



Sixth graders learn about religious vocations

About 100 sixth graders from four area Catholic schools gathered at Divine Word College in Epworth on Wednesday to learn about religious vocations.

Faith was put into action as students heard from religious sisters, priests, brothers, deacons and lay missionaries who shared their personal journeys of answering God's call and embracing religious life.

Sr. Jessi Beck, PBVM was among the presenters who talked to students about prayer, service, vows and community. "Many of them don't have experience with priests, brothers and sisters, so this gives them the opportunity to start to think beyond their current realm of experience," she said. "For many of them, it's an introduction to religious life and even just affirming that marriage and single life are vocations, too. They have choices."



Sr. Jessi Beck, PBVM

The annual event is organized by the Dubuque Area Vocation Association (DAVA).

This year, sixth grade classes from Seton Catholic School in Farley, St. Francis Xavier in Dyersville, LaSalle Catholic School in Holy Cross and Aquin Catholic School in Cascade attended.

"I think it was a really cool experience to be here," said 11-year-old Seton student Mary Gotto. She particularly enjoyed the team building activities and learning about people from other countries who serve in religious life here in the United States. "I feel like my love for Jesus has grown stronger after this experience. It's been really fun," she said.



Mary Gotto

Fr. Mark Murphy, Vocation Director for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, served as the keynote speaker. He invited students to think about the Bible story of Jesus in a boat with his disciples during a storm. Reflecting on his own experience in the U.S. Navy, Murphy recounted his journey on a submarine that traveled across the globe. The boat took him around the world but he

soon realized that his real calling was back in Iowa as a priest.

“So, a question for you today is, what boats are you in?” Murphy asked. “What are your interests? How is Jesus, like he did for Peter, inviting you to follow him? Whether it’s a vocation in the church or something else, he’s inviting us. And we, like Peter, step out in faith and respond.”

For 12-year-old Xavier student Elijah Westhoff, the opportunity to step out of his regular classroom routine was a highlight. He appreciated hearing about the diverse ways people serve the Church and learning about their paths to religious life.

“We got to know how people got their calling from God and how they knew they wanted to follow it. And they encouraged us to go and think about it,” he said.



Elijah Westhoff

Fr. Adam MacDonald, SVD, a Divine Word Missionary priest assured students that being a priest is not a lonely existence. He described his missionary experiences abroad in the Philippines and Japan, emphasizing that he is always surrounded by his community of fellow priests and brothers.

Participating in events like the Vocation Day field trip can help young Catholics establish a foundation for their faith and gain insight into the possibilities available to them as they navigate their futures.



Sr. Jessi Beck, PBVM and Greg Darr present to 6th grade students

“This is a decision that is going to be coming for them, so we’re just trying to plant those seeds now,” Beck said. “We’re inviting the kids to begin praying, and ask God to help them know what their vocation is.”



Fr. Adam MacDonald, SVD demonstrates a dance during an ice breaker