the joys and challenges of the Priesthood.

Joys

For me, it is a tremendous joy to celebrate the sacraments. As a priest, I am called to bring Jesus into the world every day on the altar. The sacraments encompass the most special, profound and moving moments in peoples' lives from beginning to end. As a priest I have the privilege of being part of those moments over the course of each week. Furthermore, as a parish priest I have the opportunity to be a spiritual father to my community and to experience the joy of watching them grow in their faith.

You might also be interested to know that priests can work in varied fields: they often work in a parish like me, but they can also teach at school or university, be a police or military chaplain and so on. I even know of priests who are film reviewers!

Sadly, much of the media coverage about priests and religious focuses on issues of sexual abuse. But, the vast majority of priests lead happy, fulfilled and faithful lives! This is my own experience but is also borne out by surveys carried out in the USA.

- Tom W. Smith's "Job Satisfaction in the United States" (2007) states:
"Three occupations finish in the top dozen on both job satisfaction and general happiness. The clergy distinguishes itself from all other occupations by ranking first in both job satisfaction and general happiness."

- A study by Georgetown University, Washington DC, (2002) revealed that 99% of priests surveyed either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement: "I am happy in my ministry."

Balance and Time Off

I have a day off each week and spend it doing things such as playing sport and seeing friends and family. I also have holidays in which I watch movies, read and go to the beach. During the week I make a point of trying to do all the things needed to live a happy and balanced life, including having sufficient prayer time, exercise and sleep.

Sometimes people worry that the life of a priest can be lonely. My own experience is that my life is overflowing with community life because in addition to the Parish entrusted to my care is the larger community of the Archdiocese of Sydney to whom I belong, my Archbishop, my brother priests, my family and my friends.

Challenges

Certainly there are challenges in this vocation, but there are difficult moments in every Christian vocation. As with all vocations, the challenges a person faces can be positively addressed. As a priest I find that I am assisted in dealing with these challenges by good advice of brother priests, by friends and family, by God's grace (just as you are afforded grace to deal with some of the challenges you face as a spouse and parent) and the inner strength I gain from the satisfaction of knowing that my vocation is well suited to me.

The Role of Parents in a Child's Vocation

My parents' response to my vocation was very important to me, just as your response will be to each of your children. Inasmuch as a career is important, you would know from your own experience that career will be only one part of your children's lives and that their vocation will play a big part in their happiness, fulfilment and growth as adults.